

Gum Tree in Viet

By: Rhea Jaitha

I'm running fast.
The wind thrusts my back,
forcing me to run faster and faster.
I steal a glance at the tree a few metres in front of me.
Gum Tree.

God I miss sitting on the porch with legs up,
listening to kookaburras' laugh echo through the cloudless sky,
like waves slowly rocking back and forth on the Bondi.
The taste of dry, sandy air seasoned with Saturday's barbie
rest in my mouth while I daydream amongst the whistling of crisp leaves,
whose veins were roadmaps of million, souled cities guiding me home.
My loose, untucked shirt was nothing like

the sweaty, camo uniform that sticks to me,
like a leech not willing to let go.
I try to distract myself from the rifle
fastened tight in my bruised hands,
with the soft drizzle that reminds me of

miracles freefalling from the silver sky with wisps of genies who overlook
kangaroos frolicking around to catch raindrops on their tongue,
barren shrubs morphing into emeralds as honeyeaters' chorus brightens.
Birth of sprouts gulping breaths of fresh air signify won battles against the army of soil,
like baby wombats peeking the promise of spring through colours of local festivals.
Soon the pitter-patter slowly falls out of line with the harmony of my pulse,
but rain or no rain, Australia is where is my heart beats, and my heartbeat is far from

the thick air surrounding me that suffocates,
choking me to death then reviving me
only to choke me again with blurring screams of death.
I hate this slouch hat, I hate the humans making me carry this gun,
I hate that my birthday was drawn from the draft.
I'm too lost to remember whether I was running or

walking along arid plains towards the horizon barefoot with my little sister,
who would keep look out for koalas in gum trees as high as Ayers Rock,
and tawny snakes concealed within the tangles of the bottlebrush bushes.
Sifting my hand through the fine, fire sand just to see it
drift away in the cool breeze embraced me like Gran's warm hugs;
streaks of sunshine cycling into the dawn of the arising Southern Cross.
All's forgotten when I realise

I've passed the Gum Tree now.
I long for a glimpse back to remind me of home,
but then a rifle fires.
I look down but I can't quite tell
if it's Mum's red wine
or blood.