

Synopsis: *Rooted*



Content Warning: Loud noises, flashing lights, and strong language.

Please note: No plants were harmed in the making of this production.

Scene 1:

In her treehouse, middle-aged woman Emery is performing experiments on her mimosa plants, which she is broadcasting on YouTube. She has named each plant; they are dropped in a short, controlled fall, and each one “remembers” that they will land safely, letting their bloom remain open. Her older sister Hazel appears at the door hatch, demanding to be let in. As she signs off, Emery implores her followers to plant trees to counteract carbon dioxide emissions.

Hazel, in an over-the-top 50s diner uniform, has brought Emery food. She also informs Emery that there is a crowd of strangers singing something unintelligible in the field

below, but Emery is more concerned with her online experiments, the latest of which has garnered 13,042 comments. Hazel is unconvinced and begs Emery to leave with her, finally revealing that she has been fired again for pouring hot coffee in a rude customer's lap. She hasn't accomplished anything significant for her age, and she's clearly insecure about it. However, Emery insists that she can't leave the treehouse because of her walker.

The two continue to argue – Emery expresses her desire to remain in the treehouse and perform her experiments, and Hazel insists that the experiments are not scientific and that she has to take care of everything for Emery. Finally, they realize what the crowd below is chanting: a song of devotion to Emery, asking her to heal them. They are also dropping plants without a cushion to catch them, much to Emery's horror. Hazel has her pull up the YouTube comments, and she puts the pieces together. There is an Emery-worshipping cult below; her experiments have gone mega-viral.

Emery begs Hazel to tell them to leave, but her efforts are futile. Initially Hazel is angry at Emery, blaming her for the cult followers, but then she realizes that they are sending money up to Emery in a pulley bucket. Realizing that she can make a better living working Emery's cult than getting her job back at the diner, Hazel begins to research the possibilities, to Emery's chagrin.

Scene 2:

Days later, Emery's mimosas are drooping, and she is broadcasting on YouTube again, begging everyone to leave. Hazel comes up to the door hatch again, clearly exhilarated from the energy of the crowd, but she has forgotten Emery's food. What she has brought are envelopes of dollar bills that Emery's followers are mailing in. Hazel also tells Emery that the local stores are cleaned out, everyone is camping out in the field, and that her boss is begging for her to come back and work. She asks Emery to give her a chestnut disc she stashed; Emery says no, because the chestnut tree is practically extinct. Hazel insists that she needs to bury the disc and dig it up to serve as a sacred text for Emery's followers.

Once again, the sisters fight. Emery insists they don't need the money and that it's immoral to mislead them; Hazel says everyone is already convinced and they might as well take advantage of the opportunity. Hazel smashes one of the plants and is prepared to smash another one, bringing a weeping Emery to finally relinquish the disc. She asks Hazel to write on it "Save the plants, save the planet." Hazel leaves with the disc while Emery scoops up the remains of her demolished plant.

Transition:

In a feverish dream-like sequence, Emery feels the trunk of her tree, Mabel, beckoning to her. She goes to Mabel without her walker and reaches out to her; the crowd begins shouting once again, and snapping out of it, Emery falls and crawls to her walker.

Scene 3:

Below, the sister's cousin and housekeeper Cliff "finds" the chestnut disc, and a stampede ensues. Hazel climbs the ladder once again as the crowd chants, and Emery opens the hatch to find that a young woman is being hoisted up: it is Luanne, who has been injured in the frenzy. Hazel and Emery patch her up, and Hazel apologizes for forgetting Emery's food again. Luanne wakes up, enamored by Emery's presence. She reveals that the crowd below has traveled from all across the United States and even Canada to see Emery. Luanne is also convinced that various signs led her to the treehouse.

While Hazel is gone, Emery tries to tell Luanne that the cult is a scam. She is unconvinced, but listens as Emery passionately explains the intelligence of plants and the looming plight of climate change. Luanne is taken aback; she's never met someone who believes climate change is real. She tells Emery that outside the treehouse, everything is shutting down, and she and her aunt might lose their jobs. Emery says to get another job; but Luanne purports that there are no other jobs for normal people – people who aren't Emery. She also tells Emery that she has been learning about the relationship between pea and tomato plants, which Emery tells her is a legitimate scientific experiment.

