

The X Files

Helt

by L. C. Wells

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NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
DECEMBER 3, 1993

"Granddad? Granddad? Mrs. Parson says I could be in the Olympics someday!" The teenager bounded up the wooden stairs of the small house, her skates dangling from one hand. "Who was the woman who I just saw go out, Granddad? Granddad?"

She smelled something from her grandfather's bedroom, a metallic, salty, musty smell. It saturated the humid air.

"Granddad?"

She looked into the room and screamed. The skates went flying down the corridor.

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BI HEADQUARTERS
WASHINGTON, D.C.
DECEMBER 27, 1993

Dana Scully was a physician with years of forensic experience and a professional investigator for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but she flinched when she saw the photograph.

Her partner, Fox Mulder, watched her face return to its smooth professional calm. "Imagine what his granddaughter must have thought," he offered. "She found him."

The woman laid down the picture. "That's not hard. This is his granddaughter?" She tapped on the photograph of a blonde teenager in an ice-skating costume.

"That's her. Her name is Alice Wateron, fourteen."

"Pretty girl."

"Lived with her grandfather, Pers Olaffson, who is the dead man."

Scully looked over at him. "So, why is this case in *here*, Mulder?"

Mulder tapped on two brown folders beside him. "This isn't the first of this kind of killing, Scully." "Oh, no. Don't tell me there's an X-Files connection," she replied. "Why not just a random killing by a crackpot? Does it have to be space aliens, Mulder?"

"Fifteen years ago, a man was killed in exactly the same fashion as this." Mulder ignored her acid tone as he shoved the folder over the desk to her. "A retired farmer named Hans Pertimer, age seventy-five."

She scanned the file. "Norwegian?"

"He emigrated from Norway in the mid-fifties, set up in Iowa, had many children, and lived a long profitable life."

"It says here that he had had a cardiac arrest and was in the hospital recovering when ..."

"Someone ripped his lungs out of his chest and he died, drowned in his own blood," Mulder finished. "Exactly what happened with Olaffson."

"Who is the other file?"

"Peter Gerund, an Englishman born in Manchester, a diplomat who retired a couple of years before he was killed in 1984 by ... whatever."

She picked up the last file and began reading it. "It says he was already dead when it happened!"

"Nearly dead," Mulder contradicted. "He was drowning when another man pulled him out. The guy thought he felt a pulse so he went for help. When the man came back, Gerund was dead —"

"Painfully," Scully commented, dropping the file. "This happened ten years ago, Mulder. What are you concluding?"

Mulder shrugged, and folded his hands behind his head. "I haven't got any conclusions yet. There are too many anomalies here — the age of the victims, where they were from and where they died. The only thing that brings them together is the manner of death."

"Who'd be sick enough to rip a man's lungs out on a public beach, Mulder?" she asked idly.

"Someone with a long-term grudge."

"But, in the meantime," Scully said as she walked over to her desk, "we have that commonplace murder in Bethesda."

"Another diplomat." He shoved back his chair and picked up his coat. "So what are we waiting for?"

"A Zamboni to take us over the ice. There's at least a foot of snow out there and more coming down."

"We'll ring in New Year's with more snow?"

"And drunken accidents. Happy New Year, Mulder."

"Happy New Year, Scully."



AN JUAN BAPTISTE MONASTERY
GUYANE, SOUTH AMERICA
JANUARY 6, 1994

The priest sat beside the old man's bed and said the rosary as he waited for the shallow breathing to slow into nothingness. The dying man's mouth was mottled with dried saliva and his eyes stared out the window at the tropical plants waving in the night breeze.

As the night drifted into the early morning, the small votive candle on the nightstand burned low and the priest drowsed. Finally, his eyes drooped shut and he began to gently snore. He slumped comfortably against the wall.

The room grew colder, frost forming on the bedside table and dampening the sheets. Out from the shadows beside the door came a bulky man, wearing a fur tunic and cross-gartered leggings,

his face covered by a metal helmet. He carried in one hand a huge axe, stained with rust. The air smelled of wet, aged fur and decaying bones.

He glided over to the bed where the old man was staring at him, sheer horror in his eyes, his palsied hands clutching the thin white sheet.

"Where is it, Axel Norung?"

"A Viking?" whispered Norung.

"My Hammer! I saw you steal it that night, the night your leader died. Did you think it would take you to Odin Hall where your friends are, where your leader is?"

The priest sighed in his sleep and shifted position, burying his head deeper against his sleeves.

The dying man looked at the visitor and shook his head a fraction. "I want to ... be with the others ... Collins. Anderson. Aune. The ones she took ..."

"They were heroes. You are a traitor."

"I saw ... *her*. Verner saw her too ... but ... I told him the woman ... was a ghost. I will tell you where ... the amulet is ... if you take me to my friends ..."

The Viking looked at the priest, the cross that hung on the Hospice wall, the crucifix almost hidden in the wattles of his neck. "I took many of your friends before finding you, Axel Norung. Tell me where you have my Hammer!" He raised his axe and the wind howled. The window in its warped wood frame splintered like an icicle.

The dying man screamed and clutched his rosary as the room darkened and ice formed on the coverlet. His breath rattled in his throat and his eyes bulged. "I sent it ... to the boy ... for luck. Don't hit me!"

"Traitor! Go to your God who forgives everything!" The axe came down with a tremendous crash, echoed by a roll of thunder from the humid night, and a fountain of blood spouted from the cloven chest.

The priest started and raised his head, finding himself covered with the warm red blood. He looked around the room. It was empty except for him and dead man. For a second he hesitated, then his nerve broke and he fled.



BI HEADQUARTERS
WASHINGTON, D.C.
JANUARY 12, 1994

"Scully!"

The woman emerged from the ladies' room shaking water off her hands. "What's up, Mulder?"

He waved a sheet of paper at her. "We've got another one, but this time with a twist."

"What? Another what?" She followed him into the office.

He slammed the door behind them. "We've got a witness this time."

"For what? What is that, Mulder?" She caught the paper out of his hand and sat on the edge of his desk to read it.

"Haakon Haraldson — how's that for a Nordic name?" Mulder joked.

"Born 1925, Oslo, Norway, Harvard professor of Folklore, now a resident of Cambridge, Mass, just outside of Boston. Found three days ago with his chest hacked open ... what is this?" She peered at the sheet. "A woman?"

"And a man, no less!" Mulder crowed. "Scully, the witness says she was out walking her dog and saw a light in the Haraldson's downstairs family room. A really bright light. Looking closely, she saw through the glass windows —"

"Snoop."

"A blonde woman standing with Haraldson. He seemed to be pleading with her or praying, or something. He was on his knees. Then some guy came into the room waving an axe and the blonde turned around and held up her hand, at which moment the lights went out in the house. The witness was terrified, ran home, called the Cambridge Police."

Scully frowned. "It says here neither the woman or the man was seen leaving the building and there were no fingerprints or footprints to show that anyone was with Haraldson. They've got no proof of the witness's story."

"Notice one difference from those other cases."

Scully raised an eyebrow.

"The amount of blood. Haraldson's heart had stopped before the axe came down, and the blood didn't spurt like in the other cases. The others were axed when they were alive."

"How did the man and the woman get out if they did it?" Scully demanded.

"They left nothing behind and all the doors were locked. And what did they do it with?" Mulder asked mischievously, handing her her coat. "No axe has been found in any of these cases, no blood tracks, nothing!"

"But his lungs were ripped out!"

"There has to be a connection, Scully," Mulder argued persuasively. "Ready to go to Boston? I've ordered up the Federal sleigh, and I've packed the files."

She put on her hat and coat, and followed him out. "Mulder, I hear they have more snow in Boston this year than they do in Colorado. Are you sure we can get in the airport up there?"

He brushed aside her caveat. "I checked. They're still putting flights in and out, and got a couple of hotel rooms reserved as well. Cambridge PD say they'll meet us at Logan Airport with their complete file and the keys to the Haraldson house."

"Keys?"

"Sure. First we check the house, then maybe we can talk to Haraldson's son. He's skiing in Waterville Valley up in New Hampshire, around 135 miles away."

Scully had her doubts that they'd be visiting the young Haraldson. The current snow storm blanketing D.C. would be on their heels all the way up the Eastern seaboard. "Maybe we should bring our skis along as well."



