“A Fresco”

All day I've been thinking of the grief on each of their faces, Adam and Eve.

The feeling is closest to a wave as it peaks, how it seems on the verge of self-consciousness before it collapses. Their mouths hold a single sound that divides, familiar as rain.

The angel points away from the green world behind them, out into the nave. I remember the woman standing there, turned to stone at the side altar, and the man next to her, the back of his overcoat on fire with reflected light. They stared straight ahead at The Expulsion and the cruel, distinct words passed between them. Tourists, a corsage at her heart, his brand new guidebook. What is startling is how the fresco works itself out from under the expectation of color. After a while in this air the other spectrum emerges:

no blues or reds but grades of dark and eerie white, as the paint thins and the lead extracts new expressions. They never raised their voices. The woman seemed like someone who had been loved, but without compassion. I don't know about the man. I recall the rest of that church now, how with small fierce gestures, votive fires were lit. The two figures burning in effigy.

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