

Broken Spine

Written By Naaz Valvani



INT. DINING ROOM- NIGHT

Family of three is seated at a table for four as MOM and Dad fight intensely. ZAIN remains silent as he plays with his peas.

DAD

Jesus Christ Elizabeth enough with the cancellations! I BEG you, think about someone other than yourself, just have some priorities.

MOM

I'm exhausted okay, come on David don't guilt trip me.

DAD

I'm just asking for a little more consideration, we've had these plans for weeks, Klaus and Anna expect us to be there. I'm just sick of the flaking, can't you commit to anything?!

Mom clenches her fork and knife as her voice softens.

MOM

(inhales deeply)

Dad's voice rises.



DAD

Please make it clear to me-

MOM

No! David, see I-I am working my ass off tirelessly trying to find a job, and you think all I do is sit on my ass all day! On top of that, I'm juggling to prepare meals and taking care of myself.

Zain plays with the configuration of his peas and plate.

Dad speaks with a sarcastic monotone as his eyes widen in playfulness.

DAD

Right, because boiling pasta is just so draining. Ugh, honey I'm so sorry I underestimated that.

Mom takes a deep breath as her nostrils flare. She looks down at her plate, and blinks for a second.

Mom takes her dishes to the sink and clatters them in aggravation.

(Brief pause)

Zain picks up a fork and pricks at his fingers with the edges. Zain rests two hands on the fork, observing it as he turns it around in his palms.

Dad returns to eating sloppily as he chews with his mouth open. Zain looks down at the food unwilling to eat, continuing to be invested in his fork. Silence fills the room until Dad finally speaks.

DAD

Where is your sister by the way?

ZAIN

She's on the phone with a friend, some project for school or something.

Dad nods his head and then takes a bite of food and begins to speak.

DAD

How was school?

ZAIN

Typical I guess.

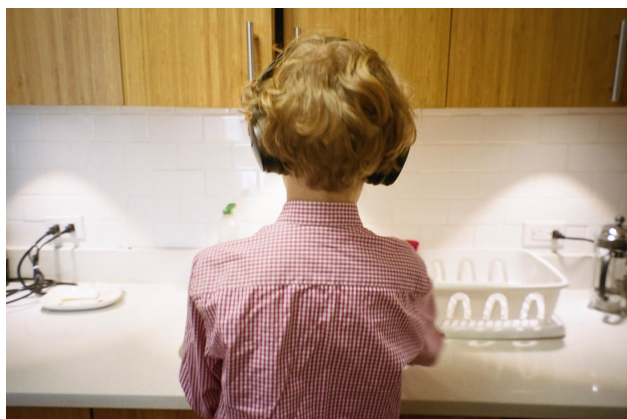
Dad looks at Zain waiting for him to elaborate, Zain takes a sip of water and doesn't speak.

The two sit in silence as Dad eats with his mouth open while Zain grips his fork and looks up at his dad in aggravation.

Zain picks up his dishes and goes to put them away in the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN- NIGHT

Zain puts gloves on and begins to thoroughly wash the dishes with a stone wall face. Music from earphones loudly plays, a faint ringing noise comes from Zain's earphones.



Zain begins to hasten his scrubbing while his face clenches in distraught. Zain's eyebrows flinch and nostrils flare, he inhales heavily through his nostrils and exhales through his breath, letting out a dense grunt.

Zain turns the sink nozzle and water begins to drip slowly out of the spiglet. Zain opens the dishwasher without turning his head, and begins loading dishes. Zain racks up ten plates, as water continues to drip from the faucet. Zain tightens the nozzle and water ceases to drop.

Zain rests his palms on the edge of the sink, he slowly shifts his hands outward to lay on the outside border of the sink. He breathes heavily and rapidly as he attempts to regain a steady breath, taking longer inhalations...

Zain washes his hands for twenty seconds, and dries them with a paper towel. He travels up the stairs in a slow fashion, dragging each foot off the steps. Zain takes numerous breaks in climbing, to rest his head on his hand alongside the railing.

INT. BEDROOM- DAY

Zain rests in his bed as the early morning sunrise seeps through his window. His eyes slowly begin to blink open.