**ARALDSON CRIME SCENE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
JANUARY 12, 1994**

It was mid-afternoon before they drove up to the sturdy stone and wood house where Haakon Haraldson had been killed. Their flight was delayed, then the airplane circled in a holding pattern until the one working runway was cleared for service.

Hidden among towering pines, the house sat behind a barricade of yew bushes that had yellow police tape tangled in the leaves. One enormous oak tree towered in the back yard, broken branches swinging dangerously from upper limbs. Ice sheathed most of the trunk and glittered in the watery sunlight. Light snowflakes were dusting the heaps of frozen ice thrown up by snowplows earlier in the afternoon.

"Where are the keys the police gave you at the airport, Mulder?" Scully looked around the frozen terrain, and shivered. Under her snow boots, sand was embedded in the ice.

The man fished out the small set. "Right here. They say the electricity is on, but the heat's turned down low, just enough to keep the pipes from freezing."

"Great," she murmured.

Inside, he flicked the hall switch and the lights came on. The house smelled of emptiness, the deadness of non-inhabitation. To the left was a living room complete with an antique television and an easy chair with a blanket carelessly thrown over the seat. A small basket of magazines sat beside it. Behind the chair, in a partly-opened cabinet, was a stereo. On the top of the cabinet sat an old-fashioned gramophone with several records lying beside it. On the right was a dining room with heavy carved wooden chairs and a mahogany table while on the walls hung portraits in gold frames. The chandelier chimed softly as Mulder shut the door.

He went down the hallway to the stairs leading to the family room on the lower level.

Scully dallied, pausing to study the photographs hung on walls. They spanned the lifetime of a family, from dimmed, yellowed photos of a family in Norwegian clothing of half a century ago to a marriage picture between a handsome man in a World War II uniform and a young woman who rested her head on his shoulder. Several pictures of a young man on skis through his life from childhood to manhood. Finally, at the end facing the door leading downstairs was a color magazine cover, lovingly framed, showing a young man skiing. The name in one corner was Eomil Haraldson.

She followed Mulder down to the family room which smelled of frozen ashes and dried blood. The locked full-length glass doors that led into the garden were frosted behind the plastic insulating curtains. Looking out, she saw a snow-covered garden. Dark bushes lined most of the back yard, and a squirrel leapt from a massive oak tree that overshadowed the family room, and scurried across the frozen tundra.

"Mulder?" She pushed back the curtains, then touched the glass. Her fingers left imprints among the frost.

"What?" He looked up from where he was examining the faint chalk outline on the carpet of where the body had been found.

"Were there any fingerprints on the glass doors?"

"Nothing but family prints. Cambridge PD dusted it," Mulder replied. His gaze wandered around the room looking at the furnishings. On the walls were academic degrees from several elite universities, stating that Haraldson was a well-respected scholar. The far wall next to the stairs had a framed poster of *Die Walkure*, one of Wagner's Ring operas.

Over the mantelpiece hung a Norwegian flag while on the wide mantle were several reproductions of Viking goblets and armlets, a half-melted candle in a brass candlestick, a box of matches, and various books. He studied them intently. There was a *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, *Beowulf*, a book on Anglo-Saxon Paganism, the complete *Ring of the Nibelungen* marked with a number of yellow Post-It notes. Stacked untidily on one end was a sheaf of loose hand-written notes on Norse mythology, which after a casual perusal, Mulder stuffed in his pocket for further reading.

"I see an axe out there," she said conversationally, peering outside.

"What?" He turned. "Where?"

"I don't know. This snow is terrible." Scully turned her head towards the room, then looked out again. "It was just an impression made by the ... no, there it is!"

For a moment, the wind blew the snow the opposite direction and they could see the fountain at the far end of the garden where a stone Viking held his axe up against the falling snow. Judging from the water marks, water flowed from the tip of the axe but the fountain had been shut off for the cold months.

"That's quite an axe but I don't think that did it," Mulder teased, letting the curtain fall back.

Scully looked around the room. "What's this?" She knelt next to a small hexagonal table in the middle of the room.

He looked down at it. "Medals? War, maybe. I'm no expert on them."

"Not this one." She tapped on the glass. "That looks like a sports medal."

"What sport?"

Scully squinted. "It looks like skiing."

"His son is a skier," Mulder offered. "It could be his."

"But this medal is from 1952. International competition. It must have been Haraldson's."

"Scully, look at this!" Mulder picked up a framed picture of a group of men in WWII uniforms that had been hidden behind one of the books. The handwritten card taped to the back was so faded that only the names were clear, and a date of 1947.

She came over. "What is that?"

"It's a commendation from the Norwegian army. But look at the names!"

She took it from him. "Hans Pertimer, Walter Ulfila, Ulf Verner. Axel Norung. Pers Olaffson, Peter Gerund and Haraldson. Well, three of them aren't in your files, Mulder — Ulfila, Verner and Norung. I'll have Washington run a check on their whereabouts. But here's your connection beyond the manner of deaths. All these men were part of the same Norwegian unit."

Mulder tucked the picture into the pocket full of papers. "Let's ask Eomil Haraldson about his father's old friends, Scully."

"You do the driving."



WATERVILLE VALLEY SKI RESORT
WATERVILLE VALLEY, NEW HAMPSHIRE

It took four hours of driving through an increasingly heavy snowfall to reach the hotel where Eomil was staying. They presented their credentials at the main desk and the concierge called Paul Barton, the team coach.

"Mr. Barton?" Mulder asked the sturdy tall black man who came out of the elevators. "I'm Special Agent Fox Mulder, this is Special Agent Dana Scully. We'd like to speak to one of your skiers, Eomil Haraldson."

"Is it about his father?" Barton asked bluntly, his voice harsh.

"Yes, it is," Mulder acknowledged.

"What more do you want to know?" the coach asked. "He's just gotten over the first shock. I don't want —"

Scully glanced at Mulder, seeing his jaw set mulishly. "May we see him?" she interrupted.

The man looked from her to Mulder, then shrugged. "I asked him if he wanted to see you and he said it would be okay. Just don't upset him any more than you folks already have. He's supposed to be getting ready for a competition."

The elevator doors opened and the agents followed the coach down the hallway. He knocked on the door to room 499.

"Come in!" the tone was muffled.

Barton opened the door and waved for the others to go in before him. Two men in their mid-twenties were sprawled on the double beds, sports magazines spread around them, the television blaring ESPN in one corner. One, an ash blonde with a deep tan, flicked the remote and the television went silent.

"What's up?" he asked cheerfully.

"These are Agent Scully," Barton waved to her, "and Agent Mulder of the FBI. They want to ask you about your father, Eomil."

The blonde winced and looked over at the other man. "More of that, Eore." He had a lilting accent straight out of Norway.

The other man brushed back his tangled black hair. His blue eyes watched them with suspicion. "I'm Eomil Haraldson. What can I tell you more than I told the police?"

Scully smiled as she looked at him. "We're trying to find some more information about your father's friends."

"Friends?" Eomil looked blank. "Which friends? After my mother died, oh, ten years ago, of cancer, my father seemed to shut everyone out after that. Kept up on his reading and my career, but I really don't know what else he was doing. I didn't go home much."

Mulder stared at him. "Why not?"

"I'm on the circuit, the skiing circuit and that doesn't leave me a lot of time," Eomil said defensively. "I wrote letters."

"What kind of reading?" Scully cut in sensing the young man defensiveness. "You said your father read —"

"Military history magazines. Academic journals. Some sports mags —"

"Especially when *you* started to show up in them," the blonde man interrupted. "I'm Alex Verner, second-fiddle to the top-class skier — awp!" Eomil's pillow hit him dead center. He slung it back.

"Was he a military man?" Mulder asked before a pillow fight started. "Your father."

"Sure. He served in World War Two." Eomil shrugged. "I heard about that all my life, how he fought in Norway —"

"With my dad," Verner cut in, suddenly serious. "That's how we got to know each other."

Scully sensed Mulder's attention suddenly focus on the young man. "What is your father's name, Mr. Verner?"

"Ulf Verner. He lives in Oslo now," Alexander said.

"Really." Scully flicked a glance at Mulder who was studying Verner intently. "He and Mr. Haraldson served together in Norway?"

