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February: On the East Rim

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FEBRUARY: ON THE EAST RIM

- for Jon Hershey

Luminous in starlight, the granite ledge hovers
over the canyon. I look back
up the trail where yellow windows
flicker through pines.

We left plates on the table,
bread crusts and salmon bones,
whiskey glasses by the fireplace,
and a cowboy whining on the radio
who'd rather be in pine box
on a slow train back to Georgia.

The Great Bear steps from the horizon.
A satellite cuts Orion's knees,
and the red and green lights
of a plane skate through western stars.
You knock my knee with the Cuervo.
I swallow and in my chest, a white crow
opens its fiery wings.
No moon, you say, and flick on the flashlight.
When you point it down over the edge it burns
a rod of silver---detached---illuminating nothing.
It can't reach the cliffs across the canyon
or the trees waving their arms in the dark
hundreds of feet below. You spit,
take a drink from the bottle,
set it down on the rock, stand up, and say,
Don't fall off the goddamn cliff.

I lie back in a crevice of the rock,
and wrap my coat around me, like the Colonel

who lay in the snow at Antietam, wrapped
the flap of a dead man's coat over him,
rested his head on the leg of another,
and slept soundly through the night.