You Know Your Mama Was Born To Die
by MyOwnSuperintendent

Summary

After the invasion, a woman and her son try to make their way in Washington, D.C.

Notes

I don’t own The X-Files or anything related to it. Hope you enjoy!

Life is easier if you have a place. You can get by, of course, without one. But it’s better to have that home base to come back to, somewhere you can stash the meager things you have, somewhere you know you can go at night.

In the garage, they are eight. The old man. The two middle-aged brothers. The tall woman. The college-aged couple. The woman with her little boy.

There’s not much there. Three abandoned cars on their level: sedan, van, bright green VW bug. One metal chair with cushioned seats. Everyone has their corner. No one talks to anyone else. At night, they ignore the sounds they hear.

Coughing, coughing, ceaseless coughing.

“What do you think about what that guy said today? Think we ought to try to make it out west?”

“Oh God…please…don’t take…oh God oh God oh God…”

Soft little sighs and gasps.
“Shh, sweetheart, it was just a dream…I’m right here and I’m not going anywhere…I’m right here.”

Some people don’t see the point in a routine. It can’t do much for you anymore. But some people think that it’s better to keep moving—something has to be the new normal.

In the morning, the woman and her little boy walk to the Y. They pass the front desk: no one sits behind it, and the cash register’s drawer hangs open. Downstairs are the swimming pools. The kiddy pool is cloudy; a woman pours detergent in and starts to dip shirts, and there’s a faint smell of lavender mixed with the chlorine. The diving pool is still clear; a man is rinsing a pair of jeans, and he turns to pull a small girl back from the edge. The lane dividers lie beside the lap pool, tangled and broken; it’s full of people now, some wearing underwear or bathing suits or just a t-shirt but most fully undressed as they wash themselves. The woman slips out of her clothes and helps the little boy to do the same; she unwraps a cake of soap from a piece of newsprint and holds his hand as they step into the shallow end. She helps him to wash.

“Hold onto me,” she says. “You should learn to swim, one of these days. I’ll teach you.”

She smiles at him, and he smiles back. “Did your mom teach you to swim?” he asks.

“No,” she says, “my dad. Come on, hang on to the railing for a minute.” She soaps up and rinses in the murky water, and then she helps the boy out of the water and they dress quickly.

In the hallway, there is a long line at the payphone. Someone has rigged it so you don’t need money. “Let’s get in line, okay?” the woman says, and she and the little boy take spots at the end.

People make calls.

“Angela, it’s David again, and I just wanted you to know that I love you, and if somehow you get this…”

“Look, they promised we’d have spots if we could get there, why won’t anyone answer the goddamn phone?”

“Christine?...Oh my God, I can’t believe I got through!...Is it true what they’re saying, that it’s safe in Minnesota?” As the blonde woman talks and talks, some frown or raise their eyebrows, and some just stare.

It’s nearly noon when the woman and the little boy get to the phone. She dials. Five rings and the answering machine. “Hi, Mom, it’s me again. I don’t know if you’re going to get this, or if you’re anywhere near your house, but I just wanted you to know we’re both safe. We’re in the garage near the hospital. And we’re…as okay as we can be. And we love you and we hope you’re safe too. Do you want to say hi to Grandma?” she asks, bending down.

The little boy nods, and she hands him the phone. “Hi, Grandma,” he says, and then he hands the phone back.

“So that’s all,” the woman says. “We’re safe and we hope you are too and that you find us if you can.” She puts the phone back hard. She takes the little boy’s hand, and they walk down the hall.

Some people say this is a sign of the end. That there can’t be any meaning any more. But some people think that faith is all that remains.
The woman and her little boy are walking across the park towards the garage. “Remember when you and Grandma used to meet me here?” she asks. He frowns and shakes his head. “Sure you do,” she says. “After I got off work. Grandma would bring you and we’d play on the swings?”

He frowns again. “Maybe.”

She stoops and hugs him. “Well, someday we’ll do it again.”

They walk towards a bench. Next to the bench, sitting on the meager grass, is a circle—ten people in all. One man is reciting a prayer; some of the others quietly say the words along with him, while some just listen. The woman and the little boy pause on the edge of the circle. When he concludes, the people look up.

“Hello,” the man says.

The woman nods. “Hello.”

“Would the two of you like to join us?” he asks. “We meet here together, just to pray. Just to give each other some hope. It’s nothing too formal. We’d be happy to let you say a prayer too, if you like. Whatever your faith is. Everyone’s welcome.”

