

BROKEN BOYS

by

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INT. APARTMENT 1 - NIGHT

We open on a grey apartment, paint peeling off the walls in the corners. A radiator hums, a clock ticks irregularly in the background. In the foreground sits a couch. Daylight, faintly blue, comes from a nearby window on the left.

MAN 1 (60s) sits on the couch, slightly left of center, wearing a leather jacket and jeans with their cuffs rolled up. He sits like a deflated mattress, splayed yet completely formless.

The image is blurry, and we focus as he musters up a faint smile, drawing his body up from the neck, the rest slowly following.

MAN 1

Hi.

As he speaks, the words THIS IS A MAN are superimposed over the darkness.

His words seem almost cut short, clipped before they form feeling.

INT. APARTMENT 2 - MORNING

A different, younger man, sitting in almost the same spot in an almost identical apartment, smiles at us. He smiles differently than the first man, and yet they seem similar. This is MAN 2. His mouth is pulled to the sides as if he knows something, but his eyes remain inexpressive. He looks around, blinks.

THIS IS A MAN

Just before the screen goes dark again, we hear MAN 1 speak again.

MAN 1

I'm in the right place, yeah?

INT. APARTMENT 3 - NOON

The format changes, the edges of the screen more drawn together:

In another identical apartment, someone sits down on the couch, their body almost descending from the upper right corner. As they sit, the camera moves in on their face, and we get a better look at them- It's an old man, cheekbones almost touching the sides of the screen. He stares a bit unsteadily, his eyelids flickering.

A face filled with wrinkles, his mouth remains set despite all the lines saying it should smile. This is MAN 3.

The screen darkens, stays dark longer the last time. Again:

THIS IS A MAN

INT. APARTMENT 1

We cut back, jarringly, the gaunt face of MAN 1 contrasting the old man's. The format is back to standard.

The camera never moves, unflinchingly set on him.

MAN 1 draws into himself, forcing a hand through his hair. Leaning forward slightly, his eyes shift upwards, as if trying to remember something.

MAN 1

I was quite young, yeah? Tenth or eleventh grade.
At the cusp of manhood, as they say. Whoever the hell
"they" is.

It seems like some sort of interview, considering he's speaking to someone behind the camera. But we never hear the interviewer, so we must simply assume that he is, and that we should hear his story.

MAN 1

It all happened real quick, like- we had been friends for a while, as you are But that friendship didn't really mean much to me you know? Not that I didn't like her, I did, but throughout that I had thought she was quite nice, right? As in, romantically-- I fucking liked the girl, is what I mean to say. So we were friends like I said, and I just thought that's it, you know? She was quite different from me anyways, and I thought things would just stay as they were.

MAN 1 (cont.)

Thought I would just sort of stand there and like her from a distance, without saying anything- didn't matter, really, I just liked to be close to her- that's what mattered, throughout, and that's all I really expected it to be.

INT. APARTMENT 2

We return to the younger man (MAN 2)- he looks to the side, camera lazily focusing on his face as it follows, trying to keep him in frame.

INT. APARTMENT 1

MAN 1

But I'd still get jealous, right? Not like I should've been, didn't have any right to be, but I still felt it. If she was talking to someone else, laughed at someone else's jokes, maybe seemed like she wasn't reacting--I don't know, if her eyes didn't follow me the right way or she didn't smile like she usually did, I'd just assume she'd changed her mind about me. Maybe she didn't want me there, you know? Maybe I should just leave. Anyway, we sort of had a tendency to only meet up late, and so we'd go for walks or we'd watch some movie, just being together as friends I thought and I think she did too, and then that was always it.

INT. APARTMENT 3

Cut to the old man (MAN 3). The screen is smaller now, the light harsher. Blue light, flickering as if cars are going by, grazes the left side of his face. He is centered perfectly, the camera slowly pulling closer and closer as he speaks.

In an old, brittle voice, both harsher and more melodious than MAN 1's.

MAN 3

I don't really talk about it too much- never really thought about why. Maybe I just don't want people assuming, you know? People take one good look at you, really look you up and down. Don't even listen- then they think they know everything about you.

MAN 3 (cont.)

I have enough trouble being looked at, anyway. Won't let myself be looked at differently because of something like that.

He seems again to be speaking to someone just behind the viewer.

MAN 3

Of course it has some effect on me. It's a part of my life, quite a big one- But I won't talk about it and that's that. Not like it matters to them. All these idiots who walk up and expect me to pour my bleeding heart out for them to step on it couldn't care less about me- bunch of animals smelling blood, that's what they are. Dogs in alleys, picking at things they don't understand to see if it hits their taste buds right.

INT. APARTMENT 2

MAN 2 looks vaguely interested, lacing his fingers together. He cocks an eyebrow, crossing his legs.

INT. APARTMENT 3

MAN 3 (cont.)

