

Pentimento

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Rated: PG13 - M/S angst, UST language

Archive: Just ask!

Summary: Pentimento is an art term meaning to obscure what was once there, such as painting a new picture over an older one on a canvas. But as it ages, oil paint on canvas can become transparent and slowly, what was there before can be seen again and the whole truth of the picture, once lost and obscured, can be rediscovered. This story of the reunion of Mulder and Scully is much the same.

The cruelest thing that The Grays do is let me watch.

The huge screen is always there on the back wall of my windowless room. It looks like one of those flat-screen TVs that manufacturers keep telling people they'll all have in their homes one day.

Well, I have one. And I hate it.

Granted, they don't MAKE me watch. It's not like they put my head in a vice, tie me down, force my eyes open, and make me watch the screen. No, it's even more insidious than that. They merely hung that thing on my wall so that I could see what I was missing, so that I could watch every single facet of my life going on without me. And although I can turn the sound down, I can't turn it off; only The Grays can do that.

They knew ahead of time that I would be unable to stop watching my world and the people in it. The ones I left behind. I can see their faces; I can hear their voices. In the beginning, foolishly, I would walk up to the glass and try to touch them, passing my hand over the ice-cold screen. The people left behind don't have a clue that in a very real sense, I'm near them everyday.

But the experience of them has become a memory for me now. I'm always with them, but I'm never WITH them--I can never interact. I've watched my work go on, taken over by someone else. I've watched my friends go about their business. I've watched my partner slowly fall in love.

I've even watched sunsets, but I can't feel them. I can't feel anything but cold and dark.

Oh God, I miss the sun. I miss what the warmth of it felt like upon my skin. There are times when I can

close my eyes and almost conjure that feeling. Almost. But in truth, the visceral experience of the beauty of sunlight is gone for me. Like so much else, it's just a memory now.

And that is the cruelest thing that these Gray bastards do. They let me see what I am missing and what may never be mine again. I'm let close, but I'm always separate, always disconnected. I wonder if all the others that are imprisoned here too are also allowed to watch their life go on or if I'm just somehow special. This is something I've not been able to discover.

The Grays will be coming to my room very soon. Time is not something I try to keep track of anymore, although I did at first. But even so, I have that internal clock that allows me to measure small chunks of time precisely. I've always had it, but the ability is mostly useless now as there doesn't seem much point in marking time. In fact, it only hurts to do so. I mean, it's not as if I'm counting down towards a release date.

But even though I know they're coming, I don't turn towards the door because I can't take my eyes off the screen. It's showing a different scene now, but the memory of what I witnessed a few hours ago is still burned into my eyes, like staring at the sun. The recollection of it will be there forever and the grief of it is crushing. I've wished for many things in my time here, but not for this. Never for this.

I'm sorry. Dear God, I'm so sorry. Pathetic words. Perhaps the most inadequate in the human language for the expression of regret and pain.

And there's been a lot of pain. At first, I thought the worst was the excruciating tests that brought tears to my eyes and ignored pleas to end the agony. But then there are the mind probes where they dig into every dark secret of my being and examine it for exploitation. My essence, all that I am, is stolen from me and given away to others. This doesn't erase the memory from my mind, although it does make it hazy, a little harder for me to conjure up.

But as time progressed and I lost track of it, the real pain, the real torture, was the despairing isolation of my cell. It's always ice cold. Always dimly lit, save the glow of screen when they've turned it on. It's my personal hell and I am all alone in it.

The Grays don't seem to understand the human concept of loneliness. They know of my increasing distress for the changes in both my physical and mental state are closely monitored. With the screen,

I wonder if they were actually trying to be kind to their captive, much the way a zookeeper would build a better cage. But they don't understand that watching only makes it worse. And in the end, it's cruel that I'm allowed to see.

At first, I wondered at their ability to see everything. Of course, it makes sense that with their advanced technology, these little Gray geeks would have no problem surveilling the people they planned to conquer. To think I wasted all that time in my apartment and office tracking down bugs and video spy cameras planted by the consortium. Foolishly, I wasn't thinking big picture enough.

The Grays have been spying on the spies since the beginning, and with technology that makes Krycek's little nanotechnology palmtop look like something built with Leggos. They are in everywhere that they can get their clones in to plant the equipment; almost no building or place is beyond their penetration. They can look at and hear anything they want, whenever they want for as long as they want. And from the sky, their ships can see nose hair on a rat in an open field; they can hear its breath.

The human race doesn't have a chance. The only thing that has kept the outright invasion at bay is the fact that we outnumber them, literally by billions. Apparently, the Grays feel that even cream puffs can win a war if there are enough of them. They can wait us out as they populate with clones. During my testing phase here, I've learned more about clones than I ever thought possible. The Grays seem to have no problem with letting me understand what they're doing. I suppose that's because they know I'm not going anywhere.

