

PLUMBARIUS EX MACHINA

By Jeff Dunne

© 2021 by Jeffrey A. Dunne
jeff@bearcreations.org

CHARACTERS

EMILY

A bubbly young woman who has perhaps had a little too much Red Bull

SARAH

A more practically-minded woman, but with a big shock on the horizon

SETTING

An innocent-seeming park (where this play happens to be performed).

SCENE

(EMILY is sitting on the ground in the center of a circular region of stone/concrete. On the ground in front of her is a game controller; her fingers are resting ever so lightly on its edges..)

EMILY

Oh, spirits from the Beyond...

(SARAH sees EMILY and approaches.)

SARAH

Emily. There you ar—

EMILY

Shhh shhh shhh!

(SARAH watches for a few moments as EMILY continues.)

Spirits from the Beyond, send me your answer!

SARAH

What in the world are you d—

EMILY

Shhhhhh!

SARAH

That's my PS4 controller.

EMILY

I know. Shhh.

SARAH

Not shhh. What are you doing with it?

EMILY

I'm communicating... with the spirits from the Beyond.

SARAH

Uh huh.

EMILY

I'm telling you, they're here.

SARAH

You just said they're beyond.

EMILY

No, they're from the Beyond, but they're here at the moment, and I can hear them.

SARAH

I don't suppose they're telling you to give me back my game controller?

EMILY

Be serious. They don't speak in words. They communicate through sounds.

SARAH

Uh huh. What kind of sounds?

EMILY

It depends. Sometimes it's like a shuffling of feet. Or a rustling of clothing. Occasionally it sounds like someone unwrapping a piece of candy or something. You seriously never hear anything like that around here?

SARAH

No.

EMILY

And sometimes... just sometimes... I think I can hear them laughing.

SARAH

Laughing.

EMILY

Right. Laughing.

SARAH

Like... ha ha laughing?

EMILY

It depends on what I'm doing. For example, if I do something strange and unexpected, it'll be kind of subdued and awkward. Here. Like this.

(EMILY suddenly moves towards some of the audience and makes strange faces at them, but not making eye contact because she can't see them.)

Right? Did you hear that?

SARAH

No.

EMILY

Really?? Well, sometimes if I say something really funny, then they laugh louder.

SARAH

Are you seriously suggesting there are spirits around us and that they're... laughing at you?

EMILY

Well, it sounds crazy when you say it like that.

SARAH

Maybe because it is crazy.

EMILY

You really can't sense them? It feels like they're all around us.

(EMILY points around at the audience.)

How can you not feel that?

SARAH

Probably because I'm not hyped up on four cans of Red Bull. Can I have my controller back now?

EMILY

No! No no no. I need it. To talk to the spirits.

SARAH

You think you're surrounded by a bunch of lost souls trapped in my PS4?

EMILY

Maybe....

SARAH

Emily...

EMILY

Sarah, I know sometimes I get some weird ideas, but trust me on this. I'm telling the truth. And I have proof.

SARAH

Oh, this should be good.

EMILY

Two days ago I got to talking with this wrinkly old guy while I was waiting for the 505.

SARAH

Ohhhh no.

EMILY

Oh yes. And he was very familiar with the ways and means and ways of connecting with... the Beyond. So I told him about how sometimes I hear voices here in Memory Park, and he suggested I try a special technique for communicating with them.

SARAH

Using a game controller?

EMILY

Right. Technically, he called it a Luigi Board, but you know how really old people sometimes struggle with technology lingo.

SARAH

A Luigi Board?

EMILY

You seriously can't hear that laughing? Anyway, he gave me some basic instructions, so I thought I'd give it a try.

SARAH

A Luigi Board.

EMILY

Stay with me here. I did some research, and it actually turns out that a surprising number of disembodied spirits used to be tiny Italian plumbers.

SARAH

Em...

EMILY

I also learned that this actually works better with two people, so it's kind of a nice coincidence that you stopped by bec— Oh! Oh oh! Not coincidence!! That's what the old guy meant!

SARAH

The wrinkly one.

EMILY

Yes! Yes! He said that there's no such thing as serenity, and that everything happens for a reason.

SARAH

Serenity?