The woman looks at the group for a moment and then nods again, and people move aside to make room for her and the little boy. She sits next to a young woman in a hijab, who whispers, “Your son is adorable.”

“Thank you,” she whispers back, smiling, and she puts an arm around the little boy. She sits like that as the members of the group taking turns praying. She doesn’t lead any prayers herself, but she joins in at one point, her voice quiet, her free hand touching a cross around her neck.

“A prayer for those we’ve lost,” one man says, and she bows her head as he begins to chant.

Another man joins in with him, the Hebrew words filling the air in two voices.

Not everyone is going to make it. You can try your hardest, but the fact remains: people are dying every day.

When the woman and the little boy come into the garage that night, the others are clustered around. The two middle-aged brothers are crouching by the old man, one of them feeling for his pulse; the college-aged couple are standing a little way off, darting glances at them. Only the tall woman is not a part of the group, sitting in the corner, staring straight ahead.

“What’s going on?” the woman asks, walking towards them, holding her little boy by the hand.

“He’s dead,” one of the brothers says. “I think.”

“Let me take a look,” she says. “I was a doctor.” The brothers nod and step back a bit, and she moves towards the old man, telling the little boy, “You stay right there, okay?” She crouches down, checks for the pulse. She takes a small flashlight from her pocket and shines it into his eyes. Then she shakes her head. “He’s dead,” she says. “He’s cold.”

The woman from the couple shifts from foot to foot. “He was always coughing,” she says. “He was probably sick, right?”

“Probably,” the woman says. “We should get him out of here. It’s not healthy to have him around.”
She reaches out and closes his eyes.

“We can move him,” one of the brothers says. They all stand looking at the old man for a moment. “Should we check if he has anything, though?”

They go through his pockets and unearth a wallet, used tissues, and a nearly full box of dental floss. The wallet contains three dollars, two credit cards, and his driver’s license. “I’ll take the license,” the woman says, studying the name and the picture. “Just in case.” She tucks it into her own wallet.

“We got this,” one of the brothers says when she attempts to help them pick up the body.

“Just don’t leave him too near…” she says, without finishing the sentence. She sighs as they walk away, then pulls a bottle of hand sanitizer from her bag and squints at the level. Shrugs and uses some.

“What happened?” the little boy asks her as they settle down against the wall, behind the sedan.

“The old man died,” she says.

“What’s going to happen to him?” the little boy asks.

She smooths his hair back from his face. “He just won’t wake up again, sweetie.”

“Why did he die?” the little boy asks.

“He was probably very sick,” she says. “And this wasn’t the healthiest place for him to live.”

They’re both quiet for a few minutes. “We live here,” the little boy says. “Am I going to die?”

“No,” she says, reaching out, pulling him close. “No, of course not. You have me to take care of you.”

“But what if you die?”

“Oh, I’m not going to die either,” she says. She smiles at him. “I have it on the best authority.”

The little boy frowns. “What’s authority?”

“I mean,” she says, “that someone who knows a lot about it told me I wouldn’t.” She smooths his hair again. “Don’t worry, okay? I know this is still…it’s not what we’re used to. But I’ll always take care of you. That won’t ever change.”

The little boy nods. “It’s the two of us,” he says, smiling a little.

She looks at his face for a moment and then nods back. “It’s the two of us,” she says. She holds out her hand and he holds out his, and they shake, slowly, and smile.

Everyone’s seen a lot. You don’t ask other people about it, don’t talk about it. But you know. It’s always there.

Late one night, everyone in the garage is asleep. The woman is tossing and turning, mumbling, and then she sits bolt upright, her eyes coming open with a gasp of “No!” She sits there, one hand pressed to her face, one hand pressed to her chest, her breath coming quickly.
She looks over at the little boy and straightens the coat he’s lying under; he’s asleep. Then she begins to cry, the sound muffled as she presses her face to her bent knees. She cries on and on.

Everything costs more now. Some people say you should save your money. Other people ask what you’d be saving it for. You might as well get some decent food while you can.

The woman and her little boy are standing in line at the restaurant. Counter service, small booths with green padded seats. A list of offerings on the wall. People jostling to read them, counter staff calling out orders. “Can we get milkshakes?” the little boy says.

“Sure,” the woman says. “Sure, we could do that.”

“Cheeseburger and onion rings to go!” one of the women at the counter calls, appearing with a paper bag in her hand.