And so I won't let it, won't even let them take a lick of me. They can find their nourishment in some other teetering little husk. They won't enjoy it, anyway- I never did find stories all that interesting when I was their age. Who I am isn't meant for others anyway, is it? My story stays mine, however much they think they want to hear. Maybe they'll like it. Make the old man dance for them. Some puppet with a hand up his ass, mouthing words to a story he doesn't understand. Well my hand is firmly next to me, and I won't make theater out of my life.

INT. APARTMENT 1

MAN 1 sits, just where we left him. The camera doesn't move, and neither does he. He just sits there, gazing right at us. He seems captivated by the old man, or maybe he's just thinking. Maybe he doesn't hear him at all.

INT. APARTMENT 3

MAN 3 (cont.)

I won't let some asshole tell me what I am. I won't even let myself tell him who I am- Won't let them take my story away from me. Because then it won't be mine anymore. They'll have it and they'll play with it, tell it to all their little friends and social circles. "See that bent little man over there?" they'll say, and they'll laugh at the little piece of me I'm reduced to. No, no. They don't get to hear any of it. They don't get a bite out of me. I won't be reduced to some story just so a bunch of morons can cry about the sad old man.

INT. APARTMENT 1

MAN 1 sits still, rubbing his hands across his thighs. His palms are sweaty, he's getting to the part of the story he's not totally comfortable with. Something passes by outside his window, harsh blue light hitting his face from the left.

MAN 1

I'd walk home, maybe with a hug or a pet to one of her fucking dogs- the things always liked me, they did. Thought I exuded the kind of charm they were looking for in a person. Can you imagine? Even the damn dog thought I was right for her. Anyway, that's always kind of how it went- and it kept going like that, even afterwards. We were friends, in our different ways. I'd never been all that popular, and she was always this real sociable girl, pretty and popular and all that other shit that meant something and so we kind of had our differences in that respect. She'd stay out late and her parents didn't care, and mine did and so we never really had that much time, you know? Anyway, one night my parents were gone. Out of town on some fucking trip- point was, I had the house to myself, and I decided this would be my night. My night to do whatever the hell I could think of, whatever kids did. Get drunk, find some girl. Try to get my mind off her. And so I went to some party, drank as much as I wanted. Stayed out late. Didn't happen all too often that I could, so as the romans say seize the day, right? Well I seized that fucking day, grabbed it by the balls and squeezed until it squirmed and let me have my fun.

INT. APARTMENT 2

MAN 2 smiles, almost like a child. His ears redden a bit.

INT. APARTMENT 1

MAN 1 (cont.)

Then afterwards as I was going home we sort of found each other. She was probably walking home from some thing and I was kind of trudging along and we happened to meet at a train station. Anyway we kind of chatted for a bit like fucking kids do; me barely being able to stand upright and her not really being able to stand either and we just kind of talked until I almost ran out of talking options: terrifying thing that, when you forget how it is to talk to people and just sort of seize up and I'm left there like some fucking puppet who can't get words out his mouth

INT. APARTMENT 3

The old man breaths through his nose, turns away from the camera. Something tugs at a corner of his mouth, and he almost smiles.

INT. APARTMENT 1

MAN 1 (cont.)

And she just looked at me while I struggled to breathe and not to stutter and such, and I don't think I've ever seen a face like that. Maybe I put her on some pedestal or something but when I looked at her I felt like I wanted to run for my fucking life and at the same time get married on the spot. And so I just kept standing there, couldn't make myself do either. So we were standing there, right, and I realized that maybe I could invite her over. No idea what I told her about *why* she should come, and I'm not sure she really wanted to but she did, and so we went home. As it turned out, she'd sort of fancied me some time too, and so as it ended up she just never left. That is to say she slept over, as in we had sex. God I sound stupid- we fucked, right? All my fucking dreams coming true and that. And it was, they did come true. Never slept so well in my damn life, barely ever woke up. And when I did I got to hold her against the cold and feel her back against me.

INT. APARTMENT 3

MAN 3 smiles for real this time, some color coming into his cheeks. His arms almost wrap around himself, affirming that her hands were once there- right there. For an instant we're forced to assume they're the same man: for an instant they are.

INT. APARTMENT 1

MAN 1 (cont.)

I should probably say that I hadn't slept with anyone before, much less anyone I genuinely liked. I'd fooled around as you do but I'd never really taken that sort of step. I thought it meant something, you know? I thought I was supposed to think it meant something. In fact I thought guys were the one who just fucked people and the girls were the ones who called twenty times afterwards and wanted to cuddle and never get out of bed and just sort of stay with their little partner as long as they could. And in the morning, when we woke up, I thought we wouldn't talk about it and it would just work- and it did, really, so she left and I called every fucking guy I could think of to tell him what a night I'd had and why she was perfect for me and how I really was more of a man than they had given me credit for. And then later we met up again and we kissed and messed around, but then I had to go home because my parents had come back and it was a school night and I had to sleep so I really had to get home. And then that was it, really.

He looks around, tries to focus on something. He's run out of breath, his story is far too long for him to keep up.

MAN 1 (cont.)

We talked about it afterwards, me and the girl I mean, because I thought we should kind of know where we stood. I thought- I thought she would tell me how much she loved me or ask me to stay the night or at least tell me what a big cock I had, but she just sort of-

He pauses again, searching for the right words.

