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Peter

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Peter

A.H. JENNINGS

Ryan Chighizola Memorial Scholarship 2011

Jesus was short and raw-boned. He
smelled of sweat and funeral herbs.
Lazarus told me that as a boy, he
was not so serene, that he
had an awful temper. After
the Temple Incident, as
it is now called, we were separated
from the others. Jesus and I
ran together into the market, where
we paused, winded, near some disused
stalls once it had become clear that
we had lost our pursuers. We
leaned on our knees, breathing the
stench of dung mingled with foreign
spices, and when I could speak, I said,
‘They’ll kill you for this.

I was famous for my temper, but
my rages were never so dark or
formidable as his. Imagine
God’s face when He sent the rains
to drown the world. When He sent
His angels to raze Sodom and

Gomorrah--That expression was recalled in Jesus' face when he overturned the tables, railing against the defilement of his Father's house. He was so small, so unkempt. Watching him, I remembered his face made monstrous by anger and wondered where that anger had gone when it drained away. There were chicken feathers in his hair. He said, *I know. I know it. I have seen this thing, but The End is coming, and it is me.*

Jesus had three voices: his daily voice, quiet and slow, often made women blush. And there was the voice he used for declaiming in Aramaic--The Romans called it a gutter language. They mimicked it, making awful sounds like the snuffles and bleatings of barnyard animals. Jesus made it beautiful. He savored the taste of its clipped vowels, its soft gutturals. How straight his back when he said, *The first will be last, and the last, first.* We all wept. But The third voice, the one from That Day, frightened me. When he used it, his gaze would cease taking in the world and sharpen to an awful point, and his words would wrap around my neck like living things--swarm on me like carrion fish hungry for drowned flesh. Do you see now? I denied him three times. I, the Rock. When they asked, I said, *Yes, I am from Galilee, but say once more I know*

*that criminal, and I will cut your lying
throat.*

At the time, I thought, How could I know him?
How could anyone? He is so much more than I,
than all of us. But my lies weighed me down
like bricks fallen from the city wall.
I feared the cross, and more than that,
I feared him. That little man,
my dearest friend.

I sat with Lazarus after Jesus woke
him from the sleep of death. Hardly
speaking, we shared a jar of wine, and
frightened tears streamed down Lazarus's
face. He said, *Peter, I know now. I saw
him over there. He will end
the world.*

But what Lazarus did not
understand was that Jesus already had. The
world we live in is not the one into which
I was born. Countless learned men have
asked, What was Jesus? Was he God? Was
he the Messiah? But they do not understand:
Jesus was force. He was the moment when nature
becomes supernature. He was a quick glimpse
at the secret order, the artfully arranged
chaos that is creation.

When I think of him, I imagine the world
that came before viewed as a reflection
in a pool. Jesus' coming disturbed our lives
as a body disturbs water. Jesus loved the water, and
I believe this is why. When he called me out of the
boat, and I stepped onto the waves

while the others stayed behind, praying
as loud as they could, I realized that I walked
not on, but above the waves. Jesus stood a little lower,
And the water foamed and roiled beneath him, as
if boiled up by his very shadow. I knew then that
while I, through faith, am able to exert
my will over creation, Jesus need not do so, for
creation is his will made whole. When he was
born, The old order of the world passed away,
and--Ah. You are asleep. Take your rest, and tomorrow
I will go to my own execution on the cross—I consider
this a private joke between Jesus and myself.

When I go, much of what I have seen
will pass with me from this life, but when
I step forth into Jesus' living embrace, I will take
comfort in the knowledge that the very air, the
sand, the soil, even the sea, are forever changed
because he once trod the earth.