SLEEPWALKING- MODEST MOUSE (begins to play)

Zain gets out of bed and walks to the bathroom in boxers and a t-shirt. He strips off his t-shirt and reaches for deodorant to apply to his underarms. He views himself in the mirror, and begins making poses to himself. Zain pouts his lips, sucks in his stomach, and acts as if the mirror is a camera. He tightens his jaw, and looks deeply into his own eyes as his eyebrows clench.

Zain exits the bathroom and moves into his room where he lightly grasps the same collared shirt from the previous night. He dresses himself thoroughly, and delicately while staring at himself in the mirror. He carries his dirty pajamas to the hamper in his bathroom, but stops himself from leaving the room to glance over the space once more, ensuring everything is in order. He continues to the bathroom.

Zain walks back from the bathroom to then sit down in the chair of his desk. He grabs a banana from the upper right corner of his desk, sitting on top of a copy of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. He reaches for the exacto knife, tucked into the upright pencil stand, and begins to slide the blade through the peel.



He unravels the peel and eats hastily while staring at the wall next to him.

After finishing with the banana, Zain takes a needle and string from the drawer below him and sews the peel into one continuous peel with no gaps.





He discards the banana peel in the trash beside him and exits the room with his tote bag that was lying on the back of his chair.

INT. DOORWAY - DAY

Zain walks down stairs as he steps down two stairs at a time, Zib follows on while listening to music through one earphone.

Zain opens the door alongside Zib.

EXT. STREET- DAY

The two walk in silence, as Zib ponders in her gaze in front of her. Zain looks down at his feet while he talks.

ZAIN

Anything going on this week?

ZIB

No, not really

Zain nods his head and looks down at his feet, tracking how his feet land against the sidewalk cracks.



The two walk together in silence, Zib opens her phone to check the time, and returns it to her pocket.

ZAIN

Does it...

Zib looks at Zain briefly and then returns to gazing in front of her.

ZAIN

I don't get how you do it, you know I tried your mechanism.

ZIB

What mechanism?

ZAIN

Remember you told me when things are bothering me, like mom and dad just to put it at the back of my mind, to just leave it alone I guess.

ZIB

Oh right... and how'd that go?

Zain looks up from his feet and turns his head to Zib.

ZAIN

As I expected it to be...

Zain looks back down at his feet, taking a larger leap to avoid a crack on the sidewalk.

ZAIN
Ineffective.

ZAIN
I envy you though, I wish I was capable of just, uh I don't know just... controlling my thoughts.

Zain moves his hands together, playing with his fingers.

ZIB
Yeah, I don't know how I do it...

ZAIN
What do you think the problem is? Between mom and dad,

ZIB
I don't know if there is a problem, I just think it's some level of, (pause) marital exhaustion, I guess.

Zain stops fidgeting, and places his hands at his side. He looks down at his feet, and takes a large step to the right to avoid a crack, he briefly bumps into Zib.

ZAIN
Maybe...

Zib speaks irritably to Zain.

ZIB
What are you doing?

ZAIN
Step on a crack, and you break your mother's back. Step on a line and you break her spine. (giggles)

Zib looks at Zain, and begins to watch his footsteps for a brief moment. She looks back at Zain as he concentrates on his movements. She returns to looking forward.

Zain mutters quietly with a solemn expression.

ZAIN

Wouldn't want to break Mom's back...

ZAIN (CONTD.)

... Seems like it's already broken though.

Zain stops tracking his movements, and lifts his head to look forward.

The two walk in silence as they approach their school, Zain continues to look at his feet.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Zain doodles drawings of the body from the back, outlining the spine with a dark pen. He draws an arrow to the spine, and labels it "*the glue!*"

He stares at the doodle for a moment, and then scribbles the exclamation mark, and changes it to a question mark. He continues to stare at it.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

Zain, exits school and cleanses his hands with purell from his pocket. He places his headphones on his ears and plays his music from his phone.

Zain walks alongside buildings and through the park with "SAPPY- DEMO" playing through headphones.

INT- HOME DOORWAY - EVENING

Zain enters home and sets keys down on the entrance bench, Zain greets his mom in the living room .

MOM
How was school?

ZAIN
Typical, I guess... How was your day?

MOM
Draining...

Zain takes his shoes off, and places them in the closet. He walks into the living room and sits himself on the chair directly across from Mom.

ZAIN
So what'd you do today?

Mom searches for her phone lost in the hovering blanket covering her.

MOM
Um, one second Zain...

