

KILROY: IN THE CASE OF VINCENT SY

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EXT. VIETNAM JUNGLE - 1968 - NIGHT

BLASTS OF GUNFIRE tear through the air. The jungle is in movement, swarming like a living creature.

A pack of SOLDIERS, alternately shooting and hiding, at the edge of panic. Some are bleeding. Some are being mowed down by their opponent VIET CONG faster than can be tracked.

The gunfire RATTLES. We find our attention drawn to a young soldier, PFC VINCENT SY, a thin and lithe Asian kid with blood streaming down his face.

A few yards to his left, Sy's comrade PFC HENRY WEST goes down with a SHOUT.

Sy struggles through the muck to reach his side. The swamp explodes in high splashes where the bullets lance close to him.

He is ten feet away. Seven. The SQUAD LEADER is SHOUTING ORDERS, incomprehensible, somewhere far off. The GUNFIRE seems to grow in intensity, overwhelming all other sounds, turning into a CONSTANT ROAR. Animal.

Sy is five feet away.

West reaches a shaking hand out to Sy. He is CALLING his name, but the sound is lost. Sy struggles closer.

An arc of bullets throws the water up in a wall of spray between them. They lance through Sy's body, sending jets of blood into the air. He begins to fall, amid West's SCREAMS.

INT. ANY AMERICAN CITY - DOWNTOWN BAR - 1971 - MORNING

The bar door opens. There's a glimpse of a wintery rainy street. A man slips in, haggard, the worse for wear, ill-dressed for the weather— it's Vincent Sy, the boy from the jungle. He looks older than his years. Gaunt. Hollow.

The door shuts.

The BARMAN watches Sy from the counter. Annoyance bordering on quiet fury. He seems to know this kid.

Sy approaches the bar and leans over it, braced on bare sinewy forearms dotted with traction marks. He's in a cold sweat, breathing raggedly. Rust-tinged dogtags hang from his neck.

BARMAN
(forced calm)
Hey, man, you don't look so hot.

SY
'Look so hot'... It's like a code.

BARMAN
You got money this time or what?

SY
Just give me something.

BARMAN
Get out of here.
(patience dissolving)
Get out of here. GI cocksucker.
Get the fuck out!

He grabs Sy by the collar of his shirt. Sy doesn't resist. Just lolls his head and grins, disoriented, until the barman drops him.

EXT. DOWNTOWN BAR - DOORWAY - MORNING

Sy exits the bar back into the rain. He GIGGLES.

BARMAN
(to another patron)
Sonzabitches brought a fucking
gook back wit 'em.

The door swings closed.

EXT. BACKSTREETS - MORNING

Sy's GIGGLES burst forth into LOUD LAUGHTER. The sound is muffled by the rain, which drips off the roofs of neglected warehouses and east-side businesses.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - MORNING - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Sy stumbles down into the alley of cragged and broken asphalt, littered with trash and soggy cardboard boxes. Rain streams down from the roofs in waterfalls, patters hard into the puddles.

Vincent Sy collides with a brick wall and slumps down into the mud. LAUGHING turning HYSTERICAL, morphing into SOBS.

He feels his chest. A thudding HEARTBEAT. A flash of the jungle with those enemy bullets tearing through flesh and bone. Sy claws at his arms, against the THUNDER of the RAIN and the ECHOED CRY OF SOLDIERS, remembered GUNFIRE.

He begins to choke. He lurches forward and gags, but the vomit is white and barely spittle.

SY

(incoherent)

Useless. They call you useless.
West. Jim- Smoke- Useless, dying
useless, all for nothing-

There's a brown bottle perched on a near box. He grabs it, up-ends. Nothing, empty.

SY

(moaning)

Sons of bitches. What do you know.
Fuck you. Fuck all of you!

He shouts the last of it, smashing his fist with the bottle against the wall. The bottle shatters in his palm.

Shards of glass peel from his bleeding hand, hitting the pavement with a sound like metal CHIMES. Sy wheezes, flexes the hand as the blood trickles down his arm.

He seizes a large chunk of glass imbedded in his skin and holds it up to examine the edge. It's a long, thick slab of glass, bloody and particularly sharp on one side, like a jagged knife.

Sy tests the edge against his wrist. Blood runs easily from the cut. Sy GASPS and PANTS from the pain, encouraging the blood out with his thumb, seeming fascinated by the effect.

His fingers close around the glass shard and slice his wrist again. Harder, deeper.

Again.

Again.

Thin trails of red curl in the rain puddles and turn the water pink with the froth and mud. Sy smears the bleeding cuts up and down his arm and SOBS quietly, WHIMPERING. He collapses into the water, hugging his body.

Sy's POV: Sideways. Something blurred and splitting in and out of focus. A MAN crouching some ten feet away, in a thick winter coat, good condition; hat, thick gloves, and a scarf that hides most of his face.

