

JAMES ARTHUR

Country Seat

With the farmhouse, my accountant acquired a hilltop barn
that was as yellow as saffron, and empty except for mice
and the smell of hay: natural things in barns, like sociability in people.
In dragging letters across an outside wall, the previous owner
painted *Jesus saves*, and after Elliot took over, he filled the barn
with guns: cannons, tanks, motorcycles with full-bellied sidecars—
anything military with wheels. He oils them in the morning, and cries
because they are the most beautiful things he has owned
since his wife left. Well, at least you can defend the farm, I say, ha ha,
and he answers yes, so I change the subject. On Saturday,
he calls Baltimore, negotiating for a convoy truck, and later he tells me
about deductions and mutual funds. I could use a place like this,
I say, a country seat, and he answers, well listen to what I'm saying
about mutual funds. For dinner he grills lamb, and a ceramic gleam
rolls out of the west. On Sunday, we paddle across the lake to hunt.
You should trade one of those cannons for a real boat, I say.
We divide to look for tracks, and creeping forward
I am as solemn as a lake country missionary, my rifle a staff of office,
my daylight shells messages of communion—but I become bored
and stalk Elliot instead. His hat bobs through the trees,
and, at the bulrushes' edge, he rests on a log
to swallow the muzzle of his gun. We both wait to see what he will do;
the swamp descends into a hiss. As we return, I say nothing
and Elliott does not mention my paddle's left-leaning dip.
Look, he says, along the shore, those girls are naked.
I lean over the side and the boat glides forward, counter-clockwise.
I cannot see anything, really: four pale lights against the green.