

## Transfiguration

Mark Jarman - 1952-

*And there appeared to them Elijah and Moses and they were talking to Jesus. Mark 9:2*

1

They were talking to him about resurrection, about law,  
about the suffering ahead.  
They were talking as if to remind him who he was and  
who they were. He was not  
Like his three friends watching a little way off, not like  
the crowd  
At the foot of the hill. A gray-green thunderhead  
massed  
from the sea  
And God spoke from it and said he was his. They were  
talking  
About how the body, broken or burned, could live again,  
remade.  
Only the fiery text of the thunderhead could explain it.  
And they were talking  
About pain and the need for judgement and how he  
would  
make himself  
A law of pain, both its spirit and its letter in his own  
flesh,  
and then break it,  
That is, transcend it. His clothes flared like magnesium,  
as they talked.

2

When we brought our mother to him, we said "Lord,  
she falls down the stairs.  
She cannot hold her water. In the afternoon she forgets  
the morning."  
And he said, "All things are possible to those who  
believe.  
Shave her head,  
Insert a silicone tube inside her skull, and run it under  
her scalp,  
Down her neck, and over her collarbone, and lead it into  
her stomach."  
And we did and saw that she no longer stumbled or wet  
herself.  
She could remember the morning until the evening  
came.  
And we went our way,  
Rejoicing as much as we could, for we had worried  
many  
years.

3

They were talking to him about heaven, how all forms  
there were luciform,  
How the leather girdle and the matted hair, how the lice  
coursing the skin  
And the skin skinned alive, blaze with perfection,  
the vibrance of light.  
And they were talking about the complexities of blood  
and lymph,  
Each component crowding the vessels, the body and  
the antibody,  
And they were talking about the lamp burning in  
the skull's niche,  
The eyes drinking light from within and light from  
without,  
And how simple it is to see the future, if you looked at it  
like the past,  
And how the present belonged to the flesh and its  
density  
and darkness  
And was hard to talk about. Before and after were easier.  
They talked about light.

4

A man came to him who said he had been blind since  
his wedding day  
And had never seen his wife under the veil or the  
children  
she had given him.  
And the Lord said, "Tell me about your parents."  
And the man talked  
A long time, remembering how his mother cut his  
father's  
meat at dinner,  
And how at night their voices crept along his bedroom  
ceiling, like--  
But he could not say what they were like. And in  
the morning, everything began to tick  
And ticked all day as if. . . . Now, he remembered!  
And suddenly his sight came back and blinded him, like  
a flashbulb.

5  
They were talking to him about law and how lawgiving  
should be  
Like rainfall, a light rain falling all morning and mixing  
with dew--  
A rain the passes through the spiderweb and penetrates  
the dirt clod  
Without melting it, a persistent, suffusing shower,  
soaking  
clothes,  
Making sweatshirts heavier, wool stink, and finding every  
hair's root on the scalp.  
And that is when you hurled judgement into the crowd  
and watched them  
Spook like cattle, reached in and stirred the turmoil  
faster,  
scarier.  
And they were saying that, to save the best, many must  
be  
punished,  
Including the best. And no one was exempt, as they  
explained it,  
Not themselves, not him, or anyone he loved, anyone  
who  
loved him.

6  
Take anyone and plant a change inside them that they  
feel  
And send them to an authority to assess that feeling.  
When they are told  
That for them alone there waits a suffering in  
accordance  
with the laws  
Of their condition, from which they may recover or may  
not,  
Then they know the vortex on the mountaintop, the  
inside  
of the unspeakable,  
The speechlessness before the voices begin talking to  
them,  
Talking to prepare them, arm them and disarm them,  
until  
the end.  
And if anybody's looking, they will seem transfigured.

7  
I want to believe that he talked back to them, his radiant  
companions,  
And I want to believe he said too much was being asked  
and too much promised.  
I want to believe that that was why he shone in the eyes  
of his friends,  
The witnesses looking on, because he spoke for them,  
because he loved them  
And was embarrassed to learn how he and they were  
going to suffer.  
I want to believe he resisted at that moment, when he  
appeared glorified,  
Because he could not reconcile the contradictions  
and suspected  
That love had a finite span and was merely the comfort  
of the lost.  
I know he must have acceded to his duty, but I want  
to believe  
He was transfigured by resistance, as he listened,  
and they talked.