

Hard Little Man

TITLE. HARD LITTLE MAN. Awkward little letters etched into the skin of a small forearm.

1. EXT. BEN'S FRONT GARDEN/DOORSTEP. MORNING.

DISSOLVE. A vast sky.

DISSOLVE. A spider crawling over our view of sky.

DISSOLVE. A giant spider climbs down a wall of bricks. A small hand blocks its path. It stops and changes direction. The hand second-guesses the spider and again stops it travelling further away. The spider scurries left and over the small arm.

BEN (V/O)

(Imitating spider's voice)

Gotta get out of here. Tired. Which way?

Jump? Let me go! I'm hungry. Let me go home.

Jump! Uh-oh, uh-oh, uh - oh.

The spider scurries further up the arm, then jumps. It lands on the tarmac path, pauses for a moment, then dashes into a hole at the bottom of the doorstep. BEN (10) watches it scurry away. He closes his eyes and is immersed into BLACK. A faint tick-tocking is audible.

2. EXT. BEN'S FRONT GARDEN/DOORSTEP. SAME TIME.

BLACK CONTINUED. The sound of a door opening. A woman's voice:

JULIE (off)

Right, I'm working a double shift today Ben.

Give us your key.

JULIE, late twenties, red bleary eyes towers above us. BEN takes his key from a string hanging around his neck and passes it to his mum. We can now see a large bruise on his forehead. JULIE shuts the door and hands him a coat and some sandwiches in a bread bag.

Jacky'll keep Jessica until I get back.

She crouches down to his level.

Please stay out of trouble Ben or school's never gonna let you back in. Don't let us down little man.

He quietly nods at her. JULIE runs her fingers over BEN's bruise and we sense a feeling of regret from her. She is near enough to kiss him but doesn't. BEN's mum and little sister disappear down the road and out of sight. BEN sits watching after them. The wheel of an old child's bike discarded in the front garden spins and creeks in the slight wind. A ticking noise again counts down. BEN's stare down the now empty road intensifies. The ticking gets louder.

3. EXT. FRONT GARDEN. MORNING.

BEN suddenly runs into our view of the garden. He dives onto the grass and lies next to a smallish round metal hub. Dry mud sticks to the cracked concrete securing the hub. Small blades of grass and a buttercup bud stem from one of the tiny cracks. It silhouettes against an enormous blue sky. His voice is quiet and serious.

BEN

It's a bomb; I've found a bomb.

The 'tick-tocking' sound continues. It gets louder and louder. BEN is suddenly up and circling around the 'bomb'.

Stand back! Don't come any closer!

He is manic, shouting out.

I want you all to clear the area - you're all in danger. Stand back! Keep out of the way.

He begins to count down.

10, 9, 8, 7...

He talks into the space that surrounds him.

I told you to get the hell outta here... Listen, you can stay but for gods sake don't light any cigarettes. You're a mate... 6, 5, 4, 3... Run! Run for cover!!!!

BEN motions to follow him then runs and jumps behind some small concrete steps at the corner of the garden.

...2, 1!

We are lying on the ground next to BEN. We wait. Finally he peeps over the top step as we do too. The garden is intact. BEN breathes a sigh of relief. He is distracted for a moment by a small piece of moss growing out of one of the steps. He scratches at it then investigates the moss between his finger and thumb. He smells it. He speaks to himself.

That was a close one.

He smiles. He looks beyond the steps to the outside world.

4. EXT. BACK GARDEN. DAY.

We catch a glimpse of BEN's small, wrecked, dirty white trainers as they struggle up and over a makeshift back gate. He climbs over the gate, climbs down the other side and disappears around the back of the house.

5. INT. BEN'S HOUSE. DAY.

We can hardly see BEN through the disarray contents of a breakfast table as he stands against the window, looking in.

6. EXT. BEN'S BACK GARDEN. DAY.

The house is in chaos. BEN focuses on the back wall where there is a painted child's picture of a woman, little girl and a house. His view refocuses to the edge of the dining table on a half-eaten pack of digestive biscuits. Again his view refocuses on his reflection in front of his view of the biscuits. His hands gently pull away from the glass leaving brief tiny imprints. Water trickles from a plastic drainpipe. He grabs a wet stone by the drain and throws it at the window. He leaves.

7. EXT. BEN'S FRONT GARDEN. DAY.

BEN looks small amongst his house and garden as he sits on his doorstep eating his sandwiches. He looks about the street but it's empty. His feet dance with impatience.

The sky is huge and blue, a cloud travels across our view.

Subtle noises of a scuffle and fight.

BEN stares at the sun, his eyes blink slightly. His view flickers to black with the sun's intensity.

8. EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - GARDEN. DAY.

BEN walks alongside the hedge outlining his garden. He shadow boxes, fighting and swiftly dodging away. His shadow falls across a hedge and then a wall. He punches into air. He reacts to punches to his own stomach and then repeatedly to his head. He imitates the sounds of being punched.

BEN

Augh! Ah! Doff! Ah, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it! Sorry, ah! Stop it please ahhh!

Suddenly he is pushed to the ground. He scampers away, his arms protecting his head. Everything is still for a moment. Ben is on his knees. Suddenly his mood changes.

What did you say?

BEN is now on his feet. He talks into a different space beside him.

What did you say? Say it to my face. C'mon. C'mon stick up for yourself. What are ya - a fuckin' wuss? C'mon! Show us what you've got!

He shifts his weight from one foot to another. One moment he is lunging forward the next he's dodging away. He is intimidating and aggressive, no longer friendly or play fighting. He is suddenly very angry.

You think you're a hard man eh? C'mon fight me back! C'mon! Come on!! Fight me back! Fight me back! Fight me back! I'll kick you to the moon you little wanker.

BEN's arms and legs suddenly lash out into thin air. His body twists and contorts then freezes. His look is dangerous. He stares at the ground. He stands rigid; his hands frozen and hooked in the air like crooked witches fingers. Tension. We watch him from the ground, keeping our distance. Slowly his hands relax. He holds one out as if talking to the ground and covers his face with the other one.

Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.

A panting noise becomes audible.

9. EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - STREET. DAY.

DISSOLVE. Hot sun.

DISSOLVE. The sun's reflection on glass.

DISSOLVE. A small dog looks out from the interior of a car. BEN watches it through the back window. He looks around but the street is deserted. The sun burns down onto the car.

BEN

Hello little man.

BEN places his palm against the window of the car. The dog tries to lick it. He runs his finger along the window and the dog follows it with it's nose. The dog pants.

BEN (V/O)

God, it's hot today. It's really hot... hot...
god it's hot.

BEN looks up at the bright sun then back at the dog behind the glass windows. It's breath mists against the glass. BEN again looks around but there is no one about.

10. EXT. BEN'S BACK GARDEN. DAY.

BEN kicks open the garden gate and dashes into the back garden and grabs his rabbit out of its cage. He carries it, running back out to the car.

11. EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - STREET. DAY.

BEN places the rabbit's face against the back windscreen for the dog to see. Rabbit and dog stare at each other. The sun beats down. A whispering noise from BEN's head begins to build and mix with the dog's panting. The dog's coat is beginning to dampen.

12. EXT. BEN'S BACK GARDEN. DAY.

BEN kicks the dilapidated garden gate until it can no longer hold on its hinges. He is manic. His trainers crunch on broken glass which glistens in the light.

BEN (V/O)

Useless fucker... Fuck off outta my face... just like your dad... it's easy, so easy to walk away...

The noise in his head intensifies distorting with other sounds; trickling water, dog panting, cracked glass, A creaking bicycle wheel, an airplane passing, other kids shouting, distant hum of motorway. He runs into the corner of the garden and snatches a small magnifying glass from amongst a hoard of other tiny objects. He quickly looks around at the contents of the garden. He spots and runs to the straw which lines the rabbit cage. BEN holds the glass between the sun and straw. A series of intense flash still images fragments time. The straw begins to smoke then a small flame ignites. We watch the intensity of pain on his face.

BEN (V/O)

You little asshole! 8,7,6, dirty git, bang-bang!
Kick you to the moon! 5,4, It's going to explode,
watch out! 3, selfish shit... 2... all your fault... 1...

BEN watches closely, immersed in the changing colours of the flame. His whisperings slow and eventually stop. Silence. BEN is mesmerised by the fire. A tiny green bug on a piece of straw becomes engulfed in the flame. The straw on fire dissolves into a branch fire, which dissolves into the cage on fire.

TIME SLOWS.

The rabbit hops around the garden. BEN shuts his eyes: BLACK. CALM. Bright spots of changing colours can be seen. Eventually they also disappear into the black.

13. EXT. BEN'S HOUSE. STREET. EARLY EVE.

The sun is setting and it is getting dark. BEN watches his mum and sister approach from the bottom of the road. We see him on the doorstep in exactly the same position as they left him that morning. The bicycle wheel spins slowly. He looks exhausted. JULIE and JESSICA walk by him, a carrier bag of Chinese takeaway swings past his head.

JULIE

What you staring at? Look at you. Dirty git.

JULIE unlocks the door and enters the house. BEN looks at his muddy hands and clothes.

(over her shoulder) Dinner's ready. Shift.

BEN stands. He stares directly at us for the first time: we are not invited in. He follows his mum and sister into the house and shuts the door.

END CREDITS. Words scratched into black.