

Atonement

DE 14
DE 14-90

INT. PRISON RECEPTION CENTER - SAMMIE'S CELL - EVENING

In the cell there is one COT, one TOILET and one sleeping prisoner, Samuel Wiggins. SAMMIE, a medium built young man of ambiguous ethnicity, jolts awake on the cot in a sweat. Guilt and pain wash over his face. He is staying in a temporary facility to sort out which prison to be transferred to.

Sammie's body trembles. He looks at his hand shake. He is in intense WITHDRAWAL. Sammie hears FAINT WHISTLING.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION CENTER - HALLWAY - EVENING

DAVE, a young, handsome, blue eyed, dimpled GUARD, whistling "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms", strolls slowly up to Sammie's cell with an ENVELOPE in his hand. He discretely drops a DIMEBAG of a WHITE SUBSTANCE into the envelope.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION CENTER - SAMMIE'S CELL

Dave pokes the end of the envelope through the bars. Dave whistles. Sammie glares at the guard. Dave twiddles the envelope, as if he's a prisoner passing a note. Sammie looks at the envelope. He seems to recognize Dave's body language.

SAMMIE

Who are you?

DAVE

Dave.

SAMMIE

(suspicious of Dave's
whispery voice)

What is that?

DAVE

A letter.

SAMMIE

(wary)

I don't want it.

Dave continues whistling. His eyes are cold and dead. He stares at Sammie with supreme confidence. Sammie rubs his temples. Sweat pours down his forehead. He can't stand the whistling.

SAMMIE

You gonna stand there all day?

DAVE

I will if you will.

Dave leans all his weight onto one leg. Sammie gets up and snatches the envelope out of Dave's hand and tosses it on his cot. The dimebag slides out onto the mattress.

SAMMIE

Man, this is a set up!

Dave slams the bars with intense, spontaneous rage, but his eyes never change. He relaxes his body again.

DAVE

That one's for you Sammie.

Sammie glances at the dimebag.

DAVE

Next one is for whoever I say it's for.

SAMMIE

I want nothin' to do with no Mule!

Sammie wipes the sweat off his mouth with the back of his hand. His shoulders tremble from the withdrawal. Dave cocks his head, knowingly, but his face does not change.

DAVE

Murder/first right? They'll send you upstate. Need good people out there. You're good people Sammie.

SAMMIE

You don't know me!

DAVE

I do Sammie and I don't suffer fools. I'll be back when it's dark.

Dave walks away whistling.

Sammie listens as the whistling disappears.

Sammie wipes the sweat off of his face. He turns and looks at the dimebag and the envelope on the cot.

Sammie falls to his knees and picks up the dimebag. He hangs it in front of his face, inspecting it. He looks over his shoulders. He licks his lips and rubs his nose. He looks at a SHADOW being cast by the BARS of his cell. He

turns and stares at the BARS of his cell. He looks at the dimebag again. He turns away, ashamed. He winces with another pang of withdrawal. He shuts his eyes.

Sammie opens his eyes and looks at the envelope, which is upside down. He glances at the dimebag. Sammie lifts the mattress and shoves the dimebag underneath. He breathes in deeply and smacks his tongue. He grabs the envelope and turns away from the cot.

Sammie turns the envelope over. He sees his name Samuel Wiggins. He reads the return address, which says Martin Fitzgerald.

SAMMIE
Martin Fitzger--

Sammie crushes the envelope in his fist. He steps forward and leans his head against the wall. He punches the wall.

Sammie turns, enraged. He paces back a forth. He looks down at the cot. He contemplates for a moment. His breathing quickens. He blinks quickly.

Sammie turns from the temptation again and faces the toilet. He walks over and sits on the toilet.

Sammie looks at the ground, trying not to look at the cot. He looks at the envelope, still crushed in his fist. He releases his grip and removes a HAND WRITTEN LETTER. He reads it.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
What does a man say to the murderer
of his only son? Not too long ago
I'd shoot you with no remorse.

