

"ROOTS"

Screenplay by

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INT. HOUSE - MORNING

JUNIPER WOODROW, a young woman (25), rushes around her bedroom. Clothes are scattered across her bed, two suitcases lay open in the middle. Her phone buzzes, and she groans in frustration, answering it.

JUNIPER

Hello?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (V.O)

Hello, this is Juniper, right?

JUNIPER

Yes, this is she.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (V.O)

Good! Hello Miss Woodrow, this is Mitchell Gale, we talked a few weeks ago about the arrangements for your mother's funeral! How are you holding up? I know this was very sudden..

JUNIPER

Oh, uh.. I'm fine. Really, I didn't even know her that well. Not to be rude, but is there a reason for your call?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (V.O)

Oh, sorry! Yes, I was just calling to ask when you plan to come down here?

JUNIPER

I'm actually packing right now, I plan on leaving today. I should be there by..

(checks the time)

4 o'clock. Give or take an hour.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (V.O)

Wonderful! I'm currently out of town,
but my daughter will stop by sometime
around 5 or 6, does that work for you?

JUNIPER

Sounds great. Thank you.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (V.O)

Thank you! And Juniper?

(he sighs)

If you need any kind of support,
everyone in town is here for you.

JUNIPER

..Thanks. Bye.

She hangs up, visibly disgruntled. She tosses her phone onto the bed, and slides down onto the floor, head in her hands, knees to her chest.

JUNIPER

Jesus christ.. Just how fragile do they
think I am?

She looks over at her nightstand. A picture of her and her father is framed on it, next to her lamp, and a book titled "A Writer's Guide To Being A Writer". She lays her head on her knees, hugging them close to her chest. She sits there for a few minutes, then takes a deep breath, runs her hands through her hair and sighs, then stands up.

JUNIPER

Alright, let's get this over with.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON/EVENING

A car drives down a heavily wooded two-lane road. The forest is thick on both sides, and the road is empty. The sun is setting, but it's still bright outside.

Inside the car, Juniper grips the steering wheel, unsettled.

JUNIPER

Why are these roads always so damn
creepy?

She turns on the radio, and static blares through the speakers. Juniper screams, quickly turning the radio down. She curses under her breath, and changes the station until the static stops, and a talk show starts playing.

TALK SHOW HOST 1

..storming the last few days, which was already bad enough. But to make things worse, this big tree outside my parents' house, one that's been there for almost 35 years, fell down!

TALK SHOW HOST 2

What? That's crazy! Was it already falling down, dying or something?

TALK SHOW HOST 1

No! That's just it, the thing was as healthy as could be! My dad planted it himself, loved it like a son! Apparently, the constant rain did something to the soil, and the wind just overturned it! 35 years of growth, the strongest tree I'd ever seen, overturned by some rain and a bit of wind. Crazy, right?

Juniper turns onto a road leading into a neighborhood, then into a driveway. She shuts off the car, and stares at the house in front of her. The windows are covered by old, yellowed newspapers. The lawn is overgrown, and the walkway is overrun with weeds. There's a "NO TRESPASSING" sign on the porch, and multiple cameras.

Juniper unbuckles her seatbelt, and reaches for the door. ASPEN slams his hands on the window. Juniper screams, throwing the door open. Aspen falls onto the ground, laughing hysterically.

EXT. HOUSE - EVENING

ASPEN

Oh my god!! You should've seen your face!

JUNIPER

ASPEN! You asshole!!

Juniper gets out of the car, glaring at Aspen. He stands up, still laughing, and wipes a tear from his eye. He leans against the hood of the car with one arm, looking Juniper up and down.

ASPEN

Wow, Jupiter. You've gotten big.

JUNIPER

Is that supposed to be a compliment?

ASPEN

No, I'm saying you're fat. OBVIOUSLY.

JUNIPER

Fuck off!! What are you even doing here?

ASPEN

Oh, uh.. (he straightens up awkwardly) well, you came back to town. I wanted to be the first person you saw.

JUNIPER

(disgusted) ew. That's.. That's ew. Never do that again.

ASPEN

What the hell?! I'm tryna be nice and sentimental and stuff, and your first response is "ew"?!

Juniper laughs and shuts the car door. She walks around to the trunk, using the keys to open it. Aspen follows.

ASPEN

So... how are you.. Holding up?

Juniper pauses, staring at her suitcases. She's frustrated. She pulls her suitcase out roughly, and slams it on the ground. She grabs a computer bag and slings it over her shoulder just as roughly while she talks.

JUNIPER

I'm fine. I've been fine. I keep telling everyone, "I'm fine!" but people seem to think I'm just "being

strong" or whatever. It's getting really annoying. Don't be like them. Just be like you.

ASPEN

Jeez, fine, I won't ask.

He grabs the suitcase and Juniper pulls out her second one. They walk up to the front door, Juniper sets down her suitcase to grab the key. She pulls one out of her pocket- old, worn-down, with a strawberry keychain attached. She unlocks the door and opens it.