And the clones are everywhere. It's far, far more pervasive than we thought. It's not just Samantha or a scientist here and there. There are thousands upon thousands who have been taken and replaced with beings who are controlled from above. Beings who don't even actually know that they ARE clones because they've been implanted with the memories of the original beings. It's straight out of Blade Runner. Perhaps Ridley Scott is a clone too.

It's almost amusing that like all artificial, manufactured items, sometimes the clones get quirky, out of line or malfunction entirely. The friends, family, and co-workers all just think the clone is having a bad day or is going through a phase. Well, I got news for you guys, it's not PMS, it's a clone.

Of course, another problem with clones is that they aren't terribly good at reproducing on their own. It's something that the Grays haven't quite got worked out. Sometimes it works, but most times, it doesn't. For all their advanced technology, getting artificial life to create life, even with help from humans, just doesn't work as well as they'd hoped. So, they just keep taking people and manufacturing the clones up here in a more controlled environment. Where they have people like me to extract from and experiment upon until they get it right.

But there are others who are taken who are not replaced with a clone. These poor souls are the lab rats of The Grays. During what can only be described as reverse engineering their DNA is so totally fucked up that by the time The Grays are done, they don't want to reproduce them. They are merely experimented upon and discarded. There are times when I wish I were one of them. Their misery is over.

But I guess I fulfill a useful need for them. Just my luck.

But lately The Grays have been concerned about me; I can hear it in my mind. I'm not doing well and they know it. I think it has finally, finally dawned on them that I've given up on the hope that I held onto for so long. And they've realized that I am, quite literally, dying of the loneliness and despair. And they've realized that no matter how many nutrients they pump into me or how much they stimulate my muscles, if I will myself to give up, I will die and they can't stop it. And as easily as they discard human life, they don't want me to die. They need me, I'm one of their best apparently and I'm no use to them dead.

But just hours ago, I witnessed just how they plan to solve their problem. And it's broken my heart. And for all that I've wished for in my time here, I never wished for this. Not once. I swear.

I hear the mechanical snicking sound that the door makes just before it opens, when the lock disengages. In fact, during my imprisonment, I've become so inured to the sound that I rarely even bother to turn around any more. It's not as if the little Gray bastards were ever coming to let me go home. Usually when the door opens, it just means I'm being offered food or that my ass will be drug away for more procedures and I have no interest in facilitating either. And I haven't even bothered to rush the door in a very, very long time. I used to and several times, through trickery or happenstance, I got out. But each time I found that there is

nowhere to go, nowhere to hide, no way to escape. I never even made it far enough to reach the other humans that I know are here. And I paid dearly for each of those attempts.

So I remain in the soft shadows of the darkened room, watching the two people on the screen talking, the sound very low. Behind me, the door swooshes open, sounding amazingly like the ones on Star Trek. As it slides open, I hear someone pushed inside, stumble, and then regain balance. The door slams shut immediately and the lock engages again. I hear the sound of soft cursing and then a hand slam against the door in anger. At the sudden, violent noise, I take a deep breath and close my eyes. I know that feeling of frustration all too well.

The room falls quiet, save for the soft breath I can hear. And for a crazy second, I wonder how long I can obscure my presence before I'm noticed. But I know it's not possible and slowly, I turn away from the screen. As I look towards the door and step forward into the light, my heart is aching because I know that in order to keep me alive my partner has been sentenced to share my hell.

But I never wished for this. I swear. Not once.

Sensing now that he's not alone, Mulder turns away slowly from the door and I see his beautiful hazel eyes in person for the first time in almost five years as his gaze meets mine. The deep, bewildered confusion is instant in his expression. His lips part to say something, but then he loses the words when his attention is momentarily drawn up to the screen behind me.

To her--to that thing that took over my life. Over the years, I have grown to both hate her and feel sorry for her. In its own way, it is also a victim--the poor silly thing thinks that she's real, believes that she's human. She thinks those memories are hers.

But they are not; they are mine.

And at this moment, she is telling Skinner her good news. It seems that she's become one of the clones who's been able to successfully breed on its own. The Grays will be pleased. I reach over and shut off the sound and turn my eyes back to my partner.

Mulder moves his gaze from the screen and focuses back on me. His eyes narrow in concentration as he takes in my waist-length hair, my thin face with the dark circles under my eyes, and my pale skin that hasn't seen sunlight in years. His eyes sweep down my body and he now sees the gentle swell of yet

another implanted child growing within. Yet, another clone to be taken from my body during the second trimester and placed in a tank of green goo that will hyper-accelerate its growth. After that, some memories will be implanted and it will be sent back to my world. This is my seventh time since Duane Barry abducted me.

