

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)