Summary

*the First 48 Hours

Mulder and Scully survive their first day at home with their new daughter. Written for the 2019 Summer Fanfic Exchange.

Notes

“The long wait is over. Your baby — the little person you’ve been eagerly expecting for 9 months — is finally here. As you hold this tiny, warm, sweet-smelling bundle in your arms for the first time, you’re bound to be flooded by 1,001 emotions, ranging from over-the-moon thrilled to over-the-top nervous.”

--What to Expect the First Year

The prompt was: "Let's hear about how Mulder & Scully are navigating parenthood right after they come back from the hospital with #2. Does Mulder have to rush to the store 10 times to get baby things they didn't realize they needed? Are dishes piling up? Is Scully having breastfeeding struggles? Does she have post-partum depression? Parenthood is often romanticised, especially in fic. Let's hear about M&S's struggles that all new parents deal with."

See the end of the work for more notes

The tropical breeze felt delicious. Mulder leaned back and lazily dipped a hand into the water, letting the oar drift against the side of the boat.
“We’re here,” he announced, privately enjoying the peculiar little flip in his heartbeat he still felt whenever Scully arched her eyebrow at him.

“Where?” she asked.

He gestured expansively to the scenery behind them: the turquoise water lapping languidly at their boat; the azure sky; the shore so far beyond them that it might as well have been in another time zone.

“As far away from the darkness as we can get,” he replied.

She smiled. There was a time, Mulder thought, when the occasion of Scully smiling at him was so rare he would have awarded himself one internal point for coaxing even half a smirk from her. Fifteen years after they had first traded polite smiles in his basement office, it was still hard to believe that she sat in front of him — in a bathing suit, no less — in the closest place either of them had ever been to paradise.

She opened her mouth to say something, but Mulder found he couldn’t hear her over the sound of the water, which suddenly seemed to be thudding rhythmically against the boat.

“What?” he yelled over the sound of the waves, startling himself upright as he felt a flood of warm water against his chest.

“I said, I think she peed on you,” Scully’s weary voice repeated.

Mulder blinked. Scully’s bathing suit was gone. The boat was gone. The tropical backdrop was definitely gone.

The whooshing sound of the waves, however, continued. Mulder blinked again. Scully was sitting on an armchair with what appeared to be two enormous suction cups attached to her breasts, emanating a noise that closely resembled a vacuum cleaner hoovering up lint.

“What are you…?”

“It’s a breast pump, Mulder,” Scully said patiently, apparently not feeling the same sense of alarm Mulder did at seeing her nipples yanked in and out by a mechanical device. “And you may want to…” She gestured toward his chest.

Following her gaze, Mulder found himself momentarily panicked: there was a baby on him. Her head was nestled against his chest; he watched, transfixed, as if in slow motion her mouth opened and then closed again in a huge yawn.

His life suddenly cascaded into place. He wasn’t in a boat on a tropical vacation with his partner. He was in the house they shared, in the very bedroom where Scully had once let him open all the windows and feed her ice cream in bed while they were both naked.

There was a baby on him because she was his daughter. There was a baby on him because he was a father.

Scully seemed to be following his epiphany with some amusement. He massaged the back of his neck with one hand, trying to work out the kinks.

“I must have dozed off. You’re not supposed to let us sleep while I’m holding her,” he grumbled accusingly.
“Mulder, you never left my sight,” Scully said tolerantly, and a memory stirred within him: the last time Scully had said those words to him, she had fallen to the bottom of a deep hole in a damp Florida forest immediately thereafter.

He grimaced.

Gingerly, he shifted himself into an upright position, being exceedingly careful not to jostle the baby. She slept on, unconcerned with what Mulder was beginning to realize was a diaper leakage that had soaked his shirt.

“Ugh,” he said, sniffing the fabric theatrically. “I think this is the same stuff that was in the Erlenmeyer flask.”

