

Butchery

Five soldiers in Iraq find the body of an insurgent; one wants to decapitate him to send a message to other insurgents, another wants to stop him. After all, he's already dead; what's a body worth?

FADE IN:

EXT. TIKRIT, IRAQ - DAY

Two U.S. humvees sit in the road next to a bombed-out building.

IRAQIS pass quickly, not wanting to attract attention.

INT. ABANDONED BUILDING - DAY

On the second floor, American soldiers KYLE LOWELL, 20s, and DIEGO GONGORA, 18, sit by the wall.

FARHAN KHAN, 20s, an Iraqi civilian, is seated alone.

Near the window, Staff Sergeant WALKER HARRING, 30s, peers through binoculars at the building opposite.

Harring lifts his radio to his lips.

HARRING
(through radio)
How're we looking?

EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING ROOFTOP - DAY

Scout sniper BILL SIMMS, 20s, peers through his scope at adjacent roofs and windows.

FRANK BURDICK, 20s, lies on his stomach next to Simms, binoculars in hand.

SIMMS
(through radio)
Still clear, Staff Sergeant. No unfriendlies.

HARRING
(over radio)
Acknowledged.
(beat)
Hold on a second. Civilians.

INT. ABANDONED BUILDING - DAY

Harring stares down the street.

Gongora walks up behind Harring, looks over his shoulder.

Iraqi SCHOOLCHILDREN, roughly ten years old, walk down the street, shoving each other, laughing, growing up in a war zone.

EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING ROOFTOP - DAY

In Simms' scope, the Iraqi children pass right through the cross-hairs.

He blinks, startled.

SIMMS
(into radio)
They're in the way.

HARRING
(over radio)
Stay on package. They'll pass.

Simms shakes it off.

BURDICK
What?

SIMMS
Stare through the scope long enough, you forget you're looking at real people.

Burdick doesn't reply.

INT. ABANDONED BUILDING - DAY

Gongora looks over Harring's shoulder at the kids.

GONGORA
We should shoot them now, save us some trouble in the future.

Khan pretends he didn't hear. Lowell looks over.

HARRING
I think we're here to save the Iraqis, Gongora, not kill them.

GONGORA
I'm sorry, Staff Sergeant, I just get confused when they shoot at me.
(to Khan)
What do you think, Ishmael?

Beat.

KHAN

My name is Farhan Khan.

GONGORA

Sorry, didn't realize, Ishmael.

HARRING

Focus, Gongora. And grow up.

Lowell stands in the back.

LOWELL

What's it matter, Staff Sergeant? We're back-up. The other platoon got the glamor work.

HARRING

We'll still do our jobs.

Lowell comes to the window.

LOWELL

And he's got a point. It is getting hard to tell the good ones and the bad ones apart.

SIMMS

(over radio)

Target re-acquired. Area still clear.

HARRING

(into radio)

Acknowledged.

(to Gongora and Lowell)

And I'm beginning to think I'm giving you shitheads too much leeway. Sit the fuck down and shut up --

BURDICK

(over radio)

I got activity.

They're all instantly on-point.

EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING ROOFTOP - DAY

A platoon of SOLDIERS drag a bound Iraqi INSURGENCY LEADER out of the building opposite. An Iraqi WOMAN runs behind them, wailing.

BURDICK

That's him.

Simms lines the Insurgency Leader up in the cross-hairs.

Beat.

SIMMS

It doesn't matter. He's done.

BURDICK

Roofs still clean. No unfriendlies.

The Soldiers throw the Insurgency Leader into their humvee.

SIMMS

(into radio)

Package is on the move.

HARRING

(over radio)

Confirmed. Let's go.

Simms and Burdick grab their gear.

EXT. TIKRIT, IRAQ - DAY

The first humvee with the captured Insurgency Leader lurches off down the street.

Our boys come flying out of the building, climb into the second humvee.

Gongora's in the driver's seat. Simms and Lowell stand, propping rifles over either side of the vehicle.

They drive off.

The Iraqi woman wails, cursing them, throwing sand after them.

INT. HUMVEE - DAY

Burdick, Harring, and Khan sit in the humvee, staring out the cracked bullet-proof glass at passing Iraqis.

Two Iraqi MEN run with the humvee, yelling at the vehicle.

