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Absorption of Rock

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We bought from Laotian refugees a cloth that in war a woman sewed, appliquéd 700 triangles—mountain ranges changing colors with H’mong suns and seasons, white and yellow teeth, black arrows, or sails. They point in at an embroidery, whose mystery seems the same as that posed by face cards. Up close, the curls and x’s do not turn plainer; a green strand runs through the yellow chains, and black between the white. Sometimes caught from across the room, twilighted, the lace in the center smokes, and shadows move over the red background, which should shine. One refugee said, “This is old woman’s design.”

We rented a room to a Vietnam vet, who one Saturday night ran back to it—thrashed through bamboo along the neighborhood stream, then out on to sidewalk, lost the police, though he imprinted the cement with blood from his cut foot. He came out of the bathroom an unidentifiable man. His strange jagged wound yet unstaunched, he had shaved. Yellow beard was mixed with blood and what looked like bits of skin in the tub and toilet. On the way to the hospital, he said, “Today the M.C. raised his finger part way. They’re just about ready to gong my act.”

We search out facts to defend a Vietnamese, who has allegedly shot to death a Lao in Stockton, outside a bar. It was in fear, we hear him say, of a cantaloupe or rock that the Lao man had caused to appear inside him. One anthropologist testifies
that Vietnamese driving in the highlands
rolled up the windows against the H'mong air.
The H'mong in Fairfield were not indicted for
their try at family suicide; there was a question
of a Lao curse or want of a telephone.
Three translators have run away—this fourth
does not say enough words.