

MILK DUST

A Play

by

Robin Byrd

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by Robin Byrd

PO Box 10503
Burbank, CA 91510
ladybyrd@ladybyrdcreations.com

CHARACTERS

- Papa:** Middle Eastern business owner. Dead.
- Pushna:** Papa's daughter. An 8 month old infant played as a sixteen year old girl. Dead.
- Dartanyan:** Photo journalist covering the war in Middle East. American. Alive.
- Benta:** Pushna's mother. Papa's wife. Dead.

SETTING

A war torn city in the middle east.

TIME

2009.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Pushna can be played by a young woman; throughout the play she is a girl of sixteen years of age – the age of becoming. The entire time her father sees her as she is to him, an eight month old infant who he is holding in his arms. He should be talking to the infant (which can be depicted by a life-like doll). Benta's spirit has attached to Dartanyan and though he seems to respond to her, he cannot hear her as much as he can feel her.

(At rise, a man in a middle-eastern hat holds his infant daughter in his arms. He is standing near some very large stones that appear to be part of an entrance gate. The light is dim as the scene should appear other worldly.)

PAPA

The bombs came in the night. We prayed for daylight but found the flashes of light from the bombs as they hit the earth to be sufficient. There was nothing to grab other than breath as we headed out into the crackling night to find shelter elsewhere. Pushna was only eight months old; her mother lay unmoving in the doorway. Scraps of debris hit her before she could retrieve Pushna from her crib. I grab her -- my Pushna -- and step out into the harrowing sounds and smell, the dust from the bombs is white and thick and wet. We must enter the fog of dust descending and ascending this place that was our city. Pushna does not cry. The white dust makes her choke but she does not cry. I am almost to the city gates when the last bomb hits throwing me and Pushna into the wall. Still Pushna does not make a sound. I tell her, "Pushna, we are almost there -- almost safe. Look the sun, it rises."

(PAPA sits. Black out. Dim light on a woman, BENTA, and a man, DARTANYAN walking through the destroyed city toward the gate; the man does not know BENTA is with him. BENTA is a ghost. LIGHT: light slowly rises and hits PAPA and PUSHNA. PUSHNA at sixteen sits beside PAPA who holds the infant PUSHNA on the steps; the infant is portrayed by a doll. BENTA gasps at the scene as DARTANYAN reaches for his camera. He snaps a picture.)

DARTANYAN

Wonder if they know what hit 'em?

PUSHNA

Papa, who is the man?

PAPA

He is of no importance. Spit. We are almost there.

(PAPA gets up with PUSHNA still in his arms. He travels toward the gate but finds himself walking backward.)

BENTA

Do you feel that?

DARTANYAN

(feeling something)

What?

BENTA

That strange pull. It's like wind but there is none. I pray they did not suffer.

DARTANYAN

Okay. Is someone here? I'm just taking a few pictures.

BENTA

No one minds. How else will the world know what happened here today.

(DARTANYAN flips through his pictures in his digital camera. BENTA leans over his shoulder. He stops at the picture of PAPA and PUSHNA. The picture appears on stage, large enough for the audience to see.)

BENTA (Cont.)

The composition is great. Brilliant, how the hidden face of the father makes you take in the child's face. The milky substance which we know not to be milk...but what is it? Why is it here, in this place? It says, "What happened here? Who killed this family?" I want to know. Such a life full of things to come yet she lay there...dead... as if there never was any possibility of a future for her. Where is her mother? Why only the father?

DARTANYAN

(examining the photograph)

I guess you do look like a girl. Still nursing?

(listening)

Right, I really do not expect an answer.

BENTA

There are no words for her yet. Ma Ma. Papa. Haleeb.

(The word “Haleeb” echoes through the city. BENTA tries to catch it. DARTANYAN licks his finger and lifts it to find the direction of the wind. There is none.)

DARTANYAN

(calling out)

Jason. Jason! We’re supposed to stick together. No going into buildings alone. No making ghostly sounds. Hello!

PAPA

If I had not seen it...I would think I just heard your mother speaking.

PUSHNA

I know Papa. I hear it too. Look at me, I’m dancing.

