

Bogey Man

He returns to Abraham's field each spring; a crude figure of a man, stuffed with hay, fashioned of old dungarees and torn flannel shirt. A face drawn with oily crayon across a piece of canvas; eyes wide, staring, crescent shaped mouth turned downward in a frown. Tied around his neck, a nubby length of baling twine. With a pole rudely thrust inside his shirt, he hangs to frighten away the crows.

When Abraham gave him life on that verdant day of early April last year, he assumed his dutiful place among the corn stalks as decorative ornament and entertainer. Though scary by design, he has become very popular with the crows and feels his presence quite an asset to the farm.

One harvest afternoon toward the end of a curiously tranquil day, Abraham and his wife, Julia gather a meager crop of corn under the caressing rays of an autumn sun.

The scarecrow, though absent of a tongue, watches and listens.

"Corn borers," muttered Abraham. "Not many good ears this year."

"Yes, this field has been a horn of plenty for the crows as well," Julia complained. "No thanks to our man of straw--Mr. Friendly." She gestured absently toward the scarecrow.

Julia's harsh words yanked at the coarse, flaxen chambers of the scarecrow's straw-filled heart. He twisted his crayon mouth into a grimace. He knew he had no tongue to defend himself, he knew he had no power to make them hear the words he longed to speak, he knew he was only a man made of straw to them and nothing more, but he had feelings like everyone else.

"Maybe," Abraham said with a deep sigh, "but what's a corn field without a scarecrow?"

The scarecrow smiled slightly. *Exactly!*

Julia tossed a couple of ears into the basket at her feet. She straightened, pressed her hands into the small of her back and arched with a deep groan.

I wish I could do that, thought the scarecrow.

"This cornfield in particular could do with one a tad more intimidating," she said and continued pulling ears from the stalks, throwing them into the basket. "Something like...a bogey man!" She snapped her fingers. "Next year, I'll take old Mr. Sociable apart and start over. With a little added flair, he'll give those crows a fright they'll never forget."

Abraham chuckled softly to himself and resumed his careful selection of undamaged ears. Panic crept through the stalks of grain filling the scarecrow's bunched, misshapen body. He tried not to picture Julia's bogey man in his mind, he tried not to think of torn down reassembled parts and pieces, he tried not to

allow the specter of a dismal future to frighten him. Oh, but he was horrified.

An unexpected thought occurred to him. These people made him for the sole purpose of sending fright into the hearts of all those poor, defenseless birds! What a dreadful purpose!

The scarecrow worried and worried and worried about Julia's statement until daylight slowly vanished and the sun slipped below the horizon in search of a place to sleep.

Abraham and Julia loaded their corn-filled baskets into the old Ford and drove a short distance to their farm house.

Darkness spread murky fingers through the chilly, evening air until the gloom vanquished every last gleam of sunlight. The scarecrow still puzzled and fretted over his impending change of character and dress. Toward midnight, he watched a passionate moon rise and illuminate the corn field with such light, that daytime seemed to have forgotten something of great importance and returned to seek the lost article, like a woman searching for her missing glove.

In the pearly glow of moon beams, an object lying on the soil's surface between the stalks of corn glinted