

## To the Mountain

**Erik Raschke**

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In Erik Raschke's lean, taut novel *To the Mountain*, a father races to find his lost autistic son during a blizzard.

In a remote juvenile center in Colorado, twelve-year-old Marshall endures bullying, overzealous staff members, and intense sensory overload, forcing him to retreat inward. Marshall is on the autism spectrum, and his violent outbursts have overwhelmed his father, Jace.

Leslie, a kind orderly, takes Marshall under his wing; the two form a friendship. On a routine expedition away from the center, a van crash strands Marshall and injured Leslie in the midst of a wintery wilderness, where Marshall journeys upward in the mistaken belief that his mother's spirit is waiting at the peak.

Raschke's sparse prose evokes both the frozen isolation of the mountain, and the circumstances that lead to Marshall being stranded, well; the crash is described with a melodic cadence and visceral sensory details, as when the smell within the van is compared to a butcher shop scrubbed clean.

Jace is nearby working in search and rescue when he receives news of his son's accident. He makes a reckless attempt to find Marshall as the weather worsens and Marshall's already fragile psyche begins to splinter.

The novel excels at detailing how Marshall experiences the world, from how words are garbled in his hearing to the catchy song he uses to self-soothe. Within a few tense pages, it's clear that Marshall has strength inside. Jace's experiences split the narrative, resulting in a grounded view of Marshall's plight: Marshall may not be equipped to handle society, but thanks to Jace's unwavering love and dedication, he's learned important survival techniques.

In the lyrical and haunting novel *To The Mountain*, a father-son relationship is tested by traumatic events.

JOHN M. MURRAY (January / February 2021)

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