MAN 1 (cont.)

Just sort of said we should leave it. See what happens, what we'd do. And I was you know, I didn't really know how to react to that. It was all wrong-- I did it all wrong. She figured it out, figured out how little I deserved her. Maybe she didn't, maybe I just-- I thought she meant more to me than that, so I had to mean more to her. That's how it worked, wasn't it? Boy meets girl. Loses her. Gets her back. Except with me I started at the lost part and worked my way up and then suddenly I had her and then suddenly I didn't.

He stops. Bites his cheek to ignore the feeling of tears welling up- blinks hard enough to forget about the biting.

She was supposed to love me, you know?

INT. APARTMENT 2.

We're close to MAN 2's face, his cheekbones meeting the edge of the frame. He looks like the old man now- his eyes are dry, but they're flickering. All that carelessness, all his disregard for the story. Suddenly, he feels. We barely see it, but his eyes change.

A car flashes by.

INT. APARTMENT 1

(Throughout, we switch to the other two men as the camera moves closer to them. The camera on MAN #1 remains rigid, immovable. All of them react in their different little ways to what is being said. All of them try to hide it.)

MAN 1 (continued)

Any-- Anyway, I sort of left it there, left it with what she said cause I thought it meant we would keep trying, you know? And maybe I'd make her like me and maybe she would. But I never really told her. Why should I, right? My feelings were mine and I didn't want to share them if she didn't want me. And so I sat there like the fucking man I was, smoking a cigarette and keeping quiet, just nodding along to what she said. I couldn't- I didn't know what to say to her, didn't know what she wanted to hear. A couple weeks later a friend of mine was talking about some friend of his who had this crazy girl, some

pretty little thing he was all happy about. That friend

MAN 1 (cont.)

didn't know, of course, but it kind of shocked me to see how easy he said it. He slept with her, you know? And it was nothing to him, really, some mark in a fucking record, some name to bring up at parties. Well to him it was just a fuck, wasn't it? And why shouldn't it be, you know? It was a fuck. Just a night, just a little moment. Barely even that.

INT. IDENTICAL, UNKNOWN APARTMENT

A new man, BOY 1 (16) with wild hair sits far away, on the same couch as the others. His eyes are wide dead looking. He turns to face us as we watch- he blinks once, twice. Turns away.

INT. APARTMENT 1

MAN 1

And I know it was just a fuck, I know I know I *know*- it was nothing more, nothing more than that but that didn't matter because I loved her, you know? I loved her more than I ever told anyone, I.. I did. I know I did. Just that night I thought everything would be fine. I could stop with the stress, quit focusing on some test or other or some fucking different thing. It was just her and how I was pressed against her and how she breathed against me. And even after that, after I could barely stand in the same room, not because I was angry with her but just because it hurt so fucking much to see her, even then I didn't tell her how I felt. Why should I, you know? Didn't mean anything, not really. My thoughts were mine, and my feelings too. Especially my feelings. And I guess I'll regret that. I guess I do.

He's composed himself, he isn't crying anymore. But his eyes are wilted, everything's gone. He can barely sit, he can barely look at us. The old man is still trying to blink away his tears. His chin shakes, he laughs at himself. Laughs at how much he's feeling.

Throughout the last monologue, the ticking gets louder. More irregular. At the end, when he's finished, the ticking is gone.

INT. APARTMENT 3

The old man has stood up, we only see his waist. He walks shakily, the camera refocusing as he walks by.

INT. APARTMENT 2

MAN 2's face fills the frame. We stay there for a moment, staring dead into his eyes. He blinks, looks away from us. Wipes a hand across his eyes.

INT. APARTMENT 3

The camera turns to track MAN 3 just a second after he passes by it, closes in on his face. He's stopped, facing to the left of the camera. He looks to the side, licks his lips carefully. Turns. We watch the back of his head as a gnarled hand makes its way through his hair, gripping it for hold.

INT. SIMILAR APARTMENT

Someone new, BOY #2, no older than 10, stares confrontationally at the camera. His nostrils flare, and we cut again.

INT. APARTMENT 1

MAN 1 is looking at his hands, pulling his fingers forward by the second joint. His knuckles are white, the bones in his hands showing through. He looks up at the camera.

Cut to the others:

Man 2, BOY 1. MAN 3, BOY 2. We watch all of them as they desperately try to look away, anywhere but at us.

INT. APARTMENT 3

MAN 3 turns back slowly, shadows passing along the bridge of his nose. A diagonal rectangle of blue light nears his left eye as he turns back towards us. Just as he turns more than halfway, the light reaches his eye. The screen goes black

BROKEN BOYS fades onto the screen, startling white on the static darkness around it.

And I love her by Kurt Cobain begins to play.

Notes:

The actors or characters react differently to the ticking and are influenced by it in their own ways. The subjects are non-defined as far as who they are: they may be the same man, they may all be telling different stories. They may be reacting to each other. None of it matters:

They are there, and they speak. Unexplainably, we are listening.