"Yeah. They were part of some Commando group that got dropped in 1943 and were nearly wiped out. Dad goes — went — back to Norway for reunions," Eomil supplied. "What's this got to do with my father's death?"

"Can you tell us their names?" Scully asked picking up a pad of hotel stationary.

"We don't know," Mulder said simultaneously. "We're following up on all leads and we'd like to talk with all his friends."

"Trying to find out who might go after him with an axe?" Eomil muttered, dropping his gaze to the bedspread.

Scully flicked a warning glance at Mulder. The boy's composure was stretched thin. "Do you have their names?"

"There were so many names," Eomil said with a shake of his head. "Let's see, Alex, your Dad, Ulf, —"

"Umm, so many *unpronounceable* names," Alexander said over his friend. "We can always call my father. He knows all the stories. 'Course it would be midnight there and he's probably not at home now since he's planning to come here for the funeral tomorrow." He winced and shot Eomil an embarrassed look. "Sorry. Let's see. Hans Pertimer, Haakon Haraldson, uh, Axel Norung, who was a friend of your family, Eore. Didn't he send you that old amulet that he dug up years ago?"

Eomil looked blank. "Mr. Norung? He sent me the charm when he left the US. Nice old man but ... well, Dad didn't like him much. Said once he couldn't trust him."

"What happened?" Mulder asked curiously.

"Dunno. Dad wouldn't talk about it. He was sort of annoyed when the charm arrived but he thought it might bring good luck to my skiing." Eomil pulled out the crude iron cross that hung around his neck on a silver chain.

Actually, Scully thought, it wasn't a cross but something more like a railroad spike. Approximately the length of a little finger, it had been shined and a hoop attached to the top. "What is it?"

"Thor's Hammer," Alex trumpeted. "And snow will thunder under his skis —"

"Oh, shut up, Alex!" Eomil said exasperated. "You're full of it tonight, aren't you? It's a Norse luck charm probably from the sixth or seventh century. But you wanted the rest of Dad's friends. There's Walter Ulfila, grandfather of the beautiful Gisele, Alex's chosen bride —" Eomil said mockingly.

"Shut up, Eore! She's not mine!" Alexander went red.

"Then why are you going to propose tomorrow?" Eomil retorted. "When the wake's over?"

Alex chose to ignore the comment. "The big hero was Coifi Aune but he's dead — died in '43."

"Coifi Aune? Who was he?" Scully questioned sharply.

"Aune? He was the leader of the Norwegian commandos," Eomil said. "Dad revered him."

"How about Peter Gerund?" Mulder asked unexpectedly.

Both boys looked at him in puzzlement. "How did you know about him?" Alexander asked. "Gerund was part of the British group sent in to help Aune out. He was the only one who survived the war. Dad laughs about that Englishman among all the hot-blooded Vikings, but he said Gerund was a hell of a fighter."

"He's dead now, I think," Eomil added. "Dad told me that long ago. You know, you should read the letters. Dad used to keep all his letters in a box in the family room." His voice suddenly broke. "You can look at them if you want, Agent Mulder. I guess I inherit the house, so go ahead and take what you need. I'd like it back in the future, of course."

"It's time for you both to leave," Barton said unexpectedly. "We've got practice runs tomorrow and I want you both fit. Agents ..."

"Thank you for your time," Mulder said.

Scully smiled. "Yes, thank you both. We'll be in touch if we find out anything."

"Thank you," Eomil said gravely.

"Bye," Alexander said with a fake cheerful smile. "See you around."

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ulder was silent all the way to the car. Scully thought he was going to burst.

"So, we have that connection again," she said after settling into her seat and fastening her belt. Mulder started the car. "They were all part of the same group."

"So who's trying to carve them up now that they're old men, Scully?" he replied, swinging the car out of the parking lot.

"Watch out, Mulder!" The heavily-falling snow made the car skid on the caked pavement, and it narrowly missed a line of parked vehicles. Scully waited till the car reached the main interstate highway leading to Boston before she asked, "So what do you plan on now?"

"We go back to the Haraldson house —"

"Un-un. Not unless we can get the heat turned up," she retorted. "I'm not going to read old war stories without a heater."

"Okay, I'll drop you at the hotel, get the letters, and bring them back so we can go over them," he said reasonably. "I won't be long."

She shrugged. "I'll order room service for an hour after you leave. It might still be warm when you get back."

"Such confidence in my driving."

"This storm is building, not decreasing, and I know how much you like to drive in snow. In the meantime, I'll call Washington about Norung, Verner and Ulfila and the history of World War II in Norway."



**ARALDSON CRIME SCENE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS**

Mulder hated to admit it but Scully might have had a point. It had taken him three-quarters of an hour longer than it should have to reach the house which looked even more dismal by the dim light of the street lamp than it had by the afternoon sun. The new storm was piling snow and sleet high on the roof of the small front porch while the trees around the building were bowing under the increased weight. The stark outlines of the oak tree glittered as the lamp reflected off its encasing ice. He fumbled with the lock, finally got the key in, and turned.

For a second he stood in the dark hallway, listening to the house settling under its canopy of snow, the soft sliss of sleet, and the crack of glass as the windows adjusted to the falling temperatures. The house was alive in subtle ways that chilled him more than the weather outside.

With a shrug, he flicked on the overhead light and squinted in the brightness.

Creak.

What was that? Had something moved?

He cocked his head, listening.

Creak.

Suddenly alert, Mulder pulled out his gun and moved cautiously down the corridor.

Nothing. Or nothing he could see. Years of studies into the occult and the paranormal had made him suspicious of just his five senses. He knew there was more than just the real world out there. He had seen it.

At the far end was the staircase that led down to the family room. He carefully opened the door, feeling an icy breeze coming up the steps. There was the smell of wet plaster and mold. He frowned. The chimney flue had been closed when he and Scully had left. He felt moisture on the handrail running down the stairs. Had one of the pipes blown?

Slowly and cautiously he went down the stairs, turning on the light as he passed the switch. The room flooded with light for a second, then the lights went out all around him.

He crouched defensively. Looking back upstairs, Mulder saw the hall light was out as well. The electricity was gone then. Not surprising in this storm. Outside the glass doors, the street lamp across the backyard fence shone, giving the family room an eerie glow. The power outage must only be on this street.

Stepping into the room, he saw that the oak tree had lost a bough, the heavy wood smashing into one of the glass doors and cracking a pane. Snowflakes drifted against the break, melted and ran down the inside forming a puddle in the carpet.

He let out a sigh of relief and relaxed slightly. This was a rational reason for the wet. But what about some light? He remembered the candlestick and matches on the mantel. He lit the stub of candle and the room was suddenly bathed in warm light.

Where was the box? Hmm. Ah, over there by the poster.

Creak. Shuffle.

He froze for a fraction of a second, then put the candlestick back on the mantle. Holding his gun ready, he stepped silently over to the curtained glass windows and peered outside.

A shadowy form was at the far end of the garden next to the fountain. Or was it just a shift in the snow that deceived his eyes? Mulder couldn't decide. After a second of indecision, he opened the unbroken side of the glass doors, and stepped outside into the storm.

Ice stung his eyes and his hands were chilled by the time he stepped off the patio. The shadowy figure was no clearer than it had been when he had been inside.

"Hey! Who are you?" Mulder called. "I'm —"

An avalanche of snow hit him as another large bough cracked off the oak. He was close enough to the patio to spring back as the heavy wood crashed down. He hit the glass doors, sending glass from the broken one spraying over the carpet. His vision swam with stars. His gun slid somewhere under the fallen wood. The frame kept him from falling inside but also trapped him among the wooden branches of the tree. Twigs scratched his frozen face.

The shadowy figure at the other end of the garden moved toward him.



AMBRIDGE MARRIOTT
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Scully picked up the loose sheets that Mulder had given her before he had taken off in the car. Haraldson's notes for a book, she concluded, scanning the writing. Full of Norse mythology, Odin and his companions and things she'd long ago forgotten from elementary

school. As she read further her schooling came back. Norse legends were grim with brutality that came from a culture that grew up in an unforgiving climate. From Odin trading an eye for wisdom, to the death of the most beloved of all the gods, Balder, to the foretold destruction of the world and its resurrection as a 'brave new world', they showed a harsh life with priorities not considered valid by modern standards. Still, on the whole, the Norse gods were far more 'human' than most created by man. For example, their afterlife centered around Valhalla which was an all-night sodden brawl where the heroes partied until daylight, when they went out to kill each other. Magically revived at nightfall, they went back inside and resumed drinking. What a life ... or death.

