Frieze

By Alan R. Shapiro

Over an edge of cloud the naked angel
blasts his long horn downward and they rise,
or try to, skeletons, half-skeletons,
the still-fleshed bodies of the newly dead,
rising and pushing up the stone lids, heaving
the crypt doors open, clambering over one
another, dumbstruck, frightened, warily peeking
out from inside tombs, or out of ditches,
their eye holes blacker than the black they peek from
while some reach out of habit for a robe
to hide a nakedness they have no longer,
a phantom shame that must be all the bones
remember of the living flesh they were,

and all of them worn away to nearly nothing,
more wisp of form than form, more wraith than wisp,
as if before your eyes they’re sinking into
what they’re rising out of, coming into view
by fading from it, there and gone, as if
the very stone, unsure of what it holds,
can neither cling to nor relinquish now
the dream of something in it more than stone,
other than hard or heavy, as over the face
of it the air of a wished-for morning ripples
the robes to water while it washes through
the skulls and half-skulls tilted back to see
just what the noise is that won’t let them sleep.

Source: Poetry (February 2016)