THE BEAR

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SERIES OF SHOTS:

Grainy and unsteady... Bright flashes of sunlight, sirens WAIL... A building ablaze, smoke billowing... A POLICE OFFICER motions back a crowd of onlookers...

FADE IN:

EXT. NURSING HOME - DAY

A sprawling, red brick structure. Lots of bright and cheery flowers suggest this is the place your loved ones should be.

INT. NURSING HOME DINING ROOM - DAY

Into a well lit room as soft piano music plays. In the corner, a large tank houses a peaceful community of fish. A scattering of SENIORS eat around a long dining table.

In a wheelchair at the table, carefully feeding herself, is MARGO FLEMING (79), remnants of food on her chin, and...

A STUFFED BEAR in her lap, curiously dressed in FIREFIGHTER gear - thin red vinyl uniform and a hose attached to its arm.

A scrawny MAN in hospital SCRUBS two sizes too big slowly creeps over... PETE, mid-thirties. A lazy eye runs slightly askew. A mean and crooked grin on his face.

PETE

Need help with that?

Margo looks up, fearful, as the spoon she holds begins to tremble. She pulls her stuffed bear in close.

Pete snakes his hand along her thin white hair, down her shoulder and hospital gown. His thumb and index finger dig viciously into the soft flesh of her thigh.

She opens her mouth as if to cry out, but she's too terrified to make a sound.

PETE You sew your family fortune into that bear? Hmm? Pension maybe..? YOLANDA, a young NURSE'S AIDE, rushes over.

YOLANDA (Hispanic accent) Take your hands off her.

Pete straightens up.

PETE

Or what? Do I need to remind you again that my uncle's the town selectman? Leans to the right, you know. Don't appreciate illegals 'round here.

Yolanda just stares as he slowly backs off. She gives Margo a reassuring touch, wipes the food from her chin.

Pete scratches a pimple on his face and hacks up some phlegm. He retreats back by the fish tank where...

Watching on is a HULK of a black man named OTTO, early forties, in a brown housekeeping uniform. Time hasn't been kind to his waistline, but he has a gentle way about him.

He wrings out a mop, then fishes through his pockets. He pulls out an INHALER and takes a hit.

> PETE Why you think she carries that bear 'round with her all the time?

OTTO I thought it was a dog.

PETE

Nope. It's a bear.

OTTO I dunno. But you better watch out. One day that bear gonna jump up, bite you on the ass.

PETE What's that supposed to mean? OTTO Why you don't just leave that poor woman alone?

PETE What the hell you care? She ain't got no family. No one comes to visit. Old women like that die in their sleep all the time. (winks)

Otto's immense hands grip the mop handle as if it were a bread stick.

OTTO That woman been through more than her share without your harassment.

Pete's expression turns sour.

PETE

Harassment? You know who I am, right? You mention that word one more time and I pick up the phone. I pick up the phone and I got your job... (snaps his fingers) ...just like that. It'll be that quick. We understand each other?

Otto glares at him. BEAT.

OTTO (simmers) I got laundry to do.

PETE

Well, what're ya waitin' for? (waves) Bye bye, asshole.

Otto takes his mop bucket and hastily leaves.

Pete watches him go, *harrumphs*, then fixes his gaze back to the old woman.

INT. MARGO'S ROOM - NIGHT

A nite lite illuminates Margo's bed. An I.V. bag drips as she sleeps, mouth hanging open.

Outside, Pete passes by with a broom. He passes again...

The third time he stops and stands in the doorway, his shadowy figure black against the dimly lit hall.

He silently approaches Margo's bed, stops and scratches his chin. Underneath the covers, the shape of the bear with one furry paw protruding.

Pete glances around, cautiously reaches for it and --

SNAP!

His face twists in anguish. His eyes slam shut. He covers his mouth to stifle a scream.

A large MOUSETRAP dangles from his fingertips.

Pete's knees buckle. Face red and tears streaming, he carefully removes the mousetrap.

PETE

Fuckin' bi--

The nite lite flickers and goes out.

A CLICK as the door closes behind him.

In the shadows, a hand grasping a WHITE CLOTH clamps down on his mouth.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT

An oversized laundry cart rests next to rows and rows of washers and dryers.

INT. WASHER

In the cramped space a pair of EYES dart wildly. Hospital gowns, socks and underwear...everywhere.

Otto drums his fingers on top of the washer. He contemplates a bottle of bleach and soap on a shelf.

THUMP! THUMP! from inside the washer.

Otto peers through the glass and smiles. Stuffed inside is Pete -- petrified and twisted like a pretzel. A brown clump of...something...smears his face. He vomits.

> PETE (muffled) Get me outta here, nigger!

OTTO

(chuckles) You makin' this all too easy. If only you woulda let that poor woman alone.

PETE There's shit on my face!

OTTO Oh, we gonna take care of that.

Otto takes the soap and bleach from the shelf. He pours it into a hole on top of the machine.

> PETE I'm gonna fuckin' kill you! Don't you know my uncle's a --

OTTO

You know, they say that even rats can show empathy. They even go to rescue another rat if it's drowning. (starts the machine) Tell me... Who comin' to your rescue?

Water fills the machine.

PETE

(gurgling) No! No, no... I'm sorry! CLICK -- Pete tumbles to the left. CLICK -- to the right.

Otto reaches for a radio on the shelf, navigates the stations, then raises the volume.

He takes a peek inside the front loader. Pete continues to tumble, water rising fast.

OTTO Not even another rat gonna come help you. (waves) Bye bye, asshole.

A hideous sounding CRACK! from inside the washer. A bloody palm print stains the inside glass, then is washed away.

Otto shuts the light -- another CRACK! -- and leaves.

INT. MARGO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Margo where we left her, asleep on the bed.

Otto turns the bulb of the nite lite to on. He carefully steps to her bedside, past an end table where we focus on a framed picture of...

A YOUNG MAN, his face glistening with youth. Lettering across the picture: Always Remember -- Ladder 309.

Otto gently brushes the side of Margo's face, takes the stuffed bear and slides it alongside her arm. He pulls the covers up and tucks them both in.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Blinding flashes of sunlight... Echoes of panicked voices, the muffled sound of SIRENS.

The YOUNG MAN from the picture, a FIREFIGHTER, lies on the ground...dying. His face covered in soot, he motions to someone O.S.

A LARGE MAN, also a firefighter, with his hand tucked under the young man's head, leans in close to listen.

A younger Otto slowly pulls away, a somber look on his kind face. He nods.

The young man's heavy eyes slowly close.

RETURN TO SCENE:

INT. MARGO'S ROOM

OTTO

I made your son a promise, Miss Margo. I intend to keep it.

Otto checks his watch.

OTTO

Better be gettin' on back. Rinse cycle's just about done.

He winks, pulls out his inhaler and takes a hit, then quietly exits the room.

FADE OUT.