

*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.