(PUSHNA dances. PAPA stands watching. He kisses the face of his infant daughter.)

PUSHNA (Cont.)

I like your kisses papa almost as much as Ma Ma’s. Where is Ma Ma? I’m thirsty Papa.

(PUSHNA spits and brushes past BENTA who stops to rub her own breasts; they are full of milk; they ache. She puts her arm around DARTANYAN’S shoulder.)

BENTA

Yes, still nursing you can tell by her lips.

DARTANYAN traces PUSHNA’S lips on the photograph with his finger. Dust flies up from where PUSHNA is dancing; he’s coughing and covering his eyes. Wiping his camera lens, he takes a picture of PUSHNA dancing. Examines it; takes another shot. The more he shoots, the more PUSHNA

dances, the more she dances, the more the dust. He puts the pictures up one by one. Each a picture of a swirl of dust that looks like a dancer is in the midst of it.

DARTANYAN

Those would have been beautiful lips on you at sixteen. Your father would have his hands full turning away the boys.

PUSHNA

Papa, papa, the dust is in my throat. It thickens and I cannot breathe. Where is Ma Ma? I need to see her eyes. I can no longer smell her, Papa. Where is my mother? Do you hear the sounds? Do you hear the crashing steel hitting the stone? It drowns out the screams. Papa. Where is our house? I have longed to walk upon the stones with Ma Ma. Papa, when we get to the gate will Ma Ma be there...standing? Will she be there, Papa? I want Ma Ma. I want Ma Ma; the milk will clear my throat.

PAPA

She was in the doorway, Pushna. The bombs have killed her. Spit.

PUSHNA

(spitting)

No, Papa that cannot be true. She would never leave me.

PAPA

It was not her doing, the milk dust took her. Come, Pushna, we must reach the city gate.

(DARTANYAN snaps another picture, this time of PAPA.)

PAPA (Cont.)

Aaaah. Stop it!

(PAPA throws rocks and pieces of stone at DARTANYAN. DARTANYAN snaps again. More rocks and stones fall.)

PAPA (Cont.)

Stop! Do you not see the destruction? We must get out of the city!

(PAPA rushes DARTANYAN, knocks him over.)

PAPA (Cont.)

Come Pushna. We must leave. Close your eyes. Don't look into the dust.

(PUSHNA weeps. PAPA wrestles with DARTANYAN in a one-sided slippery encounter with DARTANYAN continually slipping out of his hands.)

PUSHNA

I cannot see Papa. I cannot see Ma Ma with my eyes closed. Stop, Papa. We must go back to get her.

DARTANYAN

What the hell? Dude, if you don't want me taking your picture just say so!

(PAPA looks at DARTANYAN and extends his hand. DARTANYAN does not take it because he cannot see PAPA. PAPA consoles PUSHNA instead.)

PAPA

We will see Ma Ma again. She will be smiling and her arms will be open for you and for me as well. And there shall be milk...milk that fills the oceans and we shall drink our fill.

PUSHNA

Oh, Papa. You do not drink Ma Ma's milk. It is only for me.

PAPA

Ah, but I am the husband.

PUSHNA

What does that mean Papa?

PAPA

It means what I say, I am the husband. I will have milk. You shall learn such things...when you are older.

PUSHNA

No. I will only dance. You shall come to see me dance -- you and Ma Ma. I...can we look between the posts? Maybe she is there now.

PAPA

We must leave this city.

PUSHNA

But I am very tired and the milk dust is leaving; and the sounds have gone already. Please Papa can we look just once?

(BENTA walks toward picture of PAPA and PUSHNA.)

BENTA

He looks familiar.

(BENTA blows on the picture of the man.
PAPA rubs his face where BENTA blows.)

PAPA

Benta.

(kisses PUSHNA)

I'm the husband; I will have milk.

(BENTA'S breasts have leaked all over her blouse. DARTANYAN is testing the wind again.)

BENTA

A baby crying causes milk to flow. It should not flow at the urging of the wind.

(PAPA looks toward the house for BENTA.)

PAPA

My sparrow, where have you gone to?

