

Like Demons

A play by Maggie Lou Rader

“I am naturally fond of adventure, a little ambitious, and a good deal romantic - but patriotism was the true secret of my success.”

— Emma Edmonds (Private Franklin Thompson)

SCENE I

Lights up on barren earth. A woman stands, stuck. The year is 1861. Maybe we hear a bit of "Bonnie George Campbell" underscoring our opening moments.

EMMA:

I live here. Always have. It's my home. No going back; there's no before. Just endless loops of here. No forward either. Just stuck here on this patch of broken, barren earth. I live here. I always have. On this land smelling of swine. And anger. Always anger. And still, somehow, hope. There is hope. Crisp. Light and swift, dancing above the earth and the stink and slop. Sometimes, I can find it, reach it... and when those moments come, God hope smells sweet.

MOM

Emmie?

EMMA:

Not now though.

MOM

EMMIE!?

EMMA:

Right now I smell fear-

MOM

Emma, stop 'yer wandering off!

EMMA:

Sadness and suffocation-

MOM:

Get your ass back here right now!

EMMA:

Stagnant; sharp.

MOM:

I SAID NOW!

EMMA:

I'm here Mama!

MOM:

Emmie, don't you show that temper to me girl. Jesus, if I told you once I've told 'ya a hundred times, you gotta come when I call 'ya.

EMMA:

You call a lot.

MOM:

Got a lot to tell 'ya. Jesus, still got a lot to tell 'ya. But looks like I'm not gonna git to.

(MOM takes out a roll of money)

EMMA:

Where did that come from?

MOM:

It don't matter where it come from girl. Just take it and go.

EMMA:

Where am I going?

MOM:

It don't matter, just git. He's coming for ya.

EMMA:

Mama, slow down, who's coming?

MOM:

Who do ya think? Carver. Yer daddy and him just done the deal in town. He's on his way here now.

EMMA:

Is Daddy crazy?!

MOM:

Not crazy. Just mean and drunk.

EMMA:

I am not marrying John Carver, Mama. He's older than Daddy.

MOM:

I know honey, but-

EMMA:

He smells like death!

MOM:

That's not-

EMMA:

I'm not a hog; Daddy can't *sell* me!

MOM:

He can and he done did girl. And getting angry at me ain't gonna help ya. Look, that man's got money. And I don't know if you've noticed but we ain't got penny one.

EMMA:

That's quite a few pennies you're holding right now Mama.

MOM:

But they the last ones we got. So take 'em and go. Ain't much time girl.

EMMA:

But Mama, I can't go. What about the farm? You can't turn that ground by yourself. And what about James? I can't just leave without telling him where I'm going.

MOM:

You can, and James is gonna be just fine without you. I swear to Heaven I never did understand the closeness ya got anyway. It ain't proper.

EMMA:

Mama! There ain't nothing improper about it. He's-

MOM:

I'm just saying-

EMMA:

He's my oldest friend and the only one who-

MOM:

There ain't time Emmie!

EMMA:

You never did understand why-

MOM:

EMMIE!

You gotta go now. I'll tell James... I'll tell him you got a job in the city. *(beat)* I'll tell him..
You're ok. *(beat)* Maybe I'm not such a bad mama after all.

(MAMA hands EMMA the money)

EMMA:

Maybe you're not such a bad mama after all.

MOM:

I didn't see 'ya. And I sure didn't see 'ya take my kitchen money. And I especially didn't see 'ya heading east. Stay safe Emmie.

EMMA:

You too Mama.

MOM:

And Emmie, could I not see you write me a letter every once in a while; letting me know you're alright.

EMMA:

Yes, Mama.

MOM:

Emmie, 'ya do know I love 'ya; don't you?

EMMA:

I know, Mama.

(MAMA leaves)

EMMA:

All this time trying to go forward. Turns out I just needed to go east.

(EMMA follows the smell of hope and it leads her to civilization)

Dear Mama, the smell of hope gets stronger with every step I take. I follow it, track it. Let it lead. I trust it, wandering with blind hope it won't lead me astray.