SY

What the fuck you looking at, man?!

The man continues to watch. He has old eyes. Irises a pale blue- like lightning.

MAN

Let's get you cleaned up.

INT. APARTMENT - LATE MORNING

A tiny, cramped tin can of an apartment. Neglected, nondescript- hard to tell if the man's been here a few days or a few weeks. Bare wooden floors, a small plastic table, a kitchen counter; the door to the bedroom is ajar, showing a broken bed, stacks of books.

An M-16 is leaned against the kitchen table. On the table, crinkling yellowed papers, a day-old newspaper with headlines about a general's assassination. Spare cartridges and bullets.

If one were to examine some of this, it'd look a bit suspicious. Clippings from old articles stretching from current to Truman administration; official-looking documents written in Chinese; small, sketched diagrams of what are possibly floorplans. The newspaper about the general. All signs point to a man who has been fervently busy.

Sy sits on the floor, against the wall and by the door. He watches, distant. The man removes his scarf and hat, his enormous coat and riding gloves. He starts on heating a pot of water on the stove and takes disinfectant and gauze from an almost barren cupboard.

Out of the coat, we see this man's older. Old enough to be Sy's father. Muscular, but wizened and scarred, with rough hands.

He kneels close to Sy with the pot of hot water and a washcloth. He starts to clean the boy's cuts.

MAN

Tell me about yourself.

Sy doesn't answer. He stares at nothing.

MAN

All right.

He starts dressing the wounds.

MAN

You're twenty-one. You're fucked up on something the dealer slipped you when you thought you were getting a deal. You're two years back in the World and it's been a lifetime in Hell, your parents won't talk to you, the whole universe'd prefer you died back in the mud. You hate loud noises and you hate darkness, and you hate the rain. And you chuck life like a Christmas tree on New Year's Day.

SY

(quietly)

I'm an atheist.

MAN

You're an idiot.

He leans closer and pulls up each eyelid to check pupil dilation.

MAN

But you'll live, if we can get
some food in you.

The man grins, seeming pleased at the thought.

SIRENS stir up in the distance. The man hesitates, almost
glancing back at the window.

He rises with the pot and goes back to the counter. He
dumps the bloody water into the sink and rinses it. He
locates an unmarked soup tin in the cupboard and opens it
into the pot.

MAN

Have to tell you we've seen better
days. If I had a choice it
wouldn't work out this way. These
are rough times you got yourself
landed in. We don't have room to
believe in soldiers anymore.

SY

(realizing)

You're a soldier.

MAN

A lifer. Lotta people's lives.

SY

'Nam?

MAN

Of course in 'Nam.

SY

Korea?

MAN

Korea. Japan. Russia. Italy. Back
then they called me a shipman.
Found my name in chalk on enemy
destroyers. Saw it painted on
walls in the streets of Berlin.
The great super GI. As time wore
on I didn't even need to sign
myself anymore. Other folks were

MAN (CONT'D)

doing it for me. Bathroom stalls. Library stacks. When Korea rolled around they drew it on the sides of tanks and branded it into their skin, but by the time Ho Chi Minh got spurned like a Jane Austen character, you kids were already thinking I was a myth your papas told.

SY

(hoarse)

'Kilroy was here.'

The man, KILROY, lights a cigarette and watches out the window.

Sy starts to stand up. He has a look on his face as though beholding his Maker.

SY

(stammering)

I don't... I met you. Back in the jungle. Kilroy. It... Smoke and West and me, the rest of the squad, we were... We'd gone on point for the platoon and we walked right into a trap, but... someone'd already been there before us. Pulled it down, pulled all the motherfuckers right down, stacked 'em up neat in a pile with a fuckin' calling card scraped into the mud.

Kilroy says nothing. The SIRENS are still somewhere far off in the city.

SY

Why did you leave us?

KILROY

That's just what happens.

SY

You're the only thing I believed in.

KILROY

I said these aren't the days to
believe in soldiers.

He shuts the stove off and slops the soup into a bowl.

EXT. IWO JIMA BEACH - 1945 - MORNING

A pack of American MARINES beach and run to shore through knee-deep surf. Enemy Japanese fire RAINS DOWN from the treeline.

Marines drop like flies. Some, such as a young green cadet, PVT MATHESON, make it to the dunes to return fire. He braces his rifle on his shoulder and squeezes the trigger.

The RATTLE of American gunfire is cut short by a sudden fiery EXPLOSION, swallowing up the trees. More firebombs follow.

Matheson looks up. No air cover. He begins to eyeball his trigger-finger.

CAPTAIN

Up and over! Up and over!

Still under sporadic fire, the marines climb over the dunes and make their way through the treeline.