Lowell swings his gun over at the Men.

Harring tenses.

HARRING
What're they saying?

KHAN
I can't hear --

HARRING
What good is a translator --

Beat.

KHAN
They want work. With the Americans. Like
me.

The Iraqi Men fall back, unable to keep up.

Lowell relaxes.

Harring laughs.

HARRING
Nothin' against you, Khan, but hiring too
many of you boys would be a pretty damn
stupid move.

BURDICK
Even for this war.

HARRING
Even for this one.

They look at Khan.

KHAN
I hate Saddam Hussein. I love Bush.

GONGORA
(from the front seat)
Of course you do; your women don't shave
it.

Gongora laughs hard. Khan laughs with him, uncomfortably,
not getting the joke.

Harring and Burdick smile, too.

EXT. TIKRIT, IRAQ - DAY

The Humvee passes by many Iraqis. Men, women, children.

INT. HUMVEE - DAY

Simms, standing by his gun, watches them intently.
And then they leave town, and it begins to disappear.
Lowell grits his teeth.

LOWELL
Another fuckin' mission, no shots fired.

SIMMS
Thank God for that.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF TIKRIT - DAY

The humvees reach pure desert. They drive through sand
and scorching heat.

INT. HUMVEE - DAY

Gongora drives quietly. All the soldiers relax, breathe a
little easier.

Burdick takes a swig from his canteen.

BURDICK
It's fuckin' hot.

HARRING
I hate this country.

Khan listens, smiles politely.

Suddenly:

There's gunfire.

The humvee's windshield shatters.

Bullet-holes begin to dot the vehicle, lining its side.

BURDICK
Shit!

HARRING
Enemy fire! Enemy fire!

Gongora yelps from the front. He's been shot.

Khan drops low, terrified.

The gunfire continues: loud, immediate, repetitive.

Burdick and Harring reach for their weapons.

Simms and Lowell are already firing in opposite directions, strafing the area.

BURDICK

How many?!

HARRING

I can't tell!

Chaos.

GONGORA

(pained)

Christ.

Gongora slams the brakes. The humvee skids to a halt, and Gongora falls out of the vehicle, clutching his arm.

Simms and Lowell fire like madmen.

Simms controls his fear, stops firing, scans the horizon.

A lone INSURGENT fires at them from far away with a machine gun.

SIMMS

I see him!

Simms swings his gun around and fires repeatedly.

The Insurgent falls.

The enemy fire stops.

Lowell's still firing in the opposite direction, not taking any chances.

Harring stands, puts a hand on Lowell's shoulder. He finally stops.

There's quiet.

SIMMS (CONT'D)

Was there only one?

HARRING

I think so.

SIMMS

Why would he attack us if he was only one?

Lowell looks off, sees the first humvee disappearing in the distance.

LOWELL

They didn't stop.

HARRING

They had to get the prisoner back. That was their priority.

The humvee's gone.

HARRING (CONT'D)

Where's Gongora?

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The men clamber out of the humvee. Burdick is holding Gongora down, looking at him.

GONGORA

(cracking)

Am I gonna be okay? Goddamn--

BURDICK

Hold still; let me look.

GONGORA

Christ...

BURDICK

It's surface, man, you'll be fine.

Beat.

GONGORA

Are you sure?

BURDICK

It's only a graze.

Gongora laughs, in pure relief.

Harring, Burdick, and Khan relax, relieved.

Burdick opens the med kit.

BURDICK (CONT'D)
All you need's a tourniquet.

Lowell and Simms stare off to where the Insurgent fired from.

LOWELL
(quiet)
You got the first kill, Simms. You want to look?

Simms looks unsure.

LOWELL (CONT'D)
Permission to approach, Staff Sergeant?

HARRING
With caution. Burdick, you stay back with Gongora --

GONGORA
The bastard shot me. I wanna see him, too.

Gongora gets up. It's painful, but he manages.

HARRING
Fine. We all go.

Holding their weapons at ready, the five Soldiers run forward in perfect unison.

Khan, unsteady, follows.

Soon they see:

The Insurgent, 20s, thin and bearded, arms splayed, machine gun five feet away, blood leaking out like a sieve.

HARRING (CONT'D)
Jesus.