She read on, fascinated by the minutiae that Haraldson had revelled in. Scully had never known there was a pecking order in Valkyries. Wagner had simplified the mythology for his operas, and mentioned only eight handmaidens to Odin, along with the well-known Brynhild. Haraldson had concluded that there were dozens who could cast spells, protected chosen warriors and did numerous other tasks along with their main job: choosing warriors for Odin Hall's drunken brawls. Haraldson argued that some of the Valkyries were absorbed pagan myths while others had been created for some local need.

She tossed the papers aside and picked up the phone, dialing the always-manned desk at FBI Headquarters in Washington. The clock showed half-past nine.

"FBI," the bored voice of the duty clerk replied.

"This is Agent Scully in Boston. I'd like to have some research done and faxed to me."

"Yes, ma'am." The man's voice became a little more enthusiastic. "But we're really short-staffed tonight, ma'am. There's a snowstorm outside and only half our staff is here."

"I understand but I need the information by ... ten tomorrow? Will that do?" she questioned.

"I'll pass it right up to the research desk, ma'am."

"Good." She ruffled through the pages on the bedspread till she found the picture with the card on the back. "I'd like a search done of military records from World War II pertaining to ... Norway. In particular, the year 1943. Look for the name ... Coifi Aune. A. U. N. E."

"Urrh ... yes, ma'am. I'll call the Pentagon. Or the Army War Museum. Or somewhere."

"Then, I want a search of the following names — I want to know where they are now if they are alive. Walter Ulfila. Ulf Verner. Axel Norung."

"Anything else, ma'am?"

"Anything else ..." Scully suddenly wished he would stop calling her 'ma'am.' She felt so old when he did that. "Have you got any kind of guide to Norway there? Something on Norwegian history?"

"Back to World War II, ma'am?"

"Farther back than that. A capsule history. Find out if there is any place here in Boston that has something on Norwegian history."

"Yes, ma'am. Your fax number?"

She gave him the hotel's number and hung up. Her gaze hit the clock. 9:45?

There was a knock on the door. "Room Service."

"You get leftover pizza, Mulder," she muttered as she reached for her shoes. "Bad luck."



It was cold, so cold and a rising wind was stirring the branches that were cutting into his legs. Mulder's vision was blurred by the pain in his temples.

"Whhaatt ..." he slurred. The figure looked like a man in a heavy fur coat but the outlines were indistinct. Did he have horns on his head? The Devil? Some kind of freaky hat? The icy wind blew sleet into Mulder's eyes and the light from the street lamp was suddenly far brighter than he remembered.

A man? No, it was a *woman*. Mulder's groggy impression was that the man faded into a beautiful woman wearing fur coat with metal epaulets. The 'horned' effect came from the swirling of her long silver-blond braids by the wind.

"Whoos ... are," he tried to say but his mouth wouldn't work properly, "ooo?"

"I sent him away," she said with a thick Scandinavian accent. The wind howled and he slitted his eyes against the light as she bent over him. The hand that raised his chin and brushed down his neck to the neck of his jacket was colder than ice-coated glass he had hit.

"The ... wind," he said with effort. "It's so cold ..."

"You are not one of the men. Be quiet." She stepped away from him and lifted her head, the light from the lamp shining through her long blonde hair and off the fur coat. Momentarily he was reminded of something he had seen recently but couldn't track the memory.

Then she turned and walked away through the branches. The wind diminished to nothing as soon as she reached the far end of the yard.

He suddenly realized, with an icy chill that had nothing to do with the weather, that the woman had walked through a solid, ice-coated wooden oak bough and branches, and not stirred or broken a single twig. Her hand, though, had been as solid as the branches holding him against the glass window.

From the other side of the glass, all the lights went on as the electricity was restored to the house. A shrill alarm went off above his head as the burglar alarm went off.

He succumbed to the cold, letting his head down on his pillowed arms. Vaguely he heard a siren, then more sirens, but he fell unconscious before the police arrived.



**AMBRIDGE CITY HOSPITAL
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS**

Scully's taxi made it to the hospital in record time considering the snowbound streets. After paying the tripled fares, she went into the emergency room to see it uncommonly empty. Only the most desperate had ventured outside their shelters.

"He's over there," the nurse said after the agent identified herself and asked for Mulder. "Still a bit on the frozen side but he shouldn't lose anything important."

Scully sent her a blank look, then turned on her heel, feeling a blush going up her face. Did people automatically assume that men and women partners went all the way?

Mulder was not a good candidate for that at the moment anyway. He had managed to sit up on the gurney, and was still wearing his shirt but his tie was thrown to one side with the jacket and overcoat. Everything was saturated with freezing water from where the snow and sleet had melted. He tentatively set a foot on the cold tile, then started as she entered.

"Did they tell you to stay in bed?" she asked quietly, slightly amused by his guilty look.

"Till they come back," he admitted, setting the other foot down and hitching himself off the gurney. He swayed.

"Maybe you ought to listen to them," she suggested, moving closer. "Sit down."

He glanced up under the drooping locks of brown hair that hung over his eyes. "I saw her, Scully."

"What?"

"The woman. The woman who was in Haraldson's house when he died."

She looked disbelieving.

"I saw her and there was some man as well. She said she 'sent him away'. The guy with the axe."

"It was all a dream, Mulder. The police said you were knocked out by the branch and nearly froze to death."

"They were both there," he said firmly.

Scully shook her head. "I talked with the police when they called me at the hotel. You were the only person there. The branch had you pinned down and they had quite a time getting you free."

"She touched my face and said, 'I wasn't one of them'. I wonder what she meant?" he mused, stepping away from the gurney.

"Mulder, there wasn't any way someone could have touched you!" she said in exasperation. "No one could reach you!"

He just shook his head mutely, then swayed. She grabbed his arm.

"Okay, sit down till I get the paperwork done. I take it you don't want to spend the night?"

He shot her a disgusted frown, then smiled as she grinned back at him.

"Then I'll see they'll release you into my custody. In the meantime," she fished in her overcoat pocket and brought out a rolled pair of socks. "Put these on."

"You believe me, don't you?" he asked taking the socks.

She hesitated. "I think we should discuss it tomorrow when you're unfrozen. I don't know what to believe. Let's get back to the hotel first."

He sat back on the gurney and laboriously began to pull on the dry socks. She went back to the desk to see if she could get him released.



AMBRIDGE MARRIOTT
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
JANUARY 13, 1994

It was after eight a.m. when Scully's wake-up call rang through. She acknowledged it with a murmur and hung up, promptly falling back to sleep. Nearly two hours later, her eyes finally opened and she rolled out of bed, her head still fuzzy from sleep.

She pulled on her robe, washed her face and brushed her hair into some semblance of order. Then she went over to the connecting door, knocked, and opened it. She had left the lock on Mulder's side open when she had brought him back last night from the hospital.

He was still asleep, his breathing hoarse. She hoped he wasn't catching a cold. His dark hair was ruffled from tossing and turning.

She turned and went back into her own room and called room service. "I'd like to order two waffle breakfasts, orange juice and coffee for ten thirty. And are there any messages for me?"

"No, ma'am," the clerk replied politely. "I'll send them with the breakfast should any arrive."

"Thank you." She hung up and headed for the shower.

By the time she was finished and dressed, she heard the stumbling sounds of someone in Mulder's room. The sound of running water and an empty bed told her that her partner was up and moving. She switched on the radio and twitched back the bedspread so the room was somewhat neat.

Breakfast arrived promptly and she had the cart wheeled into one corner of her room next to the small hotel table by the window.

Outside, the snow was still falling, slower than it had been the day before. She could feel cold seeping through the glass and shivered, then stepped back. "Mulder?"

"What?" came from the other room.

"Breakfast."

He came in, wearing a dark turtleneck and pants. His feet were bare, and his hair still wet from the shower. "Ah. Waffles."

"I would have given you pizza last night but you didn't show," she teased. "How are your hands?"