EMILY

Uh huh.

SARAH

Do you mean 'serendipity'?

EMILY

He's not a fairy godmother, Sarah.

SARAH

It's—

EMILY

Anyway, I don't think it's just random chance that you came by.

SARAH

No, it's not. I'm here because you took my damn game controller and—

EMILY

You were summoned to help me communicate with the lost souls who come here to remember. That's why it's called Memory Park.

SARAH

Actually, no. It's called that because it's named after some other Memory Park.

EMILY

No, it's not.

SARAH

In Idaho.

EMILY

And we both know that's not a real place.

SARAH

Can I have my controller back?

EMILY

No! Yes, but not yet. Just help me with this.

SARAH

And then can I have my control—

EMILY

Yes, fine. Just... Here. Sit. Across from me.

(They sit, and put the controller between them.)

You have to cross your legs.

SARAH

This is insan—

EMILY

You have to cross them. It makes the energy flow better.

SARAH

I can't believe I'm doing this.

EMILY

Okay, now rest your fingers on the controller lightly. Like this. Good.

(EMILY closes her eyes and starts rocking a little.)

Oh, mystical Luigi! We call upon your... uh, your...

SARAH

You've never played any Mario Brothers games, have you?

EMILY

I... no.

SARAH

So you really have no idea who Luigi is, do you?

EMILY

I... no.

SARAH

Unbelievable.

EMILY

I know he has a cart or something.

SARAH

Oh my god. How are you still alive? Have you ever even heard of Donkey Kong?

EMILY

Yeah...

(SARAH gives her a doubting look.)

No.

SARAH

Alright. I can't believe I'm doing this, but I'm going to help you. And in return, you're buying me dinner.

EMILY

Deal!

(They settle in, hands on the controller, and almost begin.)

Wait.

SARAH

What?

EMILY

You have to close your eyes.

SARAH

I'm not closing my eyes. We're in the middle of—

EMILY

You have to! Or it won't work!

SARAH

I swear, Emily... Two dinners.

EMILY

Deal.

SARAH

And you have to help me haul Katie's crap downtown next weekend.

EMILY

But I've got... Fine.

SARAH

Fine.

(They close their eyes and begin.)

Oh, tall and wiry Luigi, may your mustache ever curl upwards... The moron known as Emily—

EMILY

Hey!

SARAH

—needs your assistance! We humbly ask that you stop biting your nails long enough to help this overly-caffeinated woman realize that there aren't any spirits in Ventnor Memory Park—

EMILY

Hey!

SARAH

—and that the sounds she is hearing are nothing more than her jittery nerves, likened unto yours, as they—

EMILY

I'll take it from here, thank you. Mighty Luigi!

SARAH

He's not particularly mighty...

EMILY

We ask that you lend us a moment of your time...

SARAH

Between jumping over turtles...

EMILY

From the loneliness of the Great Beyond...

SARAH

Where you're probably getting it on with Princess Daisy as we speak...

EMILY

In order to... Who's Princess Daisy?

SARAH

Just keep going.

EMILY

Whatever. In order to help us communicate with the spirits gathered around us!

(They sit still for several long moments. Then...)

Are you hearing anything?

SARAH

No.

EMILY

Nothing?

SARAH

No. Because there are no spirits here.

EMILY

But I'm sure I heard...

SARAH

Can we open our eyes now?

EMILY

(Heaving a deep sigh.)

Yeah. Alright.

(They both open their eyes. EMILY stands up, and offers the controller to SARAH, who has remained seated in a state of shock, as she suddenly can see all the people in the audience. EMILY is too distracted to see that.)

Here.

(EMILY lightly drops the controller into SARAH's hand.)

Though I swear I really heard something.

(EMILY wanders off as SARAH stands. SARAH, still speechless at seeing all the people around her, stands and wanders to a few people, waving her hands towards them and reacting in utter shock if/when they respond. After a few moments of this...)

SARAH

Emily?! Emily!

EMILY

Forget it. You were right. There's no spir—

SARAH

Emily!!

EMILY

I'll see you back at the apartment, I guess.

(Sarah runs after her, calling...)

Emily!!

SARAH

(Lights out.)