Sammie looks away angrily. He glances at the cot. He forces his eyes back to the page.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
I've changed but not as much as I'd
like. Michael's death nearly
pushed me over the edge.

INT. MARTIN FITZGERALD'S HOME OFFICE - MORNING

MARTIN FITZGERALD, a graying man despite being in his young 40's, writes a letter at his desk. His expression is heavy.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
I've been over that edge before.

Martin leans back in his chair, deep in thought. A wave of

pain rolls over his face.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION CENTER - SAMMIE'S CELL - EVENING

Sammie reads. The light is dim now as the sun sets.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 When I was 16, my best buddy and I
 got drunk and stole a car. I
 drove. The next thing I remember
 is wondering where he was.

INT. MARTIN FITZGERALD'S HOME OFFICE - MORNING

Martin writes.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 He died in the ditch I drove into.
 I was in the hospital.

EXT. ROAD OUT OF A SMALL TOWN - BEFORE SUNRISE

YOUNG MARTIN FITZGERALD walks up the road alone.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 The judge thought I had potential.
 Gave me probation until 21. But
 the parents never forgave me. And
 neither did the small town I lived
 in.

EXT. SIDE OF BOMBED OUT BUILDING - KUWAIT - DAY

Young Martin, in a MARINE COMBAT SUIT, is curled up in a ball as DIRT flies from incoming MORTAR SHELLS.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 I ran away and joined the Marines
 at 17. Not too much later I went
 to Kuwait. I was never the same.

INT. MARTIN FITZGERALD'S HOME OFFICE - MORNING

There are no rings on Martin's fingers. He writes.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 When I got home I married a nice
 girl. Right away we had Michael.

INT. YOUNG MARTIN FITZGERALD'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Young Martin sits on the sofa, staring blankly at his YOUNG INFANT SON MICHAEL. Michael crawls over and pulls himself up to a standing position using Martin's pant leg.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
Before he could say my name, I
pushed him away. I hadn't touched
alcohol since I was 16, but I
started drinking again.

Young Martin stands and walks out of sight. Michael loses his balance and falls. He cries, alone. Young Martin's wife runs in and grabs Michael. We hear a CUPBOARD OPEN and a GLASS CLINK. Young Martin walks out with a GLASS and a BOTTLE OF WHISKEY.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION CENTER - SAMMIE'S CELL - SUNSET

The sunlight is nearly gone. Sammie reads.

MARTIN (V.O.)
When I realized what it felt like
to love a son, I knew how much pain
I'd caused. I didn't deserve to be
alive, let alone a father.

INT. MARTIN FITZGERALD'S HOME OFFICE - MORNING

Martin glances up at a PURPLE HEART and SILVER STAR.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
So I signed up again in my late
20's. By my mid 30's I was in the
Middle East.

MUTED EXPLOSIONS and SHOUTING fill Martin's ears.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
Got more blood on my hands than I
dare remember.

INT. BAGHDAD BARRACK'S TINY ROOM - DAY

Middle-aged Martin Fitzgerald sits in a small, white walled dorm. He opens a LETTER.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
My wife left me because I was never
there. She was right.

Martin puts down the letter and exits the room.

INT. MARTIN FITZGERALD'S LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

No lamps are on. Middle aged Martin sits alone on a sofa chair. He sips a glass of alcohol. Next to him is an OPENED LETTER.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 Michael sent a few letters when he
 was old enough. I never wrote
 back.

INT. MARTIN FITZGERALD'S HOME OFFICE - MORNING

Martin's eyes well up.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 I was a prisoner of my own guilt.
 So I drank and drank.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION CENTER - SAMMIE'S CELL - NIGHT

The light is dim on the toilet. Sammie can barely read.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 I drank to numb the pain. I drank
 to hide from my guilt. I hated my
 drug and I hated myself for doing
 it.

Sammie stops reading and looks over. There is more light
 across the room. Sammie stares at the cot and makes a fist.
 He stands up and walks over to the cot.

He pulls out the dimebag, walks over to the toilet and
 FLUSHES IT AWAY. He watches it swirl and disappear.