INT. LIVING ROOM/FOYER - EVENING

Juniper steps inside the house. It's dark, barely any light coming in through the newspapers pasted to the windows. Juniper flips on the lights, the room lights up. There are boxes all over the place, trash piled in random places, papers scattered across every table.

Juniper stands still, shocked. She wasn't expecting the house to look like this. Aspen looks over her shoulder, making a noise somewhere between disgust and shock when he sees the state of the home.

ASPEN

Ugh.. that's bad. Like, really bad.

JUNIPER

Thanks, I hadn't noticed.

ASPEN

What? I'm just saying!

JUNIPER

Just shut up and get inside.

They move further inside.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Juniper and Aspen stand beside the couch. Juniper sets her suitcase down and sits on top of it, setting her computer bag down on the couch. Aspen sets the other suitcase down behind the couch.

JUNIPER

Wanna help me go through these boxes?

ASPEN

Oh most definitely, I love spending my free time going through ratty old boxes filled with roaches and rats.

JUNIPER

They're not THAT bad. Come on, please? I really don't wanna deal with this alone.

She looks at him pleadingly. He groans, rubbing his face and looking at a nearby box.

ASPEN

Fine. But you owe me!

JUNIPER

Yeah, yeah, come on, get to digging. We've gotta figure out what boxes actually have important stuff, and what can be thrown out.

They start digging through the boxes. Aspen pulls a small toy doll out of the bottom of a box and waves it at Juniper. The doll is falling apart, one eye is stuck shut, and it's missing half of its hair. It's covered in dirt, scribbles, and some mystery stain on its dress.

Juniper rolls her eyes and continues looking through her box. She notices a bunch of pictures at the top, ones taken from her childhood. She pulls them out, smiling.

JUNIPER

Oh my god, look at these! (she shows Aspen a picture) That's when I caught my first fish! (she shows another) and that's from my first day of third grade!

ASPEN

Oh, I remember that! You stepped on a ladybug and cried so hard you peed your pants!

Juniper elbows him in the side, and sets the pictures aside. She continues looking through the box.

A newspaper clipping catches her eye, she pulls stuff out of the box to get to it. It's dated SEPTEMBER 2005. The article clipped is about 3 missing kids being a suspected kidnapping. She reads it, growing visibly confused as she does.

JUNIPER

Hey. Aspen.

He's too distracted by something in the box he's looking through. Juniper smacks his shoulder to get his attention.

ASPEN

Ow! What?

JUNIPER

What's this?

She shows him the clipping. His face drops, and he quickly looks back into his box, pretending to be focused.

ASPEN

Dunno. Maybe your mom just clipped it because she was scared or something.

Hey, check out this ugly drawing!

He pulls out a wrinkled up paper with a "self-portrait" drawn by 6-year-old Juniper. She smacks him. He laughs and puts the drawing back in the box.

Juniper goes back to her box, digging around in it. She rummages through the papers, muttering "trash" with each one. Once she's done, she tosses them all back into the box and slides it away from her. She grabs another box and pulls it towards her, then opens it.

The box is full of missing child posters. All of them have a picture of 5-year-old Juniper. Text reads: "MISSING CHILD. LAST SEEN SEPTEMBER 3RD, WEARING RED SKIRT OVERALLS, WHITE SHIRT, AND PINK LIGHT-UP SHOES. IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT."

Juniper stares at the posters, disturbed. She closes the box and shoves it away. She grabs another box, but hesitates before

opening it. She opens it and pulls out a camcorder. She gasps and smiles, turning to Aspen.

JUNIPER

Check it out!! Think it still works?

Aspen leans over, skeptical.

ASPEN

Uh. Doubtful. In the state it was in, I'd be surprised if it could ever work again.

Juniper rolls her eyes and searches for the power button. She finds it, turning on the camcorder. It takes a minute, but it eventually turns on. She cheers, and sets it to player mode. She rewinds the footage, looking at Aspen as it rewinds.

ASPEN

I hope it's full of embarrassing videos. Like you with a face covered in peanut butter.

JUNIPER

Maybe it'll be the video my dad took of us walking to school. You know, the one where that dog came charging at the fence and you literally shit your pants?

Aspen looks absolutely mortified. He lunges for the camera, but Juniper holds it out of his reach, laughing. The camera clicks, the footage now rewound. Aspen sits up, leaning over to watch as Juniper plays the footage.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

A five-year-old Juniper is sitting on the floor in front of the TV, watching Sesame Street and shoving cereal into her mouth by the handful. ANTHONY is recording. He's laughing, whispering for LAUREN to come over.

ANTHONY (O.S)

She's completely entranced! Look, look at- (he laughs) look at how she grabs the cereal!

LAUREN (O.S)
(fussing) Oh, she's got milk all over her new Sunday dress!

Lauren walks over to Juniper, taking the cereal bowl from her. Juniper looks at her, wide-eyed and confused, cereal in her lap and milk all over her dress.

LAUREN
Oh, Juniper, look at you.. Oh you've got cereal stuck to your arm.. How did you manage that? We're gonna have to get you changed.. Come on, let's go.

Anthony lowers the camcorder, sighing.