"They're fine." He looked out the window and shuddered slightly. "It's getting worse out there."

"The radio says four more inches today."

"Bad. Let's go to Miami."

She smiled. "We can hunt the ghosts of cocaine smugglers instead."

He took the metal lid off one of the plates of waffles. "What about the letters?"

She took the plate he held out and sat down. "Some syrup, please. The family room was totally soaked from what the policemen said. They weren't looking for anything but the burglar who tripped the alarm, so I suppose the box is still there."

Mulder grimaced. "So we have to go back for them."

"I put in for some research from the Bureau last night."

"These maybe?" Mulder held up three faxed pages he found on the tray.

"Maybe." She took the pages and scanned them, frowning.

"What?"

"I wanted some information on the Norwegian campaigns of World War II but there doesn't seem to be much here. Looks like not much has been written about it on this side of the Atlantic. All these references are British."

Mulder shrugged as he swirled the fragment of waffle in left-over syrup. "What is it?"

"Apparently Norway was occupied in 1940, and, about a year later, the Nazis began rounding up the Jews and killing anyone they thought was collaborating with the Resistance. The death of a German soldier could get a town wiped out. Resistance fighters and commandos were shot out of hand."

"Sounds normal. What else?"

"Not much. The British used to run commandos into Norway regularly, the Germans used it for rocket experiments. The German retreat from northern Norway was 'scorched earth' — they burned everything. The country was freed in May, 1945." She turned over the last sheet. "Here's something for you, Mulder. Walter Ulfila lives in South Dakota. Ulf Verner lives in Oslo, Norway and I've got numbers for them both."

"Good. Let me have one. Let's call Ulfila. I think South Dakota is a couple of time zones behind us."

He dialed his cellular phone and settled back, coffee cup in hand. "Mrs. Ulfila? Oh, she's not in? Are you a member of the family? Ah, the housekeeper." He paused for a second as if she had asked a question. "No, I'm not selling anything. I'm Agent Fox Mulder of the FBI. I'm trying to reach Mr. Ulfila."

The woman on the other end interrupted him again.

"He and Gisele are in Boston? Really? Do you have a number where he can be reached? ... No, never mind. Let me give you my number. When he contacts you, can you have him call me? No, it's nothing desperately urgent, just following up on a case." He paused again. "I see. You say he's at the Colonnade Hotel. Thank you. I'll try and reach him there. Thank you again. Goodbye."

Scully raised an eyebrow. "He's in Boston?"

"For Haraldson's funeral," Mulder replied.

"Alexander Verner said his father was coming in as well. I wonder when?"

Mulder shrugged. "Hail, hail, the gang's all here. Call him and ask."

"Except for Axel Norung. Apparently the office didn't find him." By the time she hung up, he was lacing up his shoes over thick socks. "No answer. They are probably on the slopes. Do you know when Haraldson's funeral is?"

"Yes. Cambridge PD had it in the file. Today, at two."

Eomil looked at the flags that marked the racing path down the snowy slope. The bottom was hidden behind two bends and clumps of trees. He adjusted his goggles, and crouched, prepared to push off, then straightened up. "Alex, pay attention!"

Alexander, who stood just to his rear, jerked upright. "Sorry, Eore. Just thinking about Gisele."

"Just ask her to marry you, you Norwegian troll, and get it over with!" Eomil said in amusement. "I want you to tell me what's wrong when I launch. Something's slowing me down."

"It's probably that lucky amulet that Norung gave you." Alexander waved a walkie-talkie. "I'll tell Barton you're on the way down. This is the last run if you want to make the wake."

A muscle twitched in Eomil's cheek. "The last run, then. Here I go." He crouched, leaned forward, then launched himself.

Tearing down the steep slope, feeling the uneven snow beneath his skis, he shifted to the left as he went around the first bend out of Alex's sight.

Something caught his eye and he let his attention shift for a second. It was a mistake.

The end of one ski caught a rough patch and he pitched head over heels, the slat shattering. The other ski caught the side of the path and wrenched his knee badly, then pulled off as he tumbled into the snow banks that lined the course.

He lay there motionless, the sun dazzling his eyes, his breath coming hard and fast. He heard footsteps plowing through the snow. Alex? ... It had to be Alex.

A shadow fell over him and he opened his eyes. The sun caught the edge of the shiny axe as it loomed over him. Eomil, in one panicked movement, pushed himself away from the fur-clad Viking looming over him. The axe sliced the polyester ski jacket.

He rolled till he hit a tree and passed out.

The Viking trudged after him, axe held in one hand. He was almost to the unconscious man when the sound of skis made him turn.

Verner gaped at the apparition standing over his friend. "Hey! What are you doing? Get away from him!"

The Viking shot one disdainful look and turned back to the fallen man. His hand reached for the neck of Eomil's ski suit.

Verner threw a steel-tipped ski pole as if it were a javelin. It went through the fur-clad man, sinking deep into the tree above Eomil.

Dumbfounded, Alex saw the Viking dissolve into the thin air, leaving his friend unconscious in the snow.

Carefully moving, using his other ski pole as a crutch, he shuffled over to his friend. "Eore? Eore?" Bent over him, Alex never saw the snow that cascaded off the tree to bury them both. But he heard a man laughing.

**RIFFITH FUNERAL HOME
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS**

G

The first thing Scully and Mulder saw as they entered the funeral parlor was an enormous standing wreath of red and white carnations. It dominated the room, making the modest offerings beside the coffin seem minuscule. The banner on it said it was from the Coifi Aune Museum, Norway. Seated on the top of the coffin was a small wooden model of a dragon-headed Viking ship, sails raised to catch a non-existent breeze.

Chairs were set up around the room, and a small buffet ran down one side. Caterers were setting up plates and food.

"We're early," Scully muttered. "Must be at three, Mulder."

Behind them, the door opened and two more people came in. They unwound their scarves and coats, and hung them in the cloak room. The woman smoothed back her long blonde hair and adjusted the scarf around her neck, then took her companion's arm to help him along. He was a stocky man in his late sixties or early seventies, dressed in well-cared-for but worn brown suit. A few strands of silver hair were neatly brushed across his bald head.

Mulder glanced at Scully. "Do you think that is someone we know?"

"We can only ask and make fools of ourselves," she murmured.

The old man shuffled up to the coffin, the young woman helping him. He laid his spotted hands on the polished lid and seemed to be praying. After he raised his head, Mulder asked, "Mr. Ulfila?"

The woman shot him a startled look. "Who are you?"

The agents introduced themselves. "We're working on the Haraldson case, Mr. Ulfila, and would like your help."

Ulfila finally turned from contemplating the Viking ship. "My help? I'm not sure I can help you."

"We're interested in your time in Norway, sir," Mulder said respectfully.

Ulfila smiled. "That was a long time ago."

"Let's sit down and talk, please," Scully said in her softest tone. "You were part of a commando group, is that right?"

The old man sat down reluctantly. "Why do you want to know this?"

"A number of the men in that group have been murdered and, as far as we can see, the only connection is their time in Norway," Mulder explained. "Who was Coifi Aune?" Scully asked simultaneously.

"Coifi Aune was the leader of our group. We were sent to Norway to destroy the German rocket experiments," Ulfila said calmly.

"Let's sit down, Grandda," the young woman said. They seated themselves in the metal chairs.

Ulfila smiled reminiscently. "It's strange that you are interested in something so long ago. There isn't that much to tell. Aune had six men in his unit; myself, Haakon, Ulf Verner, Axel Norung, Pers Olaffson and Hans Pertimer. We were dropped in 1942 into Norway to attack the Germans, and prevent them from developing their bombs. Several months later, another group of British commandos were sent to support us; Brian Collins, who was their captain, Peter Gerund, Roger Anderson, and Alexander Sherwood. Good men. I remember all of them so well."

"Alexander Sherwood?" Scully murmured. "That's a new name. Is this why Alex Verner —"

"And?" Mulder interrupted.

The man sighed, his gaze going to the wreath. "Most of the people supported us but one night someone tipped the Nazis off, and we had to run into the mountains." He paused. "February. That's it. It was February and cold, so cold. I am used to cold, but that month ..."

"What happened then?" Scully asked gently.

