

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.

Source: *Poetry* (January 2015)