EXT. BURNT FOREST - MORNING - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Scorched in an instant, gutted down to the corpses of trunks. The marines rush though with rifles at chest level.

Matheson looks over his shoulder as he runs; scans the trees. Vinelike wires snake down the tree trunks and disappear into the ashes of grass. They look as though they might have been connected to charges.

EXT. JAPANESE OUTPOST - MID-MORNING - CONTINUOUS ACTION

The marines emerge through the woods into the clearing of the Japanese military installation.

Further down the beach, the American invasion goes on, with GUNFIRE still echoing down along the shore. But around Matheson's platoon, the outpost is stripped and deserted, its occupants bleeding into the dirt where they lay.

Matheson studies the look of the soil by his feet. It looks as though scraped by the edge of a stick or rifle.

MARINE (O.S.)
Kilroy. It's Kilroy.

Matheson's eyes follow the scraped trail as it deepens and ashens, a clear sign of being scorched. The trail meets the wall of the outpost. Matheson follows it up and sees the wall in full.

A message has been scarred deep into the wood, cindered chunks still glowing a hot red. The phrase is simply

"KILROY WAS HERE".

MARINE #2 (O.S.)
Never thought I'd see that.

EXT. VIETNAM JUNGLE - 1968 - DUSK

PFC SY beholds a message carved into the mud of a Vietnamese village. The gaps are filled up with dirty rainwater mixed with blood. It turns a faint off-pink color.

"KILROY WAS HERE".

EXT. IWO JIMA FOREST - 1945 - TWILIGHT

PVT MATHESON runs through dense forest. He weaves, ducks under a low branch, leaps over a fallen log— following on the path of something, PANTING and pushing himself to keep running.

EXT. VIETNAM JUNGLE - 1968 - TWILIGHT

Decades away, Matheson's PANTING is matched by Sy's, as he rushes through the thick of leafy jungle forest, as though chasing a distant runner.

INT. APARTMENT - 1971 - NOON

The gray rain persists outside. Seated at the table by an empty bowl of soup, the three-years-old Sy allows Kilroy to slip the dogtags off from around his neck.

KILROY

Best thing the military ever did
was get its men to forget what
they are.

He holds the tags up to read.

KILROY

They made you a Sergeant.

SY

After the second Purple Heart.

KILROY

Used to be they sent you home
after two.

Kilroy rises and goes to the stove. He ignites the front burner and cranks the gas up so that its flame swells to a bright blue. He dangles the tags over it with a claw-like set of tongs.

KILROY

What's the first thing your body
learns in basic? Anonymity. You
are meat. You are cannon fodder.
It's just as well.

The metal begins to brown and contort beneath the heat.

KILROY

If there's one thing the history
of war teaches, is that there's no
such thing as an individual
soldier. Soldiers are an idea.
Soldiers are the extension of an
agenda. So if the agenda is
rotten, the soldier is rotten. And
that's what's fucked up this
nation, and fucked you and me up
along with it.

Kilroy tosses the tags into a sink half-full of water. The metal HISSES and steams, just a molten chunk on a chain by the time it hits the enamel.

KILROY

What were you really chasing in
that forest?

EXT. IWO JIMA FOREST - 1945 - NIGHT

Alone and struggling for breath, PVT Matheson keeps
sprinting forward.

EXT. VIETNAM JUNGLE - 1968 - NIGHT

Alone and exhausted, PFC Sy pushes himself to keep running.

INT. APARTMENT - 1971 - NOON

SY

Something to say 'keep going.'

KILROY

And did you find it?

SY

No.

EXT. VIETNAM JUNGLE - 1968 - NIGHT

Sy staggers to a halt between a cleft of trees, at the edge
of a swamp. He PANTS heavily. Looks around, fatigued;
beaten, lost.

He stares up at the stars, through the gap in the forest
canopy. The stars seem weak and distant.

Sy quiets his breath. He closes his eyes, grimacing, as
realization seems to come over him. The area is UNNATURALLY
SILENT.

Then,

WEST (O.S.)

VINCENT!

Sy is SHOUTING almost before he begins to turn.

SY

NO!—

PFC West and the rest of the squad emerge over a fallen trunk just as the trees ERUPT into GUNFIRE. A handful of men are mowed down in less than a second. The others take cover, as leaves fly and the marsh water is sent up in jets of spray.

WEST

Sy! SY!

SY

WEST!

The RATTLE of bullets dissolves to

INT. APARTMENT - 1971 - NOON

the rain pelting the window. The SIRENS are closer and more insistent.

The two men sit adjacent at the table. Kilroy lights another cigarette. He cups the lighter close, as though agitated.

KILROY

So what did you find in the end,
Vincent Sy? Truth? Faith? The love
of God?

SY

Hope.

KILROY

In what?

SY

That you were still out there.

KILROY

That's not an answer.

