

For the Climbers

By Kevin Craft

Among the many lives you'll never lead,
 consider that of the wolverine, for whom avalanche
 is opportunity, who makes a festival
 of frozen marrow from the femur of an elk,
 who wears the crooked North Star like an amulet

of teeth. In the game of which animal
 would you return as, today I'm thinking
 snowshoe hare, a scuffle in the underbrush,
 one giant leap. You never see them
 coming and going, only the crosshairs

of their having passed, ascending the ridge, lost
 or not lost in succession forests giving way
 to open meadow where deep snow
 lingers and finally relents, uncovering
 acres of lily — glacier yellow, avalanche

white — daylight restaking its earthly claim.
 Every season swallows someone —
 Granite Mountain with its blunderbuss
 gullies, Tatoosh a lash on the tongue,
 those climbers caught if not unawares

then perfectly hapless, not thinking of riding
 that snowstorm to the summit, not thinking
 wolverine fever in the shivering blood,
 not thinking steelhead cutthroat rainbow
 or the languid river that will carry them out.

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