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)