Camouflaging the Chimera

By Yusef Komunyakaa

We tied branches to our helmets. We painted our faces & rifles with mud from a riverbank, blades of grass hung from the pockets of our tiger suits. We wove ourselves into the terrain, content to be a hummingbird’s target.

We hugged bamboo & leaned against a breeze off the river, slow-dragging with ghosts from Saigon to Bangkok, with women left in doorways reaching in from America. We aimed at dark-hearted songbirds.

In our way station of shadows rock apes tried to blow our cover, throwing stones at the sunset. Chameleons crawled our spines, changing from day to night: green to gold, gold to black. But we waited till the moon touched metal, till something almost broke inside us. VC struggled with the hillside, like black silk wrestling iron through grass. We weren’t there. The river ran through our bones. Small animals took refuge against our bodies; we held our breath, ready to spring the L-shaped ambush, as a world revolved under each man’s eyelid.
