

## POETRY

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### Four Passes on Mount Horeb

*1 Kings 19:11-12*

*for Matthew Lyman Rasmussen*

*Les Blake*

#### *Pass I*

In winters it soothed me,  
the wind blistering peals  
through naked willows in the dark  
outside my bedroom window,  
while warm and bound I marked  
lost spirits sounding in the cold.

But summer waned,  
the threshold pressed upon my racing ear  
for Father's midnight pacing, broke with  
stark measured swearing  
at what death blew through the wheat crop  
in that godless zephyr's breath.

#### *Pass II*

Stakes driven into loose dry beans,  
each anchored root waits proof  
that nothing holds in quake  
outside a roof of holy soil.  
Atop each grating plate a voice  
bodes, layered in the noise—  
“There is no other ground or stand  
that I cannot destroy.”

*Pass III*

The ingredients are spare—  
heat, fuel, air.  
I saw the conflagration  
of a several-story pine,  
a wildland fire, south Utah,  
just prior jumped its line.  
Felled branches melting bootsoles  
dry O<sup>2</sup> crisp in lung,  
a desperate snap consumed by  
one last worse and cloven flame.  
Before I could exhale  
the same, black and white  
the burns the ash  
immersing whole the frame.

*Pass IV*

This is the new tongue.  
This will be your tongue.  
Hold your breath, your pain.  
Root yourself to the still-moving mount.  
Feel the heat of the word refrain  
as God rushes by  
bosom bent to the Earth.  
Straining.  
Straining.  
Strain.