(Throughout the EMMA's next words, we find her winding through trees, lights getting brighter and she finds a bigger world. EMMA's narration is never heard by the world around her, and everyone else moves on with their lives, carrying babies, drinking with friends, cleaning pistols. The world is itching. War is coming.)

The lights get brighter. The smell gets sweeter, stronger with every wind and turn. People fill the world, every nook and cranny, women in strange clothes, colors as bright as the rainbow.

PEDDLER:

READ ALL ABOUT IT! ALL EYES ON WASHINGTON!

EMMA:

I'm on a train. The world moves fast within the cars and even faster outside them. People dart in all directions, trying to catch something ahead, just out of reach. Something wonderful, worth the chase.

WOMAN:

(Chasing an imaginary child) Come back here young lady!

EMMA:

Hope is taking form. It looks like mothers, children, wide streets, lines of trees, leaves, iron fences. It sounds like laughter and a train picking up steam. It smells like freshly made bread and a strong cup of coffee. It fills my senses wholly and completely, like a wave. Bringing me here, where the smell is the sweetest. Hope lives in Baltimore.

The hustle and bustle of the city keep EMMA swirling. Her world spinning.

PEDDLER:

READ ABOUT IT HERE FIRST! LINCOLN INAUGURATED AS TENSIONS RISE! ALL EYES TURN TO VIRGINIA!

EMMA:

Please tell James I'm getting by. I'm alright. I hope he is too.

SCENE 2

MRS. HAWKINS:

Thank you for coming Mrs.-

EMMA:

Miss

MRS. HAWKINS:

Of course. Edmondson.

EMMA:

Edmonds.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Of course. Thank you for coming in but we don't currently have any openings.

EMMA:

The sign in your window says you're hiring.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Yes, that's for a salesman position.

EMMA:

Then I'm here to apply for the salesman position.

MRS. HAWKINS:

The salesman position?

EMMA:

That's what I said, the salesman position.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Well, I apologize Mrs.-

EMMA:

It's miss.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Sure. Miss Edmondson-

EMMA:

Edmonds. Miss Emma Edmonds-

MRS. HAWKINS:

Sure. Mr. Hawkins is looking to go in a different direction for the sales *man* job.

EMMA:

But the sign didn't-

MRS. HAWKINS:

Also, anyone applying for the salesman job must be fully literate-

EMMA:

Of course, but-

MRS. HAWKINS:

Able to read-

EMMA:

Yes and-

MRS. HAWKINS:

AND write.

EMMA:

I know what literate means.

MRS. HAWKINS:

So I'm sure that's-

EMMA:

I can read.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Oh.

EMMA:

And write.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Oh! Ha! Well that's neat.

EMMA:

We agree on something. Literacy *is* neat.

MRS. HAWKINS:

But Mr. Hawkins is still looking for-

EMMA:

For what?

MRS. HAWKINS:

Well a man. Mr. Hawkins only hires men as salesmen.

EMMA:

Pardon me Miss...

MRS. HAWKINS:

Mrs.

EMMA:

Of course. Mrs.?

MRS. HAWKINS:

Hawkins.

EMMA:

Somehow not surprising. Mrs. Hawkins, I appreciate your concern and I understand this may be a bit... unorthodox-

MRS. HAWKINS:

Oh! What a big word!

EMMA:

Yes, it means unconventional.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Ha! You're so... *(so proud she found the right word for her new friend)* neat.

EMMA:

Yes, all things considered, I'd like to apply for the salesman position.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Yes, well, in spite of being so incredibly-

EMMA:

Neat?

MRS. HAWKINS:

Exactly! My job is to honor Mr. Hawkins wishes, so unfortunately, I don't think-

EMMA:

I understand, Mrs. Hawkins. Truly. Thank you for your time.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Of course. You are something.

EMMA:

Thank you for your time and I hope, for your sake, Mrs. Hawkins, that Mr. Hawkins never realizes how unqualified you are, according to his own standards.

(the offices rolls away and we find EMMA on the street)

PEDDLER:

SHOTS FIRED ON FORT SUMTER! WAR HAS BEGUN!

(People run to grab papers, shoving EMMA out of the way, reading and celebrating during next narration. Mob leaves papers, and a hat)