He observed Scully’s face hopefully, but her expression didn’t flicker. She was studying the meager amount of liquid filling up in the bottles attached the pump with a vague look of distaste.

“Uh, Scully?” he said tentatively, wincing as he stretched his neck from side to side. “What’s going on here with the…” He gestured to the contraption occupying her attention.

“The breast pump,” she repeated, in the same tone she had always used to debunk his coolest theories.

Mulder looked down at the head of fuzzy reddish hair that occupied his chest.

“I thought she was the breast pump,” he said.

Scully mercifully refrained from rolling her eyes at him, though Mulder could tell she wanted to.

“I’m trying to stimulate my milk production,” she explained. “It’ll help to have a stockpile of milk when I go back to work.”

“Go back to work?” Mulder repeated. He looked down at his daughter again, watching her body rise and fall against his chest. “Scully, she's two days old. Who said anything about going back to work?”

Her eyebrow arched again. “I believe our bank account did,” she said dryly.

“We’ve only been home for 12 hours. I was hoping the three of us would have some time to get acquainted with each other,” Mulder continued. He sniffed his shirt again. “You know, beyond her bodily fluids, with which I’d say I’m already intimately familiar.”

When he looked up, Scully was watching him with an odd expression.

“What?” he said, making a show of checking his shirt. “Did she poop on me too?”

Scully reached over and flipped the switch on the breast pump, turning the machine off, and she sighed.

“Nothing,” she said. “It’s just…” She shakes her head. “Seeing you with her. It’s like...it’s so familiar, Mulder.” She glanced away. “But it was a long time ago.”

“It’s not going to be like before,” he said quietly, trying not to feel the sting of hurt that always accompanied the memories of his first experience with fatherhood; those precious few days of William’s small body tucked against his followed by those long years of longing.

She gave him a small smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes.
“A lot of things aren’t like before,” she said, and Mulder felt a twinge stirring uneasily within him. It was an old game, their decades-long puzzle of decoding each other’s cryptic remarks, and he’d thought they were finally done playing it.

“Hey,” he said gently, stretching out his leg to nudge her with one bare toe. “It’s not going to be like before.”

He recognized the look she gave him in response: gratitude mixed with healthy skepticism.

Their daughter suddenly wailed. Scully startled, then checked her watch.

“She must be hungry. Give her to me,” she commanded in a voice Mulder had heard hundreds of times, although it was usually directed at uncooperative local law enforcement officials or incompetent medical professionals.

Her arms, reaching for the baby, knocked the breast pump to the floor with a clatter, and both of them stared down at the liquid trickling across the floor.

“Damn it,” Scully swore, unhooking her top even as she regarded the spill with dismay. Mulder couldn’t help but feeling somewhat awed as he watched her efficiently free her breast from her nursing bra, position the baby’s head in front of it and guide her nipple into the baby’s mouth, drawing in a sharp breath when their daughter began to suck.

“I guess this would be the wrong time to joke about crying over spilled milk,” Mulder said lightly, regretting the crack immediately when Scully’s eyes unexpectedly filled with tears. He got quickly to his feet, perching next to her on the arm of the chair.

“I don’t know what we were thinking, Mulder,” she said in a near whisper, stroking their daughter’s fuzzy hair. “We’re in our 50s.”

They sat in silence for a moment, looking down at their daughter.

He nudged her shoulder with his own. “We were thinking that we love each other and we deserve to be a family,” he said quietly.

The baby, still sucking eagerly, made a soft noise of appreciation. Mulder decided she agreed.

“How about Lilith?”

There was no answer. Mulder continued idly flipping through the pages of the baby name book charitably mailed to them by Scully’s sister-in-law Tara, who had seemed personally aggrieved that she wasn’t able to order monogrammed baby products for them ahead of time.

“Lillian? Lily.”