"It was Haraldson who found the cave, all covered by branches and snow. He fell into it, and almost broke his leg. We went in there never expecting to come out alive. Alex Sherwood and Verner helped Hans while Olaffson and I carried Coifi inside. That was where —"

"He was injured? Captain Aune?" Mulder broke in.

"A machine gun had caught him during the ambush and he was dying," Ulfila said softly. His tone was heavy with sadness and almost too soft to hear. "Hans Pertimer was badly wounded as well. If it wasn't for Sherwood, he wouldn't have made it to the cave. The British captain Collins and Anderson covered us, but were caught before they could reach the cave."

"And the Nazis shot them outright," Mulder said flatly. "Am I correct?"

"Yes." Ulfila shook his head. "We never knew how the Nazis found us, though. I can't believe that someone betrayed us. It must have been part of our group. I don't want to know who it was, even now."

"Go on, sir," Scully prompted.

The man smiled, showing crooked teeth. "We prayed that there was another exit and we wouldn't have to fight our way out. I had the flashlight so I was in the lead."

"And ..."

"I will never forget it. It wasn't a cave; it was a burial mound." He stopped at their uncomprehending gazes. "A Viking burial mound. The old warrior lay in a wooden boat with piles of stuff around him; armor, bottles, amulets, his battle axe laid on his bony chest, all covered in a fur coat. It glittered when the light hit it. An unbelievable find."

"A Viking ..." Mulder mused. He remembered the outline in the snow outside Haraldson's house. "What do you know about Vikings?"

Ulfila laughed, his gaze going to the coffin. "I wish Haakon was here. He knew all about them, their customs and habits. He always wanted a Viking funeral but that's impossible."

"Why?"

"I don't think your city would let us do it," Gisele said unexpectedly, dimpling.

"The Vikings buried their bravest warriors by putting them in their ships and set them afire to sail into the fjord," Ulfila explained. "Boston's 'fjord' is frozen."

"I thought they were buried?" Scully questioned. "The Sutton Hoo burial —"

"Was in England. Customs change from culture to culture," Gisele said. "And, from century to century."

The old man chuckled. "We'll send him off to Valhalla properly, Gisele. We'll toast Haakon as we did Aune and Sherwood, and drink ourselves into —"

"Grandda!"

"Sherwood?" Scully questioned. "I thought he was alive. How did he die?"

"Ulf Verner and Sherwood went exploring for the way out and found one. Sherwood pushed Verner out of the way when the roof fell in."

"And Coifi Aune died as well?" Mulder asked. "That night?"

"We laid him and Sherwood beside the Viking and toasted them."

"With what?" Scully said with a startled expression. "Mead?"

Ulfila smiled. "Beer. Count on Axel Norung to have a canteen full of beer. He was always ready for action. We washed out one of the Viking's goblets, toasted their spirits, then went out the back into a cold, cold winter's night."

Scully frowned. "So you left Aune and Sherwood behind and the two Englishmen, Collins and Anderson, were already dead —"

"We started with eleven men and ended with seven. After the war, we went back. The bodies were all still there, but a wolf or some other predator had scattered the bones. The British took Sherwood and the others home to bury them. We buried Aune with full military honors, and his family started their museum with the Viking relics from the mound. They are very famous in Norway."

Mulder's beeper went off. He reached behind, studied the number, then stood. "Please excuse me. I'll be back."

Scully watched him leave, then turned back to Ulfila. "Is this why Ulf Verner's son is named Alexander?"

The old man smiled at her. "It was the only way Verner could remember Sherwood. He always felt guilty about escaping the landslide."

"And you seven would meet at reunions —"

"They didn't happen very often." He sighed. "Verner and I are the only ones left."

Scully thought over the names. "What about Axel Norung?"

"He died a month ago in Guyane."

"Of what?" she asked sharply. "Was he murdered?"

Ulfila looked at her in puzzlement. "How did you know? I called the hospice and found out that some madman had apparently axed him."

Scully shivered. One more unexplained death for Mulder to add to the files. They had to stop this nutcase!

"It was strange," Ulfila mused, "but the priest said that the room was icy cold. Axel had gotten the last rites earlier so I feel certain he is with God, but it still seems very strange that the room was cold enough to have ice on the sheets. Sounds almost like Norway."

Scully mentally shook herself. It wasn't the chill of the funeral parlor that caused a shudder, but the flat way Ulfila explained Norung's death. God wasn't a scientific or medical concept; but then again most of the X-Files weren't 'scientific'. If they were, Mulder would have solved them by this time.

Ulfila shook his head. "A Blood Eagle is a horrible way to die."

"A what?"

"A Viking way of death for their enemies. They would split a man's chest and pull out their lungs to flap like an eagle's wings as they died."

"As they died," Scully repeated, seeing it vividly in her mind's eye. "This was a Viking thing?"

"Oh, yes. I almost thought Haraldson might have killed his friends. He was in California meeting Gerund when Peter died; he was visiting close by when Hans died. But now ..." Ulfila's gaze went to the coffin. "It couldn't have been him. It must have been some crazy man. Maybe it is a Viking."

Mulder walked quickly across the room. "Scully, that was the New Hampshire state police. Eomil Haraldson and Alex Verner are in the hospital. Eomil had a bad accident on the ski slopes and Alex got buried along with him in snowslide. Paul Barton is insisting that he talk to us right now."

"Why?" she asked, slinging her purse over her shoulder.

"I don't know."

Ulfila looked up. "Do you think it is the Viking, Miss Scully?"

Scully looked at Mulder's puzzled expression. "I'll explain later. Thank you, Mr. Ulfila. You've been very helpful."

"My pleasure," he called after them. "Come back and talk any time."

T

hey drove the car to the FBI field office and parked it in the garage, then went upstairs to find only two secretaries manning the desks. Between picking up calls, one of them pointed to an office where Scully and Mulder found a phone that could do conference calling. Mulder punched in the number that the State Police had given him for Barton.

After reaching the hospital, they were transferred to Barton who was apparently sitting in a waiting room.

"Agent Mulder?" The coach's voice sounded weary.

"We're both here," Mulder said. "What happened?"

"Apparently an accident. Haraldson spun out and hit a tree; Verner went to help him but got buried in an avalanche of snow from the same tree. Hit by a branch as well. We dug them out but it took a lot of time and neither is doing real well."

"What did you want to talk to us about?" Scully asked.

The coach hesitated from the slight pause. "Before Verner went into surgery he said that he saw something. He told me to call you."

Mulder raised an eyebrow at Scully. "Saw something?"

"It sounds crazy," Barton said with obvious embarrassment. "He said he saw some kooky nutcase in a fur coat with an axe standing over Haraldson. Said he threw one of his poles and it went right through the guy, who vanished."

Scully shook her head in disbelief. Mulder took a deep breath, and his partner eyed him doubtfully. "What is it?" she breathed the question.

"Later," he whispered.

"I think that he was hallucinating but he was so damned worried that I wouldn't call, I promised on my honor that I would," Barton concluded.

"Did he give any more description of the man or the axe?" Mulder asked.

"No, nothing but an axe is an axe, right? Anyway, what really has me worried is that Alex's father is coming in from Norway tonight and I haven't got anyone to meet him."

"Are you sure the airport is still open?" Scully said uneasily. "It looks like another storm is coming in."

"I checked. The flight's on time."

Mulder grinned. "Perfect," he muttered. "Mr. Barton, we'll pick him up for you. What's the flight number?"

"Flight 904. Lands at 5 p.m. Tell him Alex has some broken bones but he's okay. Alex says his dad's got a weak heart and I don't want to worry him. I've gotten him a room at a hotel nearby," Barton finished.

Mulder looked at Scully who shrugged, and waved at the clock on the wall. It said 3:45. "We'll bring him up to the resort."

"If they're okay, why are you still there, Mr. Barton?" Scully asked.

The man hesitated, then soberly said, "Haraldson's on life support. I'm staying till I know one way or another that he's not going to go tonight. That lucky charm didn't help a bit."

"I see." Scully winced. "We'll see you in a couple of hours, coach."

"Bye." The phone click was loud in the abnormally silent room.

Mulder looked out the window and saw light snow falling. "We'd better get a start."



"O kay, what've you got?" she asked as they drove to the airport.

Mulder hesitated for a second. "It's even more bizarre than I'd believe, Scully."

