

MICHAEL WATERS

JCB

On the lawn, the grape-arbor drags its carcass toward the moon. It looks like the last woolly mammoth, large and shaggy, hauling its shoulderful of sparrows toward extinction. An unmistakable odor of sadness surrounds it, the odor of rotting vines, the rich scent of mouse-dung and shriveled grapes.

Once a family played croquet on this lawn. The son had an artificial arm that gleamed in the sunlight. Whenever he lost, his metal hand grasped the winner's in a technological advance.

Soon their lawn will be gone. The Appalachian Highway has already touched the neighbor's meadow with its leper's fingers. The house will be trucked to another hill, the grape-arbor burned and carted away.

This morning I found a mallet in the garage. On the curved head was carved: "My mallet, 1944, JCB." I imagine the one-armed boy, missing the war, propping the shaft between his knees one afternoon. Using his knife, he wanted to claim something solid, forever, for his own.