February: On the East Rim

Michael D. Sowder
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- 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.