SY

I thought I'd find... a reason. A
definition.

EXT. IWO JIMA - CLEARING - 1945 - MORNING

Matheson staggers to a halt before the wreckage of an American plane.

He stares up at it, disoriented. Exhausted and directionless. Like he's lost whatever scent he was on.

A JAPANESE SOLDIER steps out between the trees, aims his rifle.

CRACK.

Matheson FALLS. He rolls from the plane into a ditch. Around him, a GUNFIGHT is still raging. He seems to have stepped into another battle zone.

Matheson clutches his bleeding arm and stops his slide near the bottom of the makeshift trench. He curls in on himself, bracing against the pain and the CACOPHONY going on around him.

A shape steps over him. It's a SOLDIER, regular infantry, with sleeves rolled up to his elbows, dogtags swinging from his neck, and "KILROY" printed above his breast pocket.

And then he's gone. Disappeared over the top, rifle BLAZING, as the sand sprays up around him.

INT. APARTMENT - 1971 - AFTERNOON

KILROY

A meaning, you mean?

Sy watches him.

KILROY

(socratic)

If soldiers are an idea, then what's the idea? What's the point?

Sy is SILENT.

He reaches out with his bandaged hand. He eases Kilroy's cigarette from his lips and takes a long drag for himself.

The SIRENS are right outside. Many floors below, there is a CRASH, like the front doors BREAKING OPEN. SHOUTS and RUNNING FOOTSTEPS up the stairwell.

Kilroy takes his cigarette back and rises, leaving his own dogtags on the table.

EXT. IWO JIMA CLEARING - 1945 - MORNING

Guns THUNDER. Bullets lance through the air and strike down soldiers left and right on both sides. Matheson hides his head in his hands against the side of the trench and trembles.

Up top, the young infantryman KILROY gets off two shots and then ducks behind the side of the fallen plane, slipping out the empty cartridge to begin reloading. He doesn't get far enough— an enemy bullet punches right through the plane's siding, and through him. Blood bursts through an exit wound straight through his heart.

Kilroy FALLS. Matheson witnesses the arc of his collapse, something surreal, like a bird pitfalling from the sky. Kilroy hits the sand and tumbles, rolling down into the ditch right where Matheson is hiding.

Matheson climbs over him, mouth open. Kilroy grabs at his sleeve. Matheson speaks, distraught, but the words are lost under the GUNFIRE and SHELLING. Kilroy clings tighter to him, says something. Insistent.

Matheson's eyes are wide open. They're a pale electric blue.

INT. APARTMENT - 1971 - AFTERNOON

Kilroy shields his blue eyes under his hat. He dons his coat and gloves. Puts out his cigarette on the floor. The THUNDER of FOOTSTEPS grows— now two floors beneath them, now nearly upon them—

Sy approaches when Kilroy reaches for the door. Kilroy shoves him back.

KILROY

Stay here until things quiet down.
Someone will be in touch with you.
He's an old friend. He'll get you
situated.

He picks the M-16 up from by the door.

KILROY

These are shit times you and me
got landed in, son. If I had my
choice I'd say let it all die. But

KILROY (CONT'D)
some things aren't allowed to go
away.

He readies the gun in his hands.

KILROY
Feel better, kid.

He kicks the door squarely with his boot. It bursts
outward, wrenching the hinges. He dashes out into the hall.

Guns SOUND, hollow and tinny, like firecrackers. Then
double, echo, grow into a BOOM, summoning up the POUNDING
RAIN, the THUNDER of MORTARS, the DEATH RATTLE of CHOPPERS,
HEARTBEATS, PERCUSSION.

Sy backs up, holding hands over his ears, eyes squeezing
shut.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

- A) The jungle, alive like the maw of a beast.
- B) Asian beachfront, bursting orange fire.
- C) Dark mountainside and a bloody knife shining in the
starlight.
- D) Pale, snowy wasteland.
- E) Sy's POV of Kilroy peering at him in the rain.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - 1971 - MORNING

The last carried-over gunshot dims into silence.

Sy stirs, crouched in a corner of the dingy bedroom. He
unfolds himself and stands, shakily. He exits into the
kitchen.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING - CONTINUOUS ACTION

The door leading to the hall is still ajar. The hallway is
littered with trash and the hints of burns and
bloodsplatter.

Sy finds the last tin of soup in the cupboard. He heats its contents in a pot over the stove.

As he sits at the table eating, the phone in the bedroom RINGS.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

An old and battered nicotine-yellow telephone RINGS SHRILLY. Sy picks it up with his unbandaged hand.

VOICE

Kilroy.

Beat. Final understanding seems to dawn in Sy's eyes.

He touches the old soldier's dogtags around his neck.

SY

(hoarse)

Speaking.

VOICE

Confirmed. Await instruction.