

TAWBA

by

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ON BLACK

SUPER: Tawba - The act of being repentant for one's misdeeds.

INT. AFGHAN TORTURE CELL - DAY

A man SCREAMS as chrome dental forceps TEAR his molar free.

The forceps loosen their grip and drop the tooth on a nearby chrome tray covered in dental tools, teeth, and blood. The man's scream yields to piteous moan.

The dentist, SHIRZAD (40's), stands over his "patient," still clutching his forceps. His patient/prisoner, an Afghan man in his 20's, sits bound to a metal chair, blindfolded and bleeding.

An armed guard stands by the cell door, clutching a Kalashnikov and smoking a home rolled cigarette.

With a dead, emotionless look in his eyes, Shirzad leans in close and whispers in other man's ear.

SHIRZAD

(in Dari; subtitled)

Tell me what I need to know.

The man flinches away. Tears trace rivulets in the dust on his cheeks. He speaks through swollen lips and bleeding gums.

AFGHAN MAN

P-Please... No more...

A weary sigh escapes Shirzad's lips. He straightens, grabs the man's hair with his left hand, pulls the man's head back. He inserts the forceps into the man's mouth once again.

AFGHAN MAN

No! No more! I'll talk! I'll talk!

Shirzad removes the forceps and places them on the tray. He nods to the guard, who opens the cell door.

Shirzad picks up his tray and leaves the cell without another look at the broken man.

INT. AFGHAN PRISON RESTROOM - DAY

Clear, hot water runs from a gooseneck faucet into a white ceramic sink. The water becomes pink as Shirzad washes the blood from his dental instruments.

When the only items left on the chrome tray are the teeth, Shirzad pauses. He stares at the teeth for a long moment, then empties the tray in the sink.

The teeth swirl in the pink water, then disappear down the drain.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Shirzad walks alone. No one pays him any attention. He's just another face in the crowd.

On the horizon, the sun begins to set.

EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Shirzad stands before the closed apartment door. With a conscious effort, he forces a SMILE.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Shirzad opens the door. He's greeted by YAMIN (8).

YAMIN

Father!

The boy runs to Shirzad and wraps his arms around the older man. Shirzad returns the hug as his eyes find his wife, KAIA (40's), and daughter, FIDA (14) reading near the window.

Kaia rises to greet her husband. Yamin releases his father, returns to his toys. Kaia steps in for a hug and kiss.

KAIA

How was your day, Shirzad?

Still smiling, Shirzad maintains the charade of normalcy.

SHIRZAD

Tedious. I'm glad to be home.

Kaia smiles back.

KAIA

I'll start dinner.

Kaia heads to the kitchen. Shirzad settles into his chair, all traces of the torturer within temporarily forgotten.

INT. APARTMENT - DINING AREA - LATER

Shirzad and his family gather around the table to share dinner. They eat and laugh, their conversation animated. By all appearances, they're genuinely happy.

INT. APARTMENT - SITTING AREA - LATER

From his chair, Shirzad stares out the window, lost in thought.

Kaia emerges from the hall, turning out lights behind her. She walks behind her husband, rubs his shoulders.

He returns from his reverie, his hands finding hers.

KAIA

*Yamin is already asleep. Fida won't
be far behind.*

She bends down, speaks softly in his ear.

KAIA

Are you coming to bed?

MEMORY FLASH - Shirzad's lips whisper in the prisoner's ear.

Shirzad releases his wife's hands.

SHIRZAD

Soon.

Kaia nods. Disappointment creeps around the edge of her features, but she fights to keep it hidden. She glides into the hall, disappears into the bedroom.

Shirzad reaches for the book on the stand beside his chair: a copy of the Quran. In the dim light, he reads in silent contemplation.

INT. AFGHAN PRISON - WARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Shirzad stands before the warden's desk. The man behind the desk, HAFIZ (50's), reeks of cruelty.

Hafiz studies an open folder on his desk while he speaks. He doesn't afford Shirzad the courtesy of eye contact.

HAFIZ

He's waiting for you in the cell.

(CONTINUED)

SHIRZAD

Who is he?

HAFIZ

*We don't know. He offered nothing
during his initial interrogation.*

For a brief moment, Hafiz looks up.

HAFIZ

Make him talk.

INT. AFGHAN TORTURE CELL - DAY

Shirzad enters, holding his tray of instruments before him. The guard watches him enter, but doesn't offer any greeting.

A CAUCASIAN MAN (30's) sits bound and blindfolded in the metal chair. He's covered in bruises, burns, and blood, remnants of his initial interrogation.

Shirzad places his tray on a stand by the man. With steady, practiced hands, he removes the man's blindfold. The prisoner blinks against the light, finds Shirzad's eyes.

SHIRZAD

Dari?

No response.

SHIRZAD

English?

The man hesitates, nods. Shirzad gestures to his tools.

SHIRZAD

*You have been sent to me because
you are withholding information.*

Shirzad picks up his forceps.

SHIRZAD

Tell me what I need to know.

No response. Shirzad gestures to the guard, who shoulders his rifle and moves behind the man.

The guard pries the prisoner's mouth open as Shirzad forcefully extracts a molar. He refuses to scream.

