



Battle*

Bob Sullivan

Wet from the cold March rain, the white paint glistens fresh. It is almost as if the barn has been swept by a snowstorm of Elmer's Glue. In contrast to the radiant purity of this barn, the soil of the farm is a tiring alternation of milky gray and soggy brown. Tattered stubs of once-green corn cling to the ground in haggard remnants of narrow rows. Like the littered aftermath of Gettysburg, this land is hallowed—Mother Earth. The farmer sees himself as the victor. He has tamed the cycle with civilized plastic machinery.

Lined along the boundaries of the fallow fields are stark silhouettes of naked maples and oaks. Commanded to protect the farmer's land from the whipping whims of heaven's winds, the trees form their column and march defeated toward the lowering, fading sun. Meanwhile, removed from the "useful" land and stripped of their vibrant-green ornamentation, the other trees huddle together in barbed-wire enclosures as though awaiting transport to prison camps. In this dismal, captive wood the less hearty specimens collapse at their neighbor's base and lie quite still in the musty decay of the forest floor.

Overhead, the heavy clouds form an effective barrier against the glow of the setting sun. These clouds advance so quickly that soon there is only a small window of clear sky above. In this hole a jet appears, pushing its way eastward. The white translucent needle outpaces the clouds. The needle broadens as it is left behind by the darting black speck until it becomes nothing—the material of the clouds. But still the speck pushes on, unaware that its foundation no longer exists.

The last trace of the sunlight is gone, and the clouds begin to lash out with electric fire and convulse the earth with shocks of thunder. The rain comes as musket fire, kicking up little splatters of mud on impact with the ground. Small streams of rushing water form between the rows of corn. The small stickers on the wire fences sparkle with the wetness and with rust. And mud-splatters soil the barn.