“That’s me,” says a man, reaching for it. He takes the paper bag. He’s tall, balding, wearing glasses.

The woman looks toward him, then stoops down by the little boy. “Let me fix your shoelace,” she says quietly. She stays stooped down, tying the shoelace slowly, and the man goes out of the restaurant with his lunch. The bell at the door rings, a high, bright sound.

The woman stands up again. “There you go,” she says. “Come on, let’s figure out what we want to eat.” And they turn towards the front again.

Almost everyone agrees: our loved ones are the most important thing we have now. We need to cherish them. If only it were always that easy.

It’s early morning in the garage. The two brothers are sorting through a bag of t-shirts; the young couple are curled together in their corner. The tall woman is sitting against the wall, staring straight ahead. The little boy is kneeling by the woman, who has a coat pulled over her body. “Are we going to go to the Y?” he asks.

“Give me a minute,” she says.

The little boy sits silently. “What are we going to do today, then?” he asks.

“I don’t know,” she says. Her voice is toneless.

“We could walk to a different place,” the little boy says. “Or we could—”

“I said I don’t know!” the woman says. Her voice is loud, echoing in the nearly empty space. *I don’t know I don’t know I don’t know!* “And I asked you to give me a minute, didn’t I? So could you just…could you listen to what I say and give me a minute? Is that so hard?” The little boy bites his lip and nods. No one else looks at them.

The woman sits up, after a few quiet minutes, and puts on her coat. “Yes, we’ll go to the Y,” she says. The little boy nods again and puts on his coat too. They walk out.

They are silent as they go through the streets, walk up the steps of the building, descend into the pool and bathe. But when they are dressed again, she grabs him and hugs him. “I’m sorry I yelled,” she says. “I was very tired this morning. And…and a little sad.” Her voice is very quiet. “But I
shouldn’t have yelled at you, and I’m sorry. Okay?”

“Okay,” the little boy says. His voice is quiet too.

She kisses his forehead. “It’s the two of us?” she says, holding out her hand.

The little boy smiles. “It’s the two of us,” he says, and he holds out his hand, and the two of them shake.

Everyone wants to talk eventually. It gets too wearing, being alone.

An old swing set next to an empty school, two creaky swings. The little boy sits in one, the woman watching him. A little girl sits in the other, a dark-haired woman watching her. The little girl kicks with her feet, swings high, and plummets to the ground. She begins to wail, clutching her knee.

Both women make their way toward her. “Are you all right, sweetheart?” the dark-haired woman asks.

“My knee hurts,” the little girl cries. “It’s bleeding.”

“Would you like me to take a look?” the woman asks. “I was a doctor.”

The dark-haired woman looks at her for a moment, then nods and says, “Thank you.”

She kneels beside the little girl and examines her knee. “It’s just a scrape,” she says. “Not too much blood.” She takes a tissue out of her pocket. “Here, you can press this on it.” The little girl presses the tissue to her knee, sniffling, and after a minute or two she gets up and wanders back to the swing.

The two women watch the children swinging. “Is it just the two of you?” the dark-haired woman asks quietly.

The woman nods. “Yes.”

“It’s just us too,” the dark-haired woman says. “My husband…one morning he was just gone. I tell myself something must have happened to him. But sometimes I think that’s only what I want to think. I mean, I don’t want it, but it’s better than…” She presses one hand in the other. “It’s better than thinking he left us alone in this.”

“We can’t know,” the woman says.


“We weren’t married,” the woman says with a small shrug. “Not that it made a difference. And it didn’t have anything to do with…all this.” She gestures around them with her hand. “It was five years ago, actually. When we were together. We worked together, and the work we did, it was dangerous, and he had to go into hiding.”

“I thought you said you were a doctor,” the dark-haired woman says.

“I didn’t want him to go,” the woman says. “I didn’t want him to, but I told him to. And we promised we’d see each other again, but now…who knows where he is? Who knows if we will?”

She lets out a breath. The dark-haired woman lets out a breath. They watch the children on the
swings.

No one is invincible.

It’s very cold in the garage. The air comes in through the open walls. The woman holds the little boy in her lap, one large coat wrapped around them both. She’s shivering, shivering, shivering.

“Are you all right, sweetheart?” she whispers. “Are you feeling all right?”

“Yes,” the little boy whispers back. “Are you?”

“I’m fine,” she whispers. “I’m fine, sweetheart. We’ll be all right. We’ll be all right.”

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