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A Capuchin Monk

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A Capuchin Monk

*We were once as you and you will be as we.
—sign in the Capuchin crypt*

At the open door to this sacred chapel,
he encourages change from tourist-class gawkers
by shaking a plate of percussive coins
and grunting in anger if he's ignored.
He hoods himself to care for this church
and to face the hordes which flock to it
solely to glimpse its dismembered monks.

Friars conceived of a baroque decor.
The ceilings are graced with their sacra in stars.
Femurs frame ribs nailed in scrolling arrays
and intricate garlands of vertebrae.
Some robed remains were left intact,
hands poised in prayer or holding a cross.
Their heads are pillowed by piles of ulnas,
and around them are mountains of other arm bones.

It is his brothers' skulls which flank the altar,
and their scapulas hang as shields round a painting
of Jesus extending his flesh-covered palm.
So daily the door monk hallows this place,
fills vases with blossoms, and waters his pots
of spider plants issuing shoots of new life.
He knows this crypt holds his ultimate worth.

Linda Fuller-Smith