Mom ravages for her phone, as she lifts up pillows and blankets.

Zain watches his mom intensely search for her device.

Mom finds her phone, in the crack of the sofa pillows and begins to go on it.

MOM
Sorry, what was that Zainy?

ZAIN
Just asked what you did today-

MOM
I went to therapy and I had a good session...

ZAIN
What was good about it?

MOM

Sometimes it's nice to just unleash your feelings onto someone else,
and talk openly

ZAIN

(mutter) Yeah

Zain's gaze lowers to the floor beneath his mom, and sits quietly for
a moment.

Zain walks up stairs to room, one at a time, while Mom yells from
afar.

MOM

Don't forget to do the dishes!

MOM

Zain?

ZAIN

Okay.

INT- BEDROOM/BATHROOM- EVENING

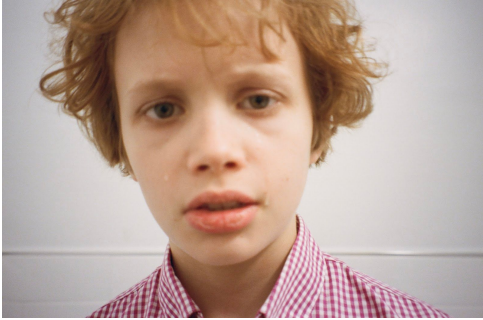
Zain walks into his room aggravated and plops down onto his bed.



He crumbles his face into his
pillow and kicks his feet in
aggravation. Zain screams into
his pillow.

He lifts himself to a sitting
position and walks to the
bathroom.

Zain looks at himself in the mirror as tears roll down his face, he begins wiping his tears away, then dunks his face into the sink where he washes away his tears. Zain looks up at himself once again and continues to shed tears.



He washes his hands thoroughly and dries them with an accompanying hand towel. Zain brushes his teeth, flosses, washes his face, and applies lotion to his face. He neatly configures the toothpaste, toothbrush, face wash and lotion to an organized row within the cabinet neighboring his mirror.

INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT

Zain enters his room and rolls his chair out from under his desk, and plops down on it. Zain reaches for the book *For Whom the Bell Tolls* on his far left right. Zain opens the dog tagged, and folded pages book to the middle, where a post-it lay on the top of the page. Zain stares at a highlighted portion of the text, to where he continues to move his eyes alongside the text. He wipes away his tears, yet continues to read. Zain takes a long inhalation, and slams the book shut with his right palm.

He grabs a t- shirt and pajama pants from a neatly organized dresser. Zain turns off the light to where he lies in bed, where he checks his clock for the time. The clock reads 12:00 AM, and Zain turns his back to the clock and attempts to sleep.

In the neighboring room, Mom prepares sits on her side of the bed, as she turns around to view her husband lying far from her. She turns her

head back, to where she sits with her thoughts for a brief moment and turns off her bedside light. (camera cuts as light goes out)

INT. BEDROOM- DAY

Zain wakes up in bed and ponders out the window and watches a bird with its mother and family sitting amongst a thin extending branch.

Zain walks out of his room and down the stairs two at a time.

INT. DINING TABLE- DAY

Zain vacuums the floors of the living room, as Zib sits lies down on her phone

Dad approaches Zain at the dining table counter.

DAD

Hey, what's up?

ZAIN

Not much, just doing some work

DAD

I'll join you for a bit

Zain looks up from his pencil and paper to glance at his Dad, he quickly looks back down at his hands. His hands clench briefly.

DAD

What are you thinking for lunch, kid?

ZAIN

Was just gonna make some pasta, maybe a sandwich..

DAD

Would you mind cooking up something for me?

Zain continues to work on his homework.

ZAIN

What are you in the mood for?

Zain responds while continuing to be engaged in his homework.

Dad looks down at his phone as it vibrates rapidly, and picks it up while covering the microphone of his phone.

DAD

Pasta should be fine, give me a second Zain just need to take this call.

Zain looks at his father, while he walks away to sit himself at the kensington couch.

Zain places his pencil down, and moves to the kitchen.

He grabs elbow pasta from the pantry and fills a pot with water and brings it to a medium broil. He taps his fingers amongst the counter, anxiously waiting for the water to boil.



Zain serves two bowls of pasta on the kitchen counter, lightly drizzled with olive oil and pepper flakes.