ANTHONY (O.S)
Lauren, come on. We're not even going anywhere today.

Lauren starts to speak, but is cut off by a knock at the door. Anthony sets the camcorder down, facing Lauren and Juniper. Lauren grips Juniper's hand, a terrified look on her face. She looks like she's ready to run. The footage cuts off.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Anthony is recording. Five-year-old Juniper is "helping" make breakfast. She's putting toy eggs in a mixing bowl and mixing them around with her hand.

ANTHONY
Whatcha doing there, Junebug?

JUNIPER
Makin' bickits!

ANTHONY
(laughing) making biscuits?

JUNIPER

Yeah!

Lauren enters, carrying a small mixing bowl, mixing pancake batter.

LAUREN

Oh wow, those look like some yummy biscuits, June! Can I have some?

Juniper yanks the bowl away, shaking her head firmly.

JUNIPER

No! They're for Daphne!

Lauren drops the mixing bowl. She rushes over to Juniper, and the recording ends.

INT. BEDROOM - NOON

Lauren is recording. Anthony and Juniper are painting pictures on the walls of her bedroom. Lauren is standing in the doorway, they don't notice her.

ANTHONY

I'm painting a dragon princess. She saves herself. What are you painting?

JUNIPER

A really fat pig.

ANTHONY

(laughing) oh? And why is the pig fat?

JUNIPER

Cause it ate lotsa food, duh!

ANTHONY

Well, that'll do it for sure!

Lauren laughs quietly, trying to keep them from noticing her. She fails. Anthony hears her, looking over his shoulder. He smiles, seemingly relieved for some reason.

There's a knock at the window. Five-year-old Aspen is standing at the window, waving. Juniper jumps up and waves back, smiling. She goes to open the window. Lauren drops the camera, running

over and slamming the window shut before Juniper can open it too far.

LAUREN

(yelling) what are you doing?!

Juniper begins to cry, clearly scared and confused. Anthony picks her up, shushing her and patting her back. Lauren looks angry, then upset. She realizes what she's done. She starts to apologize, but Anthony just shakes his head and walks out, leaving Lauren alone in the room. The recording ends.

INT. HALLWAY / LIVING ROOM - NOON

6-year-old Juniper is holding the camera. She turns it towards her face, grinning. She giggles and holds her fingers over her lips in a "shh" gesture. She turns the camera back around and tiptoes into the living room. Anthony and Lauren are arguing in whispers.

LAUREN

I'm just trying to keep her safe! She doesn't even understand that she was in danger in the first place!

ANTHONY

So you plan on locking her up in the house forever?! That's not how you protect her, Lauren. That's how you hurt her!

LAUREN

What do you want me to do?! Let her roam free so another crazy lady can snatch her up?

ANTHONY

Do NOT do me like that. You're going too far with this, and you're starting to scare her.

LAUREN

No, YOU don't do ME like this! Don't make me out to be the crazy one! Just because I want to keep my daughter safe?

ANTHONY

You slammed the door on her hand! How is that keeping her safe?!

LAUREN

Oh, like I did that intentionally?

ANTHONY

That's not what I'm saying-

LAUREN

No, I know what you're saying. You're saying I'm doing too much. But I don't think I'm doing enough.

ANTHONY

Oh my god, Lauren, will you just LISTEN to me?!

LAUREN

NO! No, I won't! Because all you're saying is that I'm crazy for wanting to protect my kid! And I'm saying YOU'RE crazy for NOT wanting that!

ANTHONY

That's not-

Anthony notices Juniper. He stops, and quickly walks over. Lauren starts to argue, but stops when she turns and sees Juniper. Anthony takes the camcorder from Juniper and sets it down, picking her up.

ANTHONY

You're a sneaky one, Junebug. What're you doing up?

JUNIPER

I was makin a mowie (moo-wee)!

ANTHONY (O.S)

Oh really? Well, how about you make a movie in your dreams? Let's get you back to bed.

He walks off. Lauren stands alone in the living room. She sighs, her head in her hands. The camera dies.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Aspen and Juniper stare at the camera screen. There's a long silence. Juniper finally speaks.

JUNIPER

What.. the hell was that? I don't remember any of that. I mean, even while watching it, I didn't remember any of that ever happening.

Aspen looks uncomfortable. He doesn't say anything, and stands up. Juniper notices this, and grows suspicious.

JUNIPER

You're hiding something. Aspen, you know something, don't you?

ASPEN

Well, I mean- (he hesitates) kinda?

JUNIPER

Aspen!! Tell me!

ASPEN

It's not really important! I mean, you've gone 20 years without knowing it, so what's the rest of your life?

Juniper glares at him. He puts his hands up defensively, looking away.

ASPEN

Look, your repressed trauma is NOT my problem, go to a therapist!

JUNIPER

Just tell me!

ASPEN

Why are you so obsessed with this?

JUNIPER

I'm not obsessed!

ASPEN

I dunno, begging on your knees seems
pretty obsessive to me!

Juniper punches him in the knee. He winces and steps back.
There's a knock at the door, Juniper shakes her head, Aspen goes
to answer it.