Mulder looked over at his still-nameless daughter, asleep again in some sort of portable napping device Scully had advised him was called a “rock ‘n play” — why, Mulder had no idea, since Scully had also advised him that it was not in their best interests to rock the baby to sleep and, in the twelve hours they had been home from the hospital, there had been decidedly little playing.

“What do you think?” he asked her companionably, feeling his voice deepen with warmth. “Lilspeth? Lilybean?”

Her eyelids fluttered, and he felt his face break into a kind of goofy smile, as if by eliciting a
response from her he had unlocked some kind of fatherhood milestone.

“I think she likes Lilspeth,” he said over his shoulder.

Scully was spreading cream cheese with the kind of relentless intensity that only Scully devoted to curating her breakfast garnishes. He watched her for a moment — noting with satisfaction that it was the full-fat kind — and felt compelled to share a fact he’d learned in their New Parents’ Guide to Pregnancy and Labor.

“You know, you can measure dilation to ten centimeters by picturing the diameter of a bagel,” he informed her.

She wrinkled her nose, sighed and set the bagel aside.

“You’re still going to be giving me tips on the best way to breathe through the contractions when she’s in high school, aren’t you,” she said resignedly.

“Probably,” Mulder agreed, then picked up the baby name book again and waggled it temptingly in the air.


Scully frowned at him but said nothing, taking a sip of her coffee.

“We have to pick one eventually,” Mulder said waringly. “This isn’t ‘Bird Box,’ Scully, we can’t call her Girl until the end of the decade.”

She was hiding a smile behind her mug, the one with the ‘I Want to Believe’ motto emblazoned on the chipped ceramic, and Mulder felt that blip in his heartbeat again, the one that said You are one lucky bastard and simultaneously Don’t fuck this up.

“What?” he said when her smile faded. She toyed with the edge of a napkin.

It had only taken Mulder the better part of a decade to learn that when Scully was reluctant to talk about something, his best strategy was to stay quiet and listen. So he pushed the baby book to the side and gave her an encouraging nod.

“She is a miracle,” Scully said finally, looking down into her coffee. “She’s given us something that we thought was impossible. But…” She let out a breath.

“But I can’t help but thinking about the daughter I didn’t get to name,” she continued softly. “And William…” Her voice faltered. “I gave him that name, Mulder, but he didn’t get to keep it.”

Mulder reached across the table to grasp her hands. They felt small and warm from the coffee mug.

“He may not have kept his name, but he kept the love you had for him,” he said firmly. “If there’s nothing else about fatherhood I’m certain of, I’m certain of that.”

She sniffed. “You know, when I was pregnant with him, my mother had a hundred ideas for what his name should be. For a ‘strong, honest name,’ she’d say.” She smiled faintly at the memory, imitating her mother’s voice, and then her eyes met his.

“She had a hundred questions, too,” she continued. “And I never answered any of them.” She was silent for a moment. “I don’t think she ever forgave me for that.”

He gave her hand a squeeze. “She was your mother,” he said.
Her eyes shimmered with unshed tears.

“...You know,” he continued tentatively, “her name could be...”

But Scully was already shaking her head. “There are a dozen names we could give her that would honor people we’ve lost,” she said thickly. “I wouldn’t know where to begin. I want her to have a fresh start.”

She took a deep breath and looked down into her coffee cup.

“I wish she were here,” she whispered. Mulder ran his thumb lightly over her knuckles.

“She is,” he said softly.

At precisely 5:24 p.m., the crying started.

For most of the day, parenting had seemed uneventful — bucolic, even. Mulder had encouraged Scully to take a nap and decided to give his daughter a tour of their house and their land (“If we’re not going to name her, we can at least show her around like a proper guest,” he informed Scully, who merely arched that eyebrow again in return).

The baby seemed unimpressed by the septic system Mulder had installed with his own two hands (“You’ll thank me when it’s time to potty train,” Mulder said gravely) and yawned hugely when Mulder introduced her to the garden Scully had been cultivating (“You scoff now, but Mom will definitely expect you to eat your vegetables once you have teeth,” Mulder advised her).