Zain begins eating at the kitchen counter, as Dad approaches shortly after he begins. Dad sits himself among the kitchen stool, and looks at Zain as he chews in silence, sitting upright.

DAD

I get it, things are weird.

Zain remains silent, a moment passes where Zain hesitates to eat the pasta from his lifted fork.

ZAIN

I mean it's just a lot of fighting.

DAD

I know, I know.

DAD

Your mother and I, we... we're working through our problems. It's just, inevitable to fight when you've been together for so long, you know?

Zain remains silent as he looks down at his bowl of pasta.

DAD

I just don't want you to worry about it. This is your mother's and my pro-

ZAIN

But what do you even mean Dad? This isn't just your problem, we see and hear it every gut wrenching moment that you two are together, you've involved our whole family in this so called 'you problem'... (brief pause) this is..

DAD

I know, I know....

Dad takes a deep breath. Zain returns to eating his pasta.

DAD

I'm sorry Zain.

Brief and silent pause.

ZAIN

It's fine though, cause it's your problem right?

Zain rinses his bowl in the sink, and places it within the second rack of the dishwasher. Zain returns to his seat on the dining table.

Dad gets up and leaves his bowl in the sink and attempts to give Mom a kiss as she enters the room.

Mom walks in, dodging Dad's kiss, as she shows irritation evidently through her scrunched nose and merely closed eyes. Her eyes hang heavily swollen from alcohol.

MOM
David, David..

MOM
I think- I have to cancel dinner tonight. I have an awful headache.

Zain mutters to himself

ZAIN
Probably the wine.

Mom's voice escalates.

MOM
What'd you say?

ZAIN
Nothing, nothing.

MOM
I heard you Zain.

DAD
Don't talk to your mother this way, Zain.

MOM
You live in *my* house-

DAD
Our house-

MOM
Remember you live under MY ROOF.

ZAIN
Just give me a fff--- break mom Jesus Christ.

Zain gets up to walk out.

Mom grabs Zain by his forearm and pulls him close.



Mom says harshly and abruptly as she trembles the words into Zain's face.

MOM

Do not talk to me this way. I am your mother (emphasis on the word mother).



Zain frees himself from Mom's grasp and stomps up the stairs.

DAD

What the hell was that?

MOM

David, I'm not having this discussion right now.

DAD

You can't grab kids like that, what the hell is wrong with you? A-Are you DRUNK or something?

MOM

JESUS CHRIST DAVID!

Zain's door slams from flights above.

INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT

Zain walks into his room and seats himself on his bed. Zain clenches fists and eyes shut, as he attempts to steady his trembling breath. Zain takes a deep breath fighting against his tightening chest.

Zain lies back in bed staring out the window from behind him, his cries intensify. Zain's breaths shorten dramatically, as he grasps for air. Zain screeches for help.

ZAIN
DA-

Zain passes out and enters a vivid hallucination.

Dad knocks on the door and interrupts his trembling cry. He lies next to Zain on his bed and comforts him.

DAD
It's okay, Zain, it's okay.

Dad begins to sniffle, a tear goes down his face.

Dad's voice trembles as he speaks.



DAD
I- I'm so sorry Zain.

Zain's cries weaken, and gains a grasp of his breath.

DAD
I think I'm going to file for a divorce.

Dad's cries intensify, as he begins to sniffle and wipe away his tears.

DAD

I'm sorry it took me so long.

Dad reaches for Zain's head and gives him a kiss.

DAD

I love-

(Fade to black)

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM- NIGHT

THE MOON SONG by Scarlett Johnanson begins to play

(fade from black)

Dad sits on Zain's hospital bed, staring at him as he begins to wake up. Zain begins to wake up, becoming aware of his surroundings within a room of a hospital.

Zain blinks a few times repetitively to assure he is still not dreaming.

The two stare at each other in silence, as tears begin to gage from their eyes. The two exchange glances of love through their tear filled eyes.

Dad continues to wipe his tears.

They continue to stare into each other's eyes for a long period of time.

Zain subtly shifts his eyes elsewhere. Dad continues to look straight at him.

Dad moves closer to him to put his head on his stomach.

(brief pause)

(fade to black)

Music gets quieter for recording to play.

ZAIN
I love you.

(brief pause)

CREDITS ROLL

(Conversation becomes indistinct as credits fade to black)

THE END.