GONGORA
Simms, you almost cut him in half.

Simms sees it and looks away, horrified.

Khan, too, can't look. Burdick looks like he wants to throw up.

Still, they approach closer.

And then Lowell notices something.

LOWELL
He's still breathing.

HARRING
Bastard's alive.

They reach the Insurgent. He looks up at them through blood-stained eyes.

Mumbling something over and over.

LOWELL
What's he saying?

Khan listens.

INSURGENT
(repeating weakly)
... Laa illaha illal Lah... laa illaaha
illal Lah...

GONGORA
Is he singing?

Beat.

KHAN
He's praying.

LOWELL
What's he saying?

KHAN
"There is no God but Allah." It is
something Muslims say. Before they pass.

Gongora cackles.

GONGORA
No God but Allah?!
(to the Insurgent)
There's Jesus, bitch!

SIMMS
Shut up, Gongora!

GONGORA
Are you kiddin'? I feel alive! This is
combat, boys! I feel alive!

HARRING

Shut up.

Gongora falls silent.

INSURGENT

(weaker)

... illaha illal ...

Harring puts his gun in the Insurgent's face and fires.

The gunshot echoes.

Gongora flinches back. Khan cringes. Burdick and Lowell watch quietly. Simms stares, dead-eyed.

Beat.

HARRING

This was a mercy kill. He would've died,
anyway.

They all feel the same.

They all shake it off.

Gongora stares down at the body.

GONGORA

I can't explain it. He doesn't look any
different but he does. I can tell he's
dead.

HARRING

Let's go.

Harring walks off. Burdick and Gongora follow. Then Simms and Lowell.

But not Khan.

He quietly kneels near the body and closes the Insurgent's eyes.

LOWELL

What're you doing, Khan?

Khan looks up. Lowell's right there. Watching him.

KHAN

It is nothing --

Lowell crouches down next to him.

LOWELL

It's okay. Talk to me a second. What're you doing?

The others stop, notice something's up. They wait.

KHAN

It's how we treat our dead. We close their eyes.

LOWELL

What happens if you don't?

KHAN

The Prophet Mohammed said you should. We do.

LOWELL

What else did he say?

HARRING

(calling out)

What's going on? What's the hold-up?

LOWELL

(yelling back)

One minute, Staff Sergeant!

(to Khan)

What else did your Prophet say? What are the rituals?

KHAN

Why are you asking --

LOWELL

Just learning the local culture, Farhan. Expanding my mind.

Harring begins heading back, noticing something up. So do the other men.

KHAN

Maybe we should go --

LOWELL

You closing his eyes 'cause you want him to reach Paradise, Khan? Huh?

KHAN

It is not like that.

LOWELL

I think you're one of them.

KHAN
No.

LOWELL
Prove it.

KHAN
How?

LOWELL
Tell me your traditions.

The others arrive.

HARRING
What's the hold-up, Lowell?

LOWELL
Farhan here was just telling me about
Muslim traditions. How do you treat your
dead, Farhan?

GONGORA
What the fuck is this bullshit?

LOWELL
Humor me a second. Tell us, man.

Beat.

KHAN
There are things we should say over the
body. Things we shouldn't say. The
funeral should go quickly. We bury them
facing Mecca. You shouldn't stand over
the grave, or wipe your hands over a
grave, you shouldn't break the bones of
the dead --

LOWELL
That's the one.

Lowell stands, looks at the other men.

LOWELL (CONT'D)
This fucker's not going to Paradise. Not
if I can help it.

Beat.

SIMMS
You're not saying what I think you're
saying --

LOWELL

I'm not letting his buddies come along,
give him a hero's burial. I want them to
know he's rotting in hell.

BURDICK

That's real funny, Lowell.

LOWELL

I want to decapitate him.

Khan steps back, away from the circle, shaking.

KHAN

(quietly)

Allah.

Simms turns to Harring.

SIMMS

Staff Sergeant, you can't let this
happen.

HARRING

He was shooting at us.

SIMMS

This isn't our mission --

LOWELL

No one has to know, Staff Sergeant.
Except the monkeys that find the fucker.

SIMMS

Staff Sergeant...

Harring looks at Simms.

SIMMS (CONT'D)

Please... no...

Beat.