Mulder looks back up at my eyes. And as I stare back at him, because Mulder is the most intuitive person I've ever known, I see the understanding come into his expression as it all clicks into place. He takes in a pained, sharp breath and his hand comes up to cover his mouth as the terrible knowledge settles heavy down upon him.

"Oh my God...Scully--" It's not a question and it's all he can get out before his voice breaks roughly and he slumps back against the door, a mixture of horror and sadness radiating from his eyes as he stares at me.

I nod, confirming his statement and with another glance at the screen behind me, Mulder slides slowly down to the floor as the full weight of realization becomes too heavy to bear. Overwhelmed, he lowers his head in his hands, hiding from the truth he sees, both on the screen and standing before him. An ungodly howl that is remorse, fear, and pain all mixed together emanates from him and it freezes me into place. A few moments later, I hear his anguished voice from behind his hands. "Oh God, I'm so sorry."

For a moment, I'm confused and then I suddenly realize that he's apologizing for not knowing the truth during all those years, for not figuring it out. How like him, I think. I've brought him into this nightmare and yet he's the one taking on the responsibility. But how could you have known, Mulder? No one knows. No one. Jesus, not even the consortium knew how they'd been so thoroughly infiltrated. Only the Grays knew.

Just as they knew that I would never leave Mulder alone to suffer the terrible pain of cold isolation or make him endure in this hell by himself. The Gray bastards have crushed my last act of defiance in the cruelest way possible. I hate them with all my heart for what they have done to me. And to him.

Mulder finally looks back up at me and I see that his eyes are bright with pain, though he does not cry for it still seems too unreal, too stunning. But he will though. And I know he has questions, and I know Mulder; he will ask all of them. He will want his

answers. But for right now he knows, he understands. He believes.

His eyes search my face for a long time and I can't help but wonder what he sees. Although I've only rarely seen glimpses of myself on a shiny surface, I know that I must look very different from the other woman he's spent the last five years with. That other is the one who's gotten to eat real food, enjoy real exercise, use her intellect, read books, see movies, hear music, love him, have his child, and bask in the warm sun. She's the one who has had all the problems and joys of that a human life can offer. A life that I took for granted--even bitched and complained about. A life I would give anything to have back.

But what does Mulder see when he looks at me now? It has been almost five years since he has actually seen the real me. I've been covered up, obliterated.

The screen behind me has gone dark now, leaving only the soft glow of the single overhead light in the cold room. But even so, his gaze never leaves mine. As he looks at me, an expression I can't read crosses his face and he reaches inside the collar of his sweater, to the back of his neck. He is feeling for an implant, I think, and I shake my head gently to reassure him. The clones have the implants, Mulder, not us. There is no need; they already have us completely under control.

But he slowly removes his hand, looking down at his palm a moment before raising his eyes to meet mine again. As he looks at me, I see his gentle compassion in his handsome face, that sure and kind empathy. I've missed that look in his eyes so that it almost hurts to see it now. He then slowly reaches his hand out towards me, offering me something.

Over the last five years all physical contact with the Grays has resulted in either icy cold touch that makes my skin crawl or excruciating pain and I hesitate to come near a human again, afraid of what it will make me feel. Mulder sees my hesitation and nods to me as he waits patiently. He knows that I am not afraid of him, but rather, that I am unsure of my own emotions. He knows that I am holding on to them by a thin frayed thread that is close to breaking.

"This is yours," he says, that low voice that I've listened to for years is soothing and his eyes beckon me to come to him. I take the few steps forward to stand between his large feet where he sits on the floor, and slowly I reach my hand out to him. Our fingers brush together and linger. He's warm, oh God, he's so warm. After feeling only cold for so

long his gentle touch is like a gift. I lift the tiny cross and chain from his palm.

"Do you remember, Scully?" he asks softly.

I stare at the tiny symbol of my once strong faith, at the small promise that there is more to this life than we can comprehend sometimes.

And then I look back at him; at the man who has always known this even without the trappings of an organized faith and I feel myself smile for the first time in five years. I grasp his offering tightly in my fist and, slowly, I find myself sitting down on the floor next to his warm body. As I do so, I breathe deep, taking in his male human scent as I look at over at his familiar face.

"Yes, Mulder, I remember."

The end.

Thanks for taking the time to read my story! This was originally written back in September, 2000 before we found out the answer to the "Did she give him her cross?" question <g>.

I would so love to hear any feedback or comments you might want to send my way at kimerikal@aol.com