"Bizarre? How can it be worse than we've got already? That some guy with a Viking fixation and an axe is going around carving out the lungs of a group of old Norwegian Commandos in a Viking ritual called a Blood Eagle. That's going to look great in a report," she said in disgust.

"A Blood Eagle. That's evocative. No, my theory's even more bizarre." He slowed slightly as the snow clogged his windshield wipers on the approach to the Callahan Tunnel.

She twitched uncomfortably as the car slid slightly and then they were in the tunnel, tiled walls sliding by and no snow falling on them. "Do I want to know?"

"We're dealing with a ghost, Scully."

"Oh, *come on*, Mulder!"

"The ghost of a Viking whose grave was desecrated by a group of Norwegian commandos fifty years ago," he continued doggedly.

When she regained control of her voice, she demanded, "And why is this ghost suddenly appearing now?"

"It isn't just now, Scully. Pertimer died fifteen years ago."

"So what's the reason? Why does this ghost do this?"

Mulder shrugged fractionally. Coming out of the tunnel that connected Boston with East Boston and Logan International, they rode up the crest of the hill and saw the lights of the airport. "I don't have the answers. I don't even know why the ghost attacked Alexander and Eomil. They weren't part of the original team."

"Ghosts don't exist, Mulder," she said flatly. "I don't believe in ghosts."

He smiled. "Then what's your explanation?"

"And what about the woman?" she asked over his question. "Who is she?"

"I haven't the foggiest idea," he confessed. "All I know is that she's got the coldest hands in existence." He looked up at the airport signs and identified their terminal, guiding the car into the proper lane of traffic.

"Maybe Verner will know," she murmured.

They would have recognized Ulf Verner before he answered the call to come to the information desk. A tall, lean man, he resembled his son down to the deep tan. Over one shoulder, he carried a set of skis and poles while, in the other, he had a garment bag and a small suitcase.

"Mr. Verner?" Mulder called. He showed his badge. "I'm Agent Mulder of the FBI, this is Agent Scully. We'd like to talk to you for a second about your son."

Verner's face froze for a second, then softened into a puzzled expression "The FBI? What has Alex done now?"

Scully smiled in spite of herself. Verner's heavily accented voice was serious but light. Like his son, he was a blithe spirit. "Nothing like that, sir. He was in an accident but is recovering. We're here to take you to him."

"We have some other questions as well," Mulder said. "About Haakon Haraldson."

"Haakon? Why on earth? I'm afraid I have missed the wake, but I hope that I can make the burial tomorrow." Verner followed them to the outside parking lot across the street from the international terminal.

The snow was falling harder as they drove along the Expressway at barely a walking speed, seeing around them cars spun out and pressed up against the roadway abutments. The conversation dragged till they reached the turnoff for Interstate 93 which led north. The snow had become mixed with sleet, but most of the time, the road around them was empty except for snowplows and the State Police helping stranded motorists.

"What did you want to ask me about Haakon?" Verner asked from the back seat.

"He was a Norse scholar," Scully said, "Correct?"

"Oh, yes. He knew everything to know about Norse mythology and the Vikings."

"Did he know about a Blood Eagle?"

Verner laughed. "Oh, yes. He used to threaten his students with it, but they loved him anyway. It was a great joke. The only person who he truly said deserved it was the man who betrayed us to the Germans during the War."

"Who was that?" Scully asked, then mentally kicked herself. How would anyone know?

Verner looking out into the increasingly heavy snowfall. "We never found out. This is almost like Norway," he mused. "There was heavy snow that night. That was how we escaped from the Nazis."

"You and Coifi Aune and the others?" Mulder asked.

"You've been talking to Ulfila," Verner said with a laugh. "Yes, all of us except Captain Collins and Roger, who were shot when they were caught. Axel and I saw that happen from where we were hidden. I never forgot that. Roger was a good friend of mine."

"Norung's dead," Scully said abruptly. "Ulfila said so."

"He's dead? Maybe now he's at peace." Verner shook his head. "Norung wanted to be a hero but didn't have it in him. I had to drag him along with me when we escaped into the snow. Olaffson nearly shot us when we tripped over him. He led us to the others."

"Did you see anything ... unusual in there?" Mulder asked. "In the mound."

"Unusual?" Verner questioned blankly. "I was so happy to be alive a naked dancing girl could have appeared and it would not have been unusual! I used to tease Haakon. He was so taken

with that Viking mound that I thought he would never leave. He was obsessed with Norse legends. Wagner's *Ring* could make him cry."

"I'd forgotten the Ring was based on Norse legends," Mulder mused. "Did you take anything from the mound?" Mulder questioned. "Rings, knives, cups, an axe ..."

The man gave a bark of laughter. "And carry it with us? No, we left Aune and Sherwood in the mound and went off on our mission. Why?"

"Apparently Norung gave Eomil Haraldson a lucky charm of some kind. I wondered if it had come from the mound," Mulder said airily, concentrating on his driving. His knuckles were white from tension.

Scully heard Verner shift in the back seat. "I ... suppose it is possible that Axel took something that none of the rest of us saw. He was the last man out of the mound when we escaped. An amulet? Robbing the dead? What a horrible thought."

"Enough to raise the dead?" Mulder commented in a low tone.

"Mulder," Scully said through clenched teeth, "let's not bring that up again."

"What?" Verner asked from the rear of the car.

"Do you plan to go skiing, Mr. Verner?" Scully asked.

"Yes, Alex is — was going to take me on the runs in Waterville. I can still ski —"

"Watch out!" she cried, instinctively putting her hand out to break her impact.

There were two bright lights suddenly in their lane and Mulder hit his brakes in an attempt to stop before they hit a wrecked car. The rental car skidded in a full one-hundred and eighty degree turn as it slid toward the heap of crumpled metal that had once been a Saab. It stopped just short of the still-lit headlights on the crashed car.

"Damn," Mulder muttered and opened his door. "Wait here. I'll check if the driver's okay in there."

Scully watched him pick his way toward the other car, then opened her door. "Stay here, Mr. Verner."

"I'll help too," the man said, stepping outside with her.

The lights were in their eyes as they shuffled through the flaky snow toward the car.

Scully heard the blare of a horn and the sound of squealing brakes behind her and then felt herself thrown to one side.

Verner landed on top of her, pressing her into the snow as an out-of-control truck crashed into their car, pushing it into the Saab and shoving the coupled metal down the roadway. It came to a rest on its side twenty feet from where Scully and Verner lay in the firm packed snow.

"*Mulder!*" She scrambled out of Verner's embrace and ran toward the smoking wreck. The smell of gasoline and seared rubber filled her nose as she ran.

He had thrown himself out of the way of the crash but had landed hard on ground, his face bruised and bloodied from the impact.

"Thank God, you're alive," she exclaimed.

He made a face. "I feel like hell."

"I'm going to check on the driver. Wait here." She shuffled over to the obscenely joined mass of metal, and hitched herself up to look in the window of the truck. The driver was still laced in his seatbelt, a streak of blood on his forehead where he had struck the windshield. His eyes were half-open but he looked barely conscious. "He's alive. We've got to get some help!"

A roll of thunder drowned Mulder's reply.

She dropped and turned. He was on his knees staring beyond her where Verner was. She swivelled, then her jaw dropped open.

Out of the darkness behind him, came a Viking. Scully stared at the man in pure disbelief. "What?"

Verner saw their shock and spun around coming face to face with the specter. "No!" He threw himself to one side as the axe came down, slicing the air where he had stood a minute ago. "Who *are* you?"

"Freeze!" Scully screamed, pulling her gun from its holster. Verner was too close to the Viking for a clean shot but she could try. "Put that axe *down!*"

The Viking swung again, narrowly missing Verner's head as he dodged.

Scully fired, aiming at the Viking.

The ghost smiled at her, showing broken teeth, and raised the axe to throw it at the agent.

"Scully!" Mulder called desperately. "*Get down!*"

The lights on the Saab flickered, then grew bright, almost like flood lamps. A blonde woman walked out of the light past Scully, an arctic blast of wind accompanying her, colder than anything the agent had ever felt.

"I have come for you, Ulf Verner," the woman said calmly stopping in front of him.

The man backpeddled and slipped, landing on one knee, almost bowing to her. "*You?* I've seen you before! You're a dream!"