Sammie sighs with huge relief, then sits on the cot. He
 continues reading in the moonlight.

INT. SMALL CHURCH - MORNING

Older Martin sits quietly in a PEW. OTHER PEOPLE SING.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 After a DWI I was sent to AA. We
 met in a small church. Sometimes
 I'd stay and listen to the music.

MICHAEL, 19, gaunt and medium built, walks down the aisle
 and stands next to Martin. He sings to the music. Martin
 glances over.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 Michael found me there.

EXT. SMALL CHURCH - MORNING

Michael's hands are very animated. Martin's face does not
 react much as he studies his son.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
He said his mother told him where I
lived. He'd been clean for
thirteen days. He told me he owed
money to some people. You know
more about that than me.

INT. SMALL CHURCH - DAY

Martin sits in the pew next to Michael and watches the
PREACHER. Martin shifts his weight many times.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
My mind had been so pickled with
alcohol I could scarcely hold a
conversation, so we went back in
and listened to the preacher. In
my mind, I wrestled with that
preacher. He spoke of the death of
God's Son and how much God loved
Him. It seemed like the preacher
looked right at me when he said
'all are guilty and need
atonement'. That the 'blood of
Jesus' will wash our sins away.
I'd heard enough.

Michael pops up and strides down to the ALTAR at the front.
The preacher stops and attends to him.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
But Michael went to the altar. I
didn't believe atonement existed.
Blood never saved anyone. And
people don't just forgive when
their sons are killed.

People stand and walk down to the altar and put their hands
on Michael. Martin peers his head around.

MICHAEL
(sobbing)
Dad... Dad...

Martin stands up.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
But I realized Michael needed me,
despite me.

Martin silently walks toward the altar. He puts his hand on
his son's neck. The preacher prays passionately.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 My son cried. I recognized those
 tears. Tears of guilt and regret.
 Those were my tears.

Martin sinks to his knees, almost like his heart has given
 out. He bows his head next to his son's.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)
 I fervently gave my heart to God
 and wept with my son.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION CENTER - SAMMIE'S CELL - NIGHT

Sammie is emotionally effected. He breathes through his
 mouth with a lump in his throat. He is no longer sweating
 and the trembling has nearly disappeared.

A hissing sound startles Sammie.

DAVE
 Sssssssammmmmie.

Dave stands in the dark. His handsome face emerges into
 moonlight.

DAVE
 Did you enjoy yourself Sammie?

SAMMIE
 (forcefully)
 I told you, I don't *want it*.

DAVE
 Where is it?

Sammie continues reading the letter.

SAMMIE
 I flushed it.

DAVE
 Hmmmm...

Dave continues humming and closes his eyes tightly. He
 opens his dead eyes.

DAVE
 Bad choice.

Sammie's cell opens. TWO INMATES run in and OVERPOWER
 Sammie. The pages of the letter scatter. The inmates hold
 Sammie's MOUTH and NOSE shut and pin him to the cot.

Dave strolls in, picking up the pages of the letter.

DAVE

I told you Sammie. I don't suffer
fools.

(holds up the pages)

You shouldn't either.

Dave tears up the pages.

DAVE

I read every letter that passes
through this facility.

(holds up the pieces)

This one by far had the best
ending.

Dave tosses the pieces in the toilet and flushes them.

Sammie struggles for air. Dave nods at the inmates. They strike SAMMIE in the RIBS right under the armpit and on the inner THIGH, then drag him over and put his head above the toilet, facing up.

DAVE

Want me to tell you how it ends?

Sammie is desperate for air.

DAVE

Turns out Martin forgives you for
turning his son into worm meat.

Dave bursts into laughter. Sammie arches his back.

DAVE

I know it's precious. Say... what
was I here for?

Sammie is starting to black out.

DAVE

Oh.

Dave pulls out another dimebag from his pocket.

Dave holds the dimebag above Sammie's face and pours as soon as the inmates release Sammie's nose.

Sammie breathes in deeply, inhaling most of the drug. He gasps and coughs loudly. He shakes his head "No" furiously.