SHIRZAD

*An adult male has 32 teeth: 8
incisors, 4 canines, 8 premolars, 8
(MORE)*

(CONTINUED)

SHIRZAD (cont'd)
molars, and 4 third molars,
assuming they haven't been
surgically removed.

(beat)

You now have 31 teeth. I have
nothing but time.

(beat)

Tell me what I need to know.

The man glares at Shirzad, then spits blood on the floor. He
stares straight ahead.

Shirzad gestures for the guard to return to his post. He
then leans in to speak softly, his back to the guard.

SHIRZAD

What is your name?

The man's eyes flit to the guard.

SHIRZAD

He doesn't speak English. Your
name.

ETHAN

Ethan.

SHIRZAD

Ethan. Good. Listen to me, Ethan. I
want to inflict pain even less than
you want to suffer through it.

ETHAN

Then don't.

SHIRZAD

If I don't, then my family will
suffer. That cannot happen.

ETHAN

(disbelieving)

You have a family?

SHIRZAD

They believe I am a dentist.

ETHAN

You know what you really are.

SHIRZAD

I do. May Allah forgive me.

Ethan's eyes flit to the guard again.

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

(conspiratorial)

Look. I can get your family to safety. I have an extraction team positioned inside the city. If I can just get a message to them...

Shirzad considers, then replaces Ethan's blindfold.

SHIRZAD

I will not put my family in danger.

Shirzad turns to his tray and resumes his role as torturer.

INT. AFGHAN PRISON - WARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Hafiz fumes from behind his desk. Shirzad stands before him.

HAFIZ

Nothing?

SHIRZAD

I am sorry.

HAFIZ

No apologies. Work harder.

Hafiz returns to his papers, wordlessly dismissing Shirzad.

INT. AFGHAN PRISON - HALLWAY - DAY

Shirzad shuffles down the hallway. His emotionless eyes now rest beneath a furrowed brow.

INT. AFGHAN TORTURE CELL - DAY

The WHINE of a DENTAL DRILL fills the small space.

Shirzad steps back and looks into the eyes of his prisoner, his expression pleading. Ethan refuses to break.

Hesitantly, Shirzad returns to his drilling.

INT. AFGHAN PRISON - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Shirzad leans against the wall, a phone to his ear.

SHIRZAD

I'm sorry. The surgery can't wait until tomorrow. I'll be home late.

(CONTINUED)

KAIA (O.S.)
You work so hard for us, Shirzad.
(beat)
I'm proud of you.

SHIRZAD
*I'll come home when as soon as I
can.*

Shirzad hangs up the phone, his face full of anger.

INT. AFGHAN TORTURE CELL - NIGHT

Shirzad extracts another molar from Ethan's mouth. He grabs a sickle probe, presses the sharp point into the open wound.

An agonized SCREAM escapes Ethan's lips.

SHIRZAD
Tell me what I need to know.

Panting, exhausted, in agony, Ethan finds a point on the far wall and focuses his attention there.

Shirzad SLAPS him, hard. Ethan's wide eyes find Shirzad's, and the determination behind them.

SHIRZAD
Ethan. Tell me what I need to know.

Understanding dawns on Ethan. Shirzad leans in close. Ethan whispers into Shirzad's ear.

INT. APARTMENT - DINING AREA - NIGHT

Shirzad shares another meal with his family. He soaks in their faces, their joy, their innocence.

INT. APARTMENT - SITTING AREA - LATER

Shirzad reads once again from the Quran. He closes the book, places it back on the stand.

EXT. CITY STREETS - MORNING

Shirzad walks to work, an intense expression on his face. The rising sun is at his back.

INT. APARTMENT - MORNING

FOUR SOLDIERS burst into Shirzad's apartment. They snatch Kaia, Fida, and Yamin from their beds.

Soldiers bark commands. Kaia fights back. Her children wail in fear. The soldiers usher them into the hallway, leaving overturned furniture in their wake.

Shirzad's copy of the Quran lies open on the floor.

INT. PRISON RESTROOM - DAY

Shirzad serenely washes the tools of his trade. He finds his reflection in the mirror. The emotionless, dead expression gives way to a bittersweet smile.

INT. AFGHAN PRISON - WARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Shirzad sits opposite Hafiz. Distant sounds of gunfire and shouting erupt from deep within the prison.

Hafiz grabs a gun from his desk, bolts from the office.

Shirzad doesn't move. He closes his eyes, begins to pray.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Two members of the extraction team drag a battered Ethan between them. Ethan hobbles along, looks up.

Dust swirls around the Black Hawk sits in their path. Dust swirls around the helicopter. Its door slides open.

Inside, Ethan spies Shirzad's family. The extraction team shoves Ethan in, follows him, then slides the door closed. The helicopter rises into the air.

INT. AFGHAN PRISON - WARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Hafiz bursts in, finds Shirzad is seated where he was when the chaos began. He storms toward Shirzad, shoves the gun into his temple. Shirzad SMILES in PERFECT SERENITY.

CUT TO BLACK

ON BLACK

The sound of a gunshot echoes in the darkness.

THE END