"You saw me in the snow above Anderson and Collins. That was not your time. It is now."

"Norung said you were a ghost," he said faltering.

She smiled, the icy breezes blowing her hair around her face in an arc. "I am no ghost. I am one of Odin's handmaidens."

"A Valkyrie," Mulder said reverently. Now he remembered why the woman had looked familiar. She vaguely resembled the poster for *Die Walkure* in Haraldson's house, but the painting had been nothing compared to the reality.

Scully shook her head. She must have hit the ground harder than she thought.

"He is mine," the Viking rumbled like a roll of thunder.

She turned to face him. "I have been following you, Thunor Creoding! You left Valhalla for your revenge, and now I cannot take you back. Your bones lie in a Christian Church and your skull in a wolf cave. I cannot take *you* back with me now."

"I was robbed!" the Viking roared. "My Hammer was stolen from my grave by a traitor and I had to find it! The boy still has it and I cannot rest until I have it back!"

A hammer? Scully remembered the lucky charm that had hung around Eomil's neck. That was what this kook wanted? That was why he was going about killing people? For some stupid metal cross?

"You have robbed me of brave men in your search," she said scornfully. "Many of that company would have gone with me to Valhalla. Be gone, Thunor, back to your grave! This is not your time."

The Viking looked at the man who was crouched in front of them, holding up his hands. "Promise me that you will find my skull and bury me outside of your church, and I will stop her, Ulf Verner!"

"*He* will do it," the Valkyrie said imperiously, pointing at Mulder, who had finally gotten to his feet. He froze. "He believes and hears." She turned back to Verner and held out her hand. "Your heart is weak, Ulf Verner, your time is short. Come with me as your friends did, Collins and Anderson."

"I'll find your skull," Verner promised the Viking, stepping back in panic from the Valkyrie. "I'll rebury you with all your honors, Thunor Creoding. Valkyrie, Odin's maiden, come for me later — I have to see my son!"

The wind was full of her voice. "The time is *now* ..."

Verner clutched his chest, and fell, landing face-down in the snow.

"*No!* We have a bargain!" the Viking swung his axe against the woman who with an astonished expression, vanished in a cascade of sparks. He swung towards Scully who was staring at the tableau, her jaw wide open. "You are a healer! Bring him back! And I will let the boy live."

He vanished the same moment the lights on the Saab went out.

"Come on!" Mulder said running over to Verner's body and turning it over. "He's had a heart attack, Scully!"

Scully began to perform CPR on Verner. After a minute, she felt for a carotid pulse. Unbelievably, she felt the thready pulse, and saw the man's chest shudder as he took a breath. "Mulder, he's breathing!"

"Good!" He pulled off his trench coat and handed it to her. "Cover him up. I'm going after the trucker. That gas smell is getting heavier."

"Hurry," she called laying the coat over the fallen man. She felt the folded cellular phone in one of the coat's pockets and pulled it out. "911?"

Mulder reached the Saab and looked inside. Empty. The car had been abandoned after all. He ran around to the door of the truck, and wrenched it open.

The driver was a little more conscious now. He helped Mulder to assist him out and staggered with the agent over to where Scully was.

"What the hell did we see?" Scully asked after they moved both injured men further away from the crash.

"What I thought. The ghost's sleep was disturbed by the commandos, one of whom stole his Thor's Hammer. Probably, Norung if he was the last man out," Mulder replied. "The ghost came out of Valhalla and was trapped when they reburied his body in a Christian cemetery."

"What was the woman saying about Collins and Anderson?"

"The Valkyrie came for them when they were shot by the Nazis. Verner and Norung saw her and she probably marked them for later collection but the ghost got there first. Killed Norung."

"What did he, the Viking, I mean, mean about the boy?" she asked.

"I don't know," Mulder said uncertainly. "The only other person who ever had the amulet was Eomil Haraldson."

They stared at each other for a second. "I hope that thing didn't mean him," Scully said.

"Are you ready to believe in ghosts, Scully?" Mulder asked mischievously.

She frowned. "I don't believe in ... There has to be a realistic reason for this, Mulder! There are no such things as *ghosts* ... Or Valkyries!"

"Right. No such thing," he agreed pleasantly. "All a figment of our imaginations."

In the distance came sirens and flashing lights. Reality was coming on spinning wheels. Scully counted on it.



BI HEADQUARTERS
WASHINGTON, D.C.
MAY 15, 1994

The sun was shining on the white cups of the tulips as Mulder walked along the path next to the Mall. He'd arrived back in Washington from Norway where Ulfila, Verner and Eomil Haraldson, on crutches, had invited him and Scully to the ceremony that accompanied the reburial of Thunor Creoding in his burial mound, complete with the Thor's Hammer around his neck and his head. Verner hadn't explained how he had found the skull — Mulder assumed the latest detection devices and a good dollop of luck factored into it.

Scully had opted out of the trip, saying she needed to finish her work in Washington. She didn't discuss what they'd seen in the burning light of wrecked cars, just refilled the folders on Haraldson, Olaffson, Gerund and Pertimer in the cabinet and moved on to the next case.

However, it wasn't forgotten. Mulder saw several sports magazines lying on her desk the week that Alexander Verner had come in first in World Cup downhill skiing. Verner had dedicated his medal to the memory of the men who had served with his father in Norway, calling them heroes worthy of Valhalla.

X Facts

FBI Agent Fox Mulder is an Oxford-educated psychologist. He left England around 1983, and was recruited by the FBI shortly after returning to the United States. A native of Chilmarc (actual spelling, "Chilmark"), Massachusetts, Mulder graduated from the FBI Academy in Quantico in 1988 at the age of 28, and his first case upon graduation was John Barnett. He was considered to be the best analyst in the Violent Crimes Section, and was viewed as a rising star in the Bureau until he began working with the "X-Files." He is somewhere between 33 and 34 years old, has hazel eyes, dark brown hair, and a penchant for sunflower seeds.

Mulder's younger sister, Samantha T. Mulder (born January 22, 1964), was abducted in 1972, when he was 12 years old and she was eight. Hypnosis and regression therapy conducted by Dr. Heitz Verber has led Mulder to believe that his sister was abducted by aliens.

Mulder's monograph, "Serial Killers and the Occult," was instrumental in the capture of Monty Propps in 1988. His criminal profile of murderer Luthor Lee Boggs led to his conviction. Outside of the Bureau, he is also the author of an *Omni* article on the "Gulf Breeze Sightings," under the pseudonym "M. F. Luder," an anagram for "F. Mulder."

Mulder's government source, "Deep Throat," signals Mulder for a meeting by calling, clicking the phone two times, and hanging up.

Mulder is a fan of Sherlock Holmes, and once indulged in an "indiscretion" on Arthur Conan Doyle's grave with Phoebe Green, his old girlfriend from Scotland Yard.

Mulder possesses photograph memory, is afraid of fire, and is squeamish at autopsies. He also runs on a regular basis.

FBI Agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully were teamed by Section Chief Scott Blevins (Violent Crimes) in March of 1992. Scully was assigned to assess the validity of Mulder's work and provide field reports to the Section Chief. In 1993, Section Chief Joseph McGrath of the Office of Professional Responsibility, initiated proceedings against Mulder to remove him from the Bureau, going over Blevins' head; recommendation for Mulder's censure and removal were overridden by a highly-placed government official, known to Mulder as "Deep Throat."

FBI Agent Dana Scully lives in a house or a first-floor apartment/townhouse in the Washington suburbs. Fox Mulder lives in an apartment, on the second or third floor.

Dana Scully and Fox Mulder both wear glasses, both for reading.

Dana Scully's parents became engaged shortly after the Cuban Blockade in 1963. Her mother's name is Maggie, and her father was a captain in the Navy. Her father died shortly after Christmas in 1993. His nickname for Dana was "Starbuck."

Dana Scully's birthday is February 23. She has hazel (sometimes blue) eyes, auburn hair, and is in her late 20s. She was raised Catholic, and one of her favorite movies is *The Exorcist*.

Dana Scully is a medical doctor, and was recruited by the FBI out of medical school between 1989 and 1990. She did her residency in Forensic Medicine. Her undergraduate degree is in Physics and her senior undergraduate thesis was "Einstein's Twin Paradox: A New Perspective."