**Entertaining Caravaggio** *by Julian Bishop*

(after Caravaggio’s *Bacchus)*

The cardinal’s cock-eyed, the Master’s tired and emotional,

overdosed on Merlot and sun.

Back at the Palazzo I’m in a pretty state as we split a carafe,

arms charred as a martyr. I strip off my top, the cardinal whips

out emollients for the burn,

gestures to a divan, some dirty bed-linen as temporary robes -

he’s not frugal with a soothing rubbing-down. The wine flows

like the Fontana di Trevi,

the Master grinds some white lead in a pestle *for your chest* -

I detect a painting coming on. The cardinal offers me a crown,

tiara of tangled vines,

rustles up a platter of rotting fruit. I look a picture - ribboned

in a toga with bows, I’m a panettone, a sweet treat to titillate

the cardinal’s *inamorati.*

Bacchic on a grubby cushion, a chalice of fermented pleasure

ripples in my hot hand. I notice my nails need a good scrub,

I’m getting increasingly juiced.

For weeks, all I can think about is the cardinal’s spoiled fruit.