

Hard Enough to Maim

by David Speranza

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the author, at david@kinotekfilms.com.

HARD ENOUGH TO MAIM

CURTAIN UP on a modestly sized, modestly furnished LIVING ROOM.

EDWARD, a man in his forties or fifties, sits in the near-darkened room watching television and eating potato chips. ALICE, around the same age, enters behind him, on her way to the sink and a glass of water. She is dressed for bed.

ALICE: What are you doing here? I thought you were staying at Susie's tonight.

EDWARD: Nah. Me and Susie broke up.

Alice finishes pouring her water and takes her glass to the living room.

ALICE: What happened this time?

EDWARD: She asked me if there was anything I didn't like about her.

ALICE: Uh-oh.

EDWARD: She said to be absolutely honest.

ALICE: *(goes to sit)* I'm afraid to ask...

EDWARD: So I told her she was too clingy and naggy and that I didn't need another mom. Oh, and that she was gettin' fat.

ALICE: Edward! You know women don't mean it when they ask you to be honest.

EDWARD: Don't they?

ALICE: Of course not. All that means is they want you to tell them exactly the opposite of what they don't want to hear.

EDWARD: That so?

ALICE: You know it is.

EDWARD: Yeah. That's probably why I said the truth, I guess: 'cause she wasn't expecting it. Thought I'd make her think twice about askin' such a foolish question again.

ALICE: She thought twice, all right—and didn't take long doin' it. You better hope she thinks a third time and takes you back.

EDWARD: Nah, this time I don't think she will.

ALICE: No?

EDWARD: Uh-uh. I said a few nasty things on my way out. That was followed by a few nasty things on her part. Along with a bar of Ivory soap.

ALICE: She gave you soap?

EDWARD: Threw it at me. Just out of the wrapper, too. Hit me square in the left buttock. Got me a nice bruise, I expect.

ALICE: Goodness. I never heard of throwing soap.

EDWARD: She was standing at the kitchen sink and had just put the clean dishes away, so I guess it was the nearest thing at hand. Pretty effective, I thought. Hard enough to maim but not to kill.

ALICE: Like those plastic bullets police sometimes use.

EDWARD: That's right.

ALICE: Appropriate, too—since you probably could have used it to clean up some of those nasty things comin' off your tongue.

EDWARD: Oh, they weren't so nasty. Hers were nastier. You'd never think a girl so sweet could talk like a ballplayer.

ALICE: You do bring that out in people.

EDWARD: I suppose sometimes I do. We can't always help the way we are.

ALICE: I know I can't.

EDWARD: You're all right.

ALICE: You think so?

EDWARD: Sure, sissy-boom, you're just fine.

ALICE: Sometimes I think maybe I'm not so fine. Sometimes I think maybe I'm really a bad person disguised as a nice one.

EDWARD: Are you kidding? You ask anyone; they don't come any nicer than you.

ALICE: Who'd you ask?

EDWARD: I didn't have to ask. Just the other day, Janet Herman was telling me how nice you are. "That sister of yours," she said, "is about the nicest creature on this green earth."

ALICE: You can't pay attention to what Janet Herman says. That's a woman who won't see an R-rated movie on religious grounds and has her own weekend sewing circle. She couldn't say a bad word about the Ayatollah Khomeini. If she knew who he was.

EDWARD: Is that who you think you are? The Ayatollah Khomeini?

ALICE: Maybe just his sister.

EDWARD: That's about the funniest thing I ever heard. You should write for the sitcoms.

ALICE: But seriously, Edward, the thoughts I get in my head sometimes make me wonder if I'm not the meanest person alive.

EDWARD: What kind of thoughts?

ALICE: I'm too ashamed to say.

EDWARD: You can't tell your own brother? You tell me everything.

ALICE: Not everything. If I told you everything, you might be afraid to come home at night.

EDWARD: You a closet axe murderer, Alice?

ALICE: Don't be silly. You know I don't like cutting things up—except maybe vegetables. Remember when we were kids, I used to fish with you and Dad, but once I caught something I'd always give it to Mom to kill and clean?

EDWARD: Sure I remember. And you'd make me take the hooks out.

ALICE: Those poor little fish and their pierced mouths. Of course today pierced mouths are all the rage...

EDWARD: I told you they couldn't feel it. Fish don't feel pain.

ALICE: Is that what they told you?

EDWARD: Who?

ALICE: The fish.

EDWARD: Of course not.

ALICE: Then how do you know?

EDWARD: 'Cause everybody knows. It's a scientific fact.

ALICE: Well, it was once a scientific fact that the world was flat and cigarettes don't kill you. Science sometimes takes a while to get things right.

EDWARD: That's certainly true. *(after a pause)* So, what kind of thoughts you been having?

ALICE: You really want to know?

EDWARD: Well, since you're not an axe murderer and you don't like blood, I figure I'm probably safe, right? Unless you're a poisoner.

ALICE: No, I don't think about killing people. Not even you.

EDWARD: That's comforting to hear.

ALICE: But I do think bad things.

EDWARD: Like what?

ALICE: Well...for instance... Yesterday morning at Applebaum's Fruit and Fish Market, an old woman cut in front of me at the checkout. Like I wasn't even there! And I thought to myself, "You're a mean old biddy, and you'd look just about right with a cucumber in your ear." I swear to the Divinity, whoever he may be, that was my exact thought! Can you imagine?

EDWARD: My thought would have been a lot worse. There are too many old biddies cutting in line, if you ask me.

ALICE: But no one thinks you're a nice person.

EDWARD: That's true. Well, Margie Blackbottom always said I was nice. But she's a bit simple.

ALICE: And the day before, walking down Stickman Avenue—a perfectly beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky—I looked up to see a jumbo 747 roaring gracefully up into the heavens, probably on its way to Rome or Phoenix or some other exotic place, and I suddenly thought to myself what a pretty fireball it would make, especially with the sky so blue and all. And then I realized what I'd been thinking, and I was horror-struck! Fortunately, the plane didn't explode, or I would have felt even more terrible.

EDWARD: Just because you think things like that doesn't make you an evil person. Maybe an imaginative one.

ALICE: Since when do I have an imagination?

EDWARD: That's true. Then think of it as an occasional fit. Like an epileptic seizure.

ALICE: An *imaginative* seizure?

EDWARD: I once imagined, for no reason at all, what it would be like to french kiss an orangutan. I don't know why. I don't even like monkeys. It just occurred to me out of the blue one night while I was watching the Discovery channel. Now does that make me a monkey lover?

ALICE: I don't know what it makes you. There might not be a word. But listen to this: Today I was taking a little walky-walk downtown and I passed a man with a very large bald head and a very small body with short legs, and I thought: "Walking beach ball." Just like that! Walking beach ball! I didn't know him, he hadn't done a thing to me—in fact, I think he even smiled at me—and there I was disparaging the size of his head. What kind of terrible person does a thing like that?

EDWARD: A very terrible person.

ALICE: You think so? Am I really?

EDWARD: Of course not. Everyone knows that bald men with large heads should have the decency to wear hats. He was asking for it.

ALICE: Now you're teasing me.

EDWARD: Does that mean you're going to think awful things about me now?

ALICE: I already think awful things about you.

EDWARD: Sure you do. But you still love me, right?

ALICE: Don't be silly. You're my brother, aren't you?

EDWARD: See? That just proves what a kind and decent person you are. If you can love someone like me, someone who really is terrible, then you must be as pure as the wind-driven snow.

ALICE: Really, bro-bro?

EDWARD: Really, sissy-boom. You're as fine an individual as I've ever known.

ALICE: Even though I sometimes have bad thoughts?

EDWARD: Mental hiccups. Even the saints had them. It's a wide gap, after all, between thought and deed.

ALICE: I'm glad you think so.

EDWARD: Of course I do. Now come here and give your brother a kiss.

Smiling, she goes to him and gives him a long, lingering kiss on the mouth.

EDWARD: There, now. Feel better?

ALICE: Much better. Thanks, bro-bro.

EDWARD: You going back to bed?

ALICE: Well, it is late already.

EDWARD: Want some company?

ALICE: You sure Susie won't mind?

EDWARD: Nah. I told you she wouldn't last. They never do.

ALICE: I know what you mean. Don't forget to bring your pillow this time.

EDWARD: Nag, nag, nag...

Edward smiles as he watches her leave the room. He moves to follow her.

EDWARD: No place like home—right, sis?

The stage goes black.