HARRING

(quietly)

I'd rather he take it out on the body
than on a civilian. Just get it all out.
It's just a corpse, Simms. It's not a
life.

BURDICK

This is wrong.

LOWELL

We gotta teach them a lesson.

BURDICK

What if they did this to us? What if they mutilated one of our guys?

LOWELL

And they don't?!

Lowell gets right in Burdick's face.

LOWELL (CONT'D)

You look me in the face and you tell me they don't. You tell me we've never seen this shit.

Burdick goes quiet.

LOWELL (CONT'D)

That's right. You told me, Frank, we want to win this war, we've got to put up or shut up. Guess what? This is putting up.

SIMMS

We need to be different from them.

LOWELL

That's how you lose, by being a fuckin' gentleman. This is war, Simms.

SIMMS

This is butchery.

LOWELL

The fuck you think war is?

Beat.

GONGORA

You shot him, Simms. You took him down.

SIMMS

That's goddamn different!

GONGORA

He's just a body now. It doesn't seem worse.

SIMMS

I have kids, man!

GONGORA

What's that got to do with anything?

Everything.

You can see it in Simms' eyes.

GONGORA (CONT'D)

You gotta remember, man. These aren't soldiers; they're terrorists. Animals. Remember 9/11 --

SIMMS

Sit down before you hurt yourself, you stupid fucking shit!

Beat.

LOWELL

It's just a body, Simms.

Simms look over.

LOWELL (CONT'D)

It's just a body. It's just a body.

Lowell takes out a blade. He kneels down, brings it forward, close to the corpse's neck.

Khan look over, furious but impotent. Burdick's fists clench, but he's quiet. Harring bites his lip. Gongora's grin is frozen across his face.

And Simms points his gun at Lowell.

SIMMS

No.

Lowell freezes.

All the other soldiers aim their guns at Simms.

HARRING

(to Simms)

What do you think you're doing, soldier?

SIMMS

Take a step closer, I'll shoot him, I swear.

LOWELL

(smiling)

You're gonna shoot me?

SIMMS
(shaking)
If I have to.

LOWELL
You're gonna fuckin' shoot me? Over what?
Over this? He's already dead!

SIMMS
Step back.

Khan watches.

LOWELL
Why?

SIMMS
I don't know.

HARRING
Put the gun down, man.

BURDICK
Sim, please.

The other soldiers advance on Simms.

LOWELL
Why, Simms?

SIMMS
What're we fighting here, Lowell? Why are
we way out in the middle of fucking
nowhere? What are we fighting for?

LOWELL
What are you fighting for?

A long beat.

Simms smiles weakly.

SIMMS
Life.

LOWELL
He's already dead.

SIMMS
Not his. Mine.

Lowell absorbs that.

SIMMS (CONT'D)

Put the knife away. Step back from the body.

Lowell nods, raises his hands, and begins to get up.

Harring attacks Simms quickly and knocks him down, kicking out his knees. Burdick and Gongora move to help. Simms is down in seconds.

They pin Simms down against the sand, holding him down.

HARRING

Fuckin' asshole, you never point a gun at one of my soldiers.

Burdick says nothing. Only holds Simms down.

Gongora looks to Lowell.

Lowell picks up the knife off the sand.

Simms struggles.

SIMMS

(muffled in the sand)

Nnnn! Nnnnn!

Khan watches, twenty feet back, horrified.

Lowell puts the knife blade against the Insurgent's neck.

He turns and looks at Simms.

Simms, sand-burned and barely breathing, stares back at him. Pleading.

Their eyes lock.

Simms tries to speak, but only sand comes out.

Lowell looks down at the knife. At the Insurgent.

A long moment.

Lowell stands up, puts the knife back, and leaves. He walks out.

The others stare.

And then one by one, they let Simms go.

Simms stands, shaking.

The men head back, leaving the body behind.

INT. HUMVEE - DAY

Harring drives.

Burdick re-wraps Gongora's tourniquet.

Lowell sits in the front passenger seat. He's looking down at the two dog tags he carries. He rubs his fingers over the letters.

In the back, Simms leans against the wall, exhausted. The right side of his face is cut up and bleeding.

Khan looks at him.

And smiles.

Simms looks back.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

They head home.

FADE OUT: