

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.