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.
