

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Windblown snow pirouettes in front of a dimly lit apartment building. From different directions, two people approach the entrance.

NAJI HAMAD (30's), tattered briefcase in hand, reaches the entry first. He tugs against the wind to open the glass door. Patiently, he pulls his collar up, draws his overcoat tight to his small frame and waits for the other.

LOREN ABERNATHY (20's) arrives at the door. She wears a heavy coat, and a scarf wrapped around her head covers all but her disdainful glance at Naji.

She scoots through the open door without a word. Inside she pulls the scarf loose, shakes her head and trudges to the elevator, she's on auto-pilot.

Naji brushes snow off his overcoat as he follows. He is a bit short for the second hand coat, and that, along with the woolen JETS cap he wears, gives him the appearance of a dark-eyed thug.

INT. ENTRANCE HALLWAY - SAME

SAMUEL, an elderly, black, cherub-of-a-man sweeps an area around the elevator. His shirt is as crisply pressed as his silver hair is neatly trimmed.

Stoop-shouldered, he lifts his head, smiles warmly and acknowledges Naji. At the elevator, behind Loren, Naji unbuttons his coat.

NAJI
Good evening.

Loren pretends that his broken-English salutation is not being spoken to her. She fidgets with her coat buttons. She looks up at the floor indicator. It moves with a slowly, excruciatingly so.

NAJI
Some nasty weather we're having
tonight.

Loren turns, looks directly at him, hesitates, then walks away, to the stairwell. As she glances back at Naji she runs into Samuel who totters and drops his broom.

SAMUEL
Whoa there!

LOREN
Oh, I'm sorry.

She fumbles awkwardly to retrieve the broom.

LOREN
Are you okay?

Samuel straightens his skewed, wire-rimmed glasses.

SAMUEL
Fine, young lady. You?

LOREN
I'm okay. I'm so sorry.

Loren hands him the broom, then reaches out gently, takes his hand in hers, her other hand behind his elbow she peers into his face with concern.

LOREN
Are you sure your alright?
I just wasn't paying attention.

SAMUEL
(light-heartedly)
No problem, dear. Just be careful.
Don't want an accident right before
Christmas. Now, you go on and have
a good night.

He returns to his sweeping.

LOREN
(questioning)
You too, uhhhhhh?

He turns and smiles.

SAMUEL
Samuel. I'm just temporary.

LOREN
Okay then, just temporary Samuel,
you have a good night too.

The elevator bell RINGS. The stairwell door opens.

Naji walks in to the empty lift and disappears. The ECHO OF LOREN'S FOOTSTEPS lingers in the entrance area as the stairwell door slowly closes.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The stairwell door opens. A weary, winded Loren steps out.

NAJI (O.S.)
(pleads)
Now give me that back, you boys.

Loren's attention is drawn down the long, well lit hallway. Three teenage boys play keep-away with the JETS cap.

DANIEL the largest of the three, towers over Naji and dangles the cap. STEVEN and JAMIE surround the small man and tease.

DANIEL
Dude, what'cha need with a cap?
Forget your turban?

The ruckus takes place down the hall from her apartment. Loren approaches, she searches her purse for keys.

NAJI
I don't wear a turban, and..

STEVEN
Don't wear a turban? What kinda
camel jockey are you?

Daniel throws the cap to Steven who sling-shots it down the hall toward Naji's apartment. The boys laugh, Naji curses. The three leave as Naji runs to retrieve his cap. They turn and start towards Loren.

Loren has found her key and calmly works it into the keyhole, unconcerned about the ruffians.

DANIEL
Hey, Mrs. Abernathy. How you doing?

She turns to face the teens. She shakes her head, a disproving mom look, as the boys come closer.

LOREN
I'm fine boys. So, what kind of
trouble are you three reprobates
causing tonight?

STEVEN
(mock offense)
Mrs. A, trouble? We're just having
a little fun. Hey, we got some time
to kill, you need anything.

A careworn smile creases her face. About 10 years their
senior, her eyes display a soul that is light years away in
anguish.

LOREN
No thanks, Steven.

She turns, opens her door, reaches in to flip on the lights.

LOREN
But you boys will be killing time
in jail if you're not careful with
the neighbor.

STEVEN
Just having fun.

DANIEL
He don't like it, maybe he'll move.

JAMIE
Yeah, maybe to fucking Mecca where
he belongs.

Steven reaches over and slaps Jamie behind the head.

STEVEN
Watch yer mouth!

JAMIE
Ow!

He looks at Loren, rubs the back of his head.

JAMIE
Sorry, Mrs. A.

She chuckles at the three stooges.

LOREN
It's okay. I've heard the word
before.

She walks into her apartment then turns and sticks
her head through the closing door.

LOREN
I've even used it a time or two.

The stooges laugh.

LOREN
Now, good night, gentlemen. And
hold it down, okay?

INT. LOREN'S APARTMENT - LATER

Loren, attired in a bathrobe, stands in the kitchen and struggles to uncork a bottle of wine. Exasperated, she tosses the bottle and opener into the trash.

A large glass tumbler slams onto the counter. Ice cubes clink into the empty glass and are then bathed in half-a-glass of dark rum, half-a-glass of ginger ale, a twist of lime, an umbrella.

The drink moves through the living room and stops in front of the television. No sound but the CLINKING OF ICE CUBES AGAINST GLASS as a silent newsreel relives the first of the Twin Towers in collapse.

Loren stands, stares vacantly, swirls her drink slowly at first then faster as the scene changes to one of an angry, crowd of young Muslims as they burn an American flag.

She takes long drink and sets the glass on the top of the TV, next to a picture of a man dressed in a fireman's uniform. He is young, and smile lines crease the face of a man in love with life.

Behind the framed photo a long dead plant stretches its limbs as if reaching for her drink. A string of Christmas lights, several bulbs dead, dangles haphazardly around the plant and off the side of the set.

She reaches down and turns the channel until she finds some senseless cartoon.

With her half-empty glass she moves across the room past piles of unfolded clothes, scattered dirty dishes, careless stacks of books and magazines. This is a reclusive den, no longer a home.

She walks past a dusty cabinet covered with pictures. She and the young man pose he-man style. Another in a bar with friends, at a backyard barbecue. In a church she wears white, he wears a suit and tie and that same smile. One last picture of the two of them, him in his firemen's uniform, they hug.

Copyright 2004 Marc Calderwood -- All Rights Reserved

For the complete script please contact Jennifer Brooks at
info@filmmakers.com