As he passed through the living room on his way to the front porch (“And this is where your mother slid under the table while she was kicking a — I mean, defending our home against those assassins”), Scully appeared in the doorway, looking curious.

“Mulder, are you on the phone? Who are you talking to?”

Hoisting the baby in the air like Simba in “The Lion King” seemed like an unwise response, so Mulder merely nodded down toward her.

“From birth, talking to your baby teaches her the power of words and begins the process of intimate attachment and building a trusting relationship,” Mulder said, quoting the baby book.

Scully smiled.

“Possibly that’s more effective when she’s awake, though,” she said.

“You forget, I’m used to pontificating before sleeping Scully women,” Mulder retorted. “My voice is extremely soothing.”

Scully checked her watch. “Don’t strain yourself too hard with that pat on the back there,” she said. “Crying time is upon us.”

“Crying time?” Mulder said blankly.

Scully, who was examining herself critically in the hallway mirror, paused and looked back at him.

“Does that baby book of yours have a chapter on newborns and the witching hour?” she said.

“Uh, not unless you swapped the baby book with my copy of ‘The Oxford Illustrated History of
Witchcraft and Magic,’” Mulder said.

Scully resumed smoothing her hair. “Prepare to have your world rocked,” she said grimly.

Mulder wasn’t prepared.

The crying started as a whimper (“I’ll change her diaper,” Mulder said confidently), progressed to a wail (“Maybe she needs to nurse,” Mulder offered hopefully) and rapidly reached full pitch as an all-out scream.

“You knew about this,” Mulder said accusingly in the second hour of screaming as he watched Scully pace calmly around the room with the baby in her arms, shushing and patting. “How did you know about this?”

She gave him a pitying look.

“Newborns cry, Mulder,” she said. “And some newborns cry every day from about 5 o’clock until bedtime.”

“When is bedtime?” Mulder asked, almost afraid to know.

“Bedtime is whenever we can convince her to stop crying and go to sleep,” Scully replied, ceremoniously placing the baby in Mulder’s arms. “Your turn. I’m going to go order takeout.”

“Need me to go pick it up?” Mulder called over the shrieking. He could swear Scully smirked at him in return.

“Nice try,” she said, tossing a takeout menu in his general direction. Mulder jiggled the baby in the crook of his elbow and reached out to snag the menu with his other hand.

“Hey, Scully,” he said, waving the menu at her. “Look at this.”

“Free egg rolls with every order over $10?”

He patted the space next to him on the couch. “C’mere.”

Scully sank down next to him, leaning her head back against the cushion. “Are my ears just ringing or is it quieting down in here,” she murmured as the baby drew in a hiccuping sob. Mulder held the menu in front of her.

“Iris Schezuan Garden,” she read, then gave Mulder a blank look.

“You want to name our daughter after your favorite Chinese restaurant?” she asked.

He grinned and snaked his free arm behind her to grab the baby name book off the end table.

“I want to name our daughter,” he said, flipping through the pages, “after the Greek goddess of the rainbow, whose flower was considered a symbol of power and majesty representing valor, wisdom and faith.”

He looked up from the book. “Valor, wisdom and faith. Think about it, Scully. Isn’t that what got us here?”

Scully may have been wearing rumpled pajamas instead of a bikini and smelling like baby powder instead of sunscreen, but as he held her gaze he felt the same blinding happiness he had felt in his
dream of the tropical rowboat.

“Iris Scully-Mulder,” she said slowly. And she smiled.

End Notes

I may have inadvertently fudged the timeline a bit on the advent of "the witching hour." In my memory, it started immediately, but Google is insistent that it doesn't happen until babies are 2-3 weeks old ;)

I'm kind of an old-school fan and this was my first Revivalfic! Valerie, you are a titan of fanfic and I hope I did your prompt justice!

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