

Brancacci Chapel

by [Janie McCrary](#) in the [April 13, 2016](#) issue

Young Masaccio died before  
his paint had dried, but  
his time-battered fresco tells all:  
how man in the midst of figs and wine  
reaches for the whole banquet  
and loses all but the crumbs,  
which taste like poison.

Their sin is fresh; the doors of Paradise  
slam while heel still crosses the threshold,  
driven out by the upraised sword  
of a crimson-winged messenger of God  
who points their way to a world of dust.  
His flowing garment billows  
around their nakedness.

They walk toward us, look like us.  
His woe is inward, head bowed.  
His hands cover darkened eyes;  
from his mouth, muffled sobs.  
Yet he strides forward  
to face the wilderness  
which yet he does not comprehend.

She does. Her foreshortened face, skull-like,  
gazes up into the looming abyss.  
Eyes strokes of gloom,  
from her mouth a scream of agony  
for what she sees ahead:  
needles passing in dirty rooms,  
children shrunk to skeletons,

men strapped with bombs.