Emery has a realization: she has been relying on Hazel, pretending that her experiments are work. She doesn't understand what it's like to need a job. She tells Luanne that she didn't finish grade school because the sensory elements were too overwhelming. Luanne encourages her to show her the experiment, and Emery explains that it applies Pavlovian techniques to plants – teaching them to turn towards energy sources other than light by associating the light with something else. In the original experiment, the alternate source was a fan; Emery is trying to teach her plants to turn towards her. When Luanne gets up to leave, Emery asks her if she is coming back, and Luanne says she will.

Transition:

In another dreamlike sequence, one of Mabel's vines reaches out to Emery, who walks towards it without her walker. They touch, finger to tendril, and then the vine drapes her in an embrace. A crash of thunder breaks the scene and sends Emery to the floor.

SCENE 4:

Emery poses for Hazel, who is trying to paint her on a piece of toast as the crowd continues chanting below. They have begun planting trees, as Emery asked, but they are doing so in the neighbor's cow pasture. A storm is brewing, and more money is coming in than ever. Suddenly the chanting becomes more intense, almost angry; Hazel tells Emery that she's going to need to show her face soon, as they're becoming impatient. Emery is concerned because Luanne is nearly two hours late. Hazel tells Emery she doesn't have to let her come up again, but Emery expresses genuine concern for Luanne. This hurts Hazel, who feels that Emery doesn't want her around, and tells her that it looks bad to the followers for her to let Luanne visit the treehouse.

Luanne knocks on the hatch, and Hazel tells Emery to stay quiet and let her go away. Finally Emery can't take it anymore and lets her in; Luanne tells them that Emery's face appeared in the toast at the diner, calling it a miracle. Hazel says that this will keep the crowd satisfied for a bit and asks Emery to keep emptying the bucket of money. Emery asks her to bring food, and Luanne jumps in, saying that she brought a ham and cheese sandwich. Hazel scolds her, saying that Emery doesn't eat meat because it destroys the planet, and that she doesn't know Emery at all. She orders Luanne to leave, but Luanne asks Emery what food she should bring her. Emery stands her ground against Hazel – it's her house, and she can have company over if she wants to. Annoyed, Hazel leaves.

Emery tells Luanne that she went to the diner once, and that someone had peed on the toilet seat, so she never went back. Luanne tells her that next time, she should just make a "v" on the seat with toilet paper, like her mom taught her. Emery reveals that her mom died, and that she feels safest in the tree. Luanne encourages her to pursue a change and try something different; Emery says that things are different every day with her plants, and that she's only lonely when Hazel comes around, because she takes up too much space. Luanne tells her about the summer she tamed a bullfrog, and how even though it was like nothing happened, everything happened. Luanne holds her hands out to the pea plant.

Transition:

Again, Emery is dreaming – she's walking to the window, which has opened on its own, without her walker. She beckons toward a branch of Mabel's, and it hugs her. As she awakens, Emery's knees give out and she falls.

SCENE 5:

The scene below has become frenzied, feral. Hazel comes up to the treehouse and tells Emery that she needs to make an appearance: there is looting at the local stores, and the gas stations are bled dry. Emery insists that it won't do anything because she can't actually heal anyone, but Hazel assures her that she doesn't actually have to do

anything – the crowd will do the rest. News helicopters start circling overhead, and as Luanne climbs the ladder, the crowd tries to follow. She makes it inside, just barely, and the crowd begins to chop Mabel down. Finally Emery walks out onto the balcony, frozen in terror, but is overcome and nearly collapses. In a desperate bid, Hazel disguises herself as Emery, goes back outside, and feigns healing herself, lulling the crowd into submission.

Hazel and Emery are unsure of how to get everyone to leave, until Luanne suggests a pilgrimage – a spiritual journey. Hazel asks if Emery would come with her, and she says no, but that it's time for Hazel to live her life. Hazel, as Emery, announces her plan to the crowd and goes back inside to say goodbye. Emery tells her to have the followers plant a tree everywhere they stop, even though she can't make her videos anymore. They share a hug, Hazel thanks Luanne, and she goes out into the crowd.

Emery points out how quiet it is without the crowd – she can finally hear her plants. Luanne has brought food; she tells Emery she'll need to get new glasses, but Emery says she likes it without them. She hopes her other senses will get stronger. Together, they decide to try Emery's experiment. Nothing happens for many hours, but eventually, the tendril reaches out to Emery and meets her finger, like "The Creation of Adam." She and Luanne take in the moment with wonder.