

# Facing It (1988)

## By Yusef Komunyakaa (United States)

*The speaker in this poem is visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. The monument, inscribed with the names of the Americans who died or disappeared in the Vietnam War, consists of two 250-foot-long black granite walls converging to a “V.”*

My black face fades,  
hiding inside the black granite.  
I said I wouldn't  
dammit: No tears.  
Line  
5 I'm stone. I'm flesh.  
My clouded reflection eyes me  
like a bird of prey, the profile of night  
slanted against morning. I turn  
this way—the stone lets me go.  
10 I turn that way—I'm inside  
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial  
again, depending on the light  
to make a difference.  
I go down the 58,022 names,  
15 half-expecting to find  
my own in letters like smoke.  
I touch the name Andrew Johnson;  
I see the booby trap's white flash.  
Names shimmer on a woman's blouse  
20 but when she walks away  
the names stay on the wall.  
Brushstrokes flash, a red bird's  
wings cutting across my stare.  
The sky. A plane in the sky.  
25 A white vet's image floats  
closer to me, then his pale eyes  
look through mine. I'm a window.  
He's lost his right arm  
inside the stone. In the black mirror  
30 a woman's trying to erase names:  
No, she's brushing a boy's hair.

