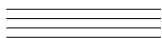


N O S T A L G I A



J A M E S A R T H U R

The museum was closed, so no one saw
the statue of Adam
tumble to the floor, and break. No one saw
the plywood pedestal
collapsing, when it couldn't hold the marble man
one second more.
Cameras weren't allowed at the scene of the accident
so no public images exist
of the curators sifting
through every fragment, hoping to rebuild Adam
from the wreck, but you can imagine
the disconnected hand
still gripping the apple. You can imagine the head
broken off at the neck.

There's no going back to the garden, she said –
no more reading poetry
in the reservoir park. No more origami.
There won't be any more lunches at the Green Room
or long weekends in New York.
No traveling by ocean liner.
No silk stockings, no poke bonnets, or broadfall pants
for the men.
No collecting beach glass
or writing out letters by fountain pen.

As the man and woman walked deeper into exile
from the garden outside of time,
their memories of where they'd come from
grew hazy, and recombined,

becoming pieces of a magic jigsaw
that never would stay together
or make any picture twice –
now a mystic wilderness
where a hyena was licking the injured flank
of a giraffe; now a couple
courting in the foreground of an ancient cenotaph.
The lovers had invented nakedness
and put on their garments made of shame.
The children
weren't children any longer, and everything
had changed – except for the angel
whose particular job it was
to stand at the garden gate forever, making sure
the man and woman
did not reenter, if somehow they came back.
And because angels
don't mind laboring without reward, the angel
didn't feel bored or disenchanted;
he didn't spend eternity on the thought
that he was getting punished
because of something that somebody else had done.
Whether he represented stubbornness
or human consciousness
or just himself, or the sun, he kept watching
all directions,
all at once. And never for a moment
did he put down his burning sword.