

# 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.

Yusef Komunyakaa, "Camouflaging the Chimera" from *Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poems*.  
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Yusef Komunyakaa's poems are rooted in his experiences as an African American growing up in rural Louisiana and his service in the Vietnam War. Influenced by the jazz music he loves as well as by people's everyday speech, his poetry has won a number of awards, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1994.

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