The inmates toss Sammie on the cot. Dave walks out. The inmates exit out of sight. Sammie's cell closes.

Sammie slowly rolls onto his back. He moans.

DAVE

No turning back now. You're in.

SAMMIE

(gasps)

No more. No more.

(he points weakly at
Dave)

No more of this! Whatever you're
in keep me out!

DAVE

You're not getting out for a long,
long time Samuel. Not after you
killed that poor man's son.

Sammie rolls off the cot onto the floor and tries to stand
with no luck. The drug takes effect.

DAVE

Warden won't be happy to see you
high as a kite on the floor. But
warden doesn't have to know.

Dave stares at Sammie with his dead eyes and whistles
"Leaning on the Everlasting Arms". He walks away.

Sammie quietly sobs and holds his chest. He crawls over to
the toilet. He reaches his hand inside and pulls out TWO
WET PIECES of the letter. He clutches them close to his
chest. He cries openly and lays down next to the toilet.

Sammie looks up and behind the toilet he sees the LAST PAGE
of the letter. Sammie grabs it tenderly and hides behind
the head of the cot.

He pulls the letter up. The words are all blurry. He
blinks his eyes.

SAMMIE

(under his breath)

Please.

Sammie breathes deeply and tries to calm himself. He blinks
again and focuses on the words. He reads.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)

I stopped alcohol the night I
invited Jesus into my life, but
sometimes I miss its numbing
effect. I've experienced a lot of

(MORE)

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.) (CONT'D)

pain in my life. I nearly killed myself in a car accident and lived with the death of that young boy on my conscience. As a Marine I was shot and burned. I lost best friends in the war. But none of it comes close to the pain of losing Michael.

Sammie closes his eyes. A single tear streams down his face.

INT. MARTIN FITZGERALD'S HOME OFFICE - MORNING

Martin Fitzgerald's is in excruciating pain. He continues writing through tears.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)

My insides burn. It's a burning that I feel could consume me. It's taken me all these months to figure out how to cope with it. At first I tried to define it. Is it rage? Pain? Guilt? I missed Michael. I thought of those poor parents in that small town and imagined they must have felt this way. And then God spoke to me and said, 'all this time, this is how much I loved you.'

Martin bursts into tears. They land on the letter.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)

Because I was far from God, like Michael is far from me now. And that separation is the most excruciating feeling imaginable. It's not the pain of death. It's not the hatred or rage. It's life without those we love that hurts most.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION CENTER - SAMMIE'S CELL

Sammie is in tears.

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.)

And I confess to you before God that it was my guilt that ruined most of my life and Michael's. I couldn't repay the blood I'd spilled. And when Michael's blood

(MORE)

MARTIN FITZGERALD (V.O.) (CONT'D)

was shed, I admit that I wanted
your blood. But I realized the
blood of Christ paid those debts.
So, I asked you in the beginning,
'what does a man say to the
murderer of his only son?' He says
'I forgive you as Christ has
forgiven me'. God bless you,
Martin S. Fitzgerald.

Sammie holds the page up to his face weeping. He rocks back
and forth. He is still dazed from the drugs.

SAMMIE
(praying)
Jesus. Please.

Sammie weeps.

Sammie's eyes open up wide. He can see clearly. All the
effects of the drug are gone.

Sammie turns and sees SUNLIGHT reach into his prison cell.

Sammie smiles.

INT. MARTIN FITZGERALD'S LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Martin sits down on the sofa chair with the MAIL. Next to
him is a bottle of MINERAL WATER and a GLASS. There is also
a BIBLE.

Martin tosses aside a couple bills. He looks at a POST CARD
from a prison. It's from Samuel Wiggins.

Martin reads Sammie's short note.

SAMMIE (V.O.)
They moved my flesh to a new
prison, but my soul has found a
home in Christ. Please visit.
Sammie W.

Martin's eyes well up.

Visiting hours are CIRCLED and a CROSS is drawn next to it.
Martin touches it.

TITLE:

ATONEMENT

FADE TO BLACK

THE END