BENTA

We should check the houses, maybe someone is still alive. You could take a picture of the rescue...

DARTANYAN

Smells like milk.

(lifts his finger to test the wind, his eyes follow. He puts on his telephoto lens and moves toward the house, shoots the body lying in the doorway.)

I guess I should get a closer look.

(BENTA follows his lens. She gasps. Rocks fall violently. The wind blows. PAPA is stoning DARTANYAN; DARTANYAN dodges the falling debris.)

DARTANYAN (Cont.)

Purgatory.

(A stone near the gate shifts.)

BENTA

What? No. It's... look he looks like he's moving.

DARTANYAN

He's dead. The baby's dead. The dead don't move.

(PAPA throws stones at DARTANYAN. The stones at the gate shift again. PUSHNA spots her mother, BENTA.)

PUSHNA

Papa, there she is! Ma Ma! Ma Ma! We couldn't find you.

(BENTA recognizes her family.)

BENTA

There is my little Pushna. Where did you go? I was waiting in the doorway for you and Papa. Waiting so long but not so long.

(PAPA looks around at the city then up into the sky. He sees DARTANYAN nursing his wounds then he sees BENTA for the first

time. He puts his hand on BENTA'S shoulder.)

PAPA

Hello, my sparrow. We – I thought we could get out of the city.

(For a moment, BENTA appears to pull away then she recognizes PAPA.)

BENTA

I know. You tried very hard.

PUSHNA

Ma Ma, I am dancing. See?

(PUSHNA swirls and dust follows. DARTANYAN covers his eyes and snaps. Rock and stones fall.)

PAPA

Aaaah. Why does he do it?

(PAPA throws rocks at DARTANYAN, stoning him in the middle of the rubble. DARTANYAN falls; he is overwhelmed by the rocks. A rock falls very near DARTANYAN'S head. PAPA picks it up as if to bash in DARTANYAN'S skull.)

BENTA

He must. He tells our story with his pictures. Don't be angry. How will they know otherwise?

(PAPA hands PUSHNA to BENTA; she feeds her. PUSHNA stops dancing; she mimes drinking from a waterfall as BENTA nurses the infant.)

PUSHNA

I am so thirsty, Ma Ma. Um, more, yes, more.

BENTA

You are drinking too fast,
Pushna. Slow down so you
do not choke.

(PUSHNA chokes. BENTA pats her back.
PUSHNA burps loudly. BENTA and PAPA
laugh and kiss the infant.)

BENTA (Cont.)

See, you must drink slowly. I am here now.

PUSHNA

Ma Ma. Papa, he says he will have my milk, too. I don't want to share with Papa.

BENTA

(laughing)

Papa! You should not speak of such things to the baby.

(BENTA helps DARTANYAN crawl out
from beneath the pile of rock and stone.
DARTANYAN crawls out from beneath the
stones; he starts to stack the stones and rocks
as a monument, right where PUSHNA is
trying to dance. She stops.)

PUSHNA

Ma Ma, what is the man doing? Is he dead, MaMa? Dead like us?

BENTA

No, little one, he is alive. He marks this place, the place where you danced. It is a
monument to this city.

(PAPA rolls stones toward DARTANYAN.
DARTANYAN uses them in the monument.
He snaps a picture of the monument.)

DARTANYAN

I take it that it's okay now? I want to show these pictures. Is it okay?

(PAPA rolls one last stone, a large one to DARTANYAN who places it on the very top. DARTANYAN is very aware of the presence of PAPA, PUSHNA, and now BENTA.)

PAPA

Please. Tell them what happened here. If nothing more, tell them about Pushna. She was to be a dancer. She loved the taste of milk.

(PUSHNA begins to dance around the monument. Dust rises and falls as she twirls. DARTANYAN grabs his camera. He snaps. He checks his footage.)

DARTANYAN

(to PUSHNA)

I see you.

(DARTANYAN snaps his last picture of the monument as PUSHNA continues to dance. The picture shows up on the screen. Lights begin to dim; PUSHNA dances...till...)

(BLACK OUT)

(THE END)