

Linda Gregerson
from The Life Of St Peter

(Brancacci Chapel, Florence)

The Death Of Ananias

(Acts 5:1-10)

There must have been something with-
held as if
you know the story you'll
know has been said about me.

I saw what we all saw: goats and cattle,
grain,
an ancient and three newer family
houses and finally

the second-best vineyard for miles around
converted
into silver and simply
laid on the ground at their feet.

And namely the one called Peter: how
is it
that one among equals will seem
to have harnessed the moon

and stars. I understood the next
part, how the
logic went: we hadn't been
savages all our lives, we'd helped

the poor before. But this was something
else, was like
the dizzying vista above the gorge:
you think you've been quite

happy, your loved ones are waiting to
welcome you
home and you can taste the broken rocks
below through all your broken

teeth, you know the terror won't be
over until
you've thrown your one allotted life
away. And so

I stepped back, just a little, from the
edge.
What kind of reckoning after all requires
this all-or-nothing? Hadn't I

torn the lovely acres from my heart?
Which he
esteemed as so much filth. The least
that would keep the cold off, that's

all I'd intended to put aside. You
see?
And cold came up to seize me.

The Tribute Money

Then, said my Master, *are the children*
free. Which you might think
would tell us what to do

but we had caught the scent
of parable. So hook, so fish, the
money in its mouth,

the mucus and blood
on the money. I paid the collector
as I'd been told and part

was the lesson and part was speaking
truth to power and still
there's part left over.

From whom, he said, do the kings
of the earth extract their tribute?
Shining in its mouth as

shines the golden hair
you see to my left in the picture. From
the stranger, we said. But he

my Master loved said nothing, nothing
but beauty was ever required
of him. *Then are*

the children free. Now look,
I'm not immune to this, I like
to work the likeness out:

for *pieces of money* read
gifts of the earth, for *hook*
read *yours for the asking*. But as to

the one with golden hair, read what?
That some shall leap while others
crawl? That even

the best of love is partial?
The fish that flashed a thousand
colours, though you throw

him back, will drown.
Which makes me think
the gills in their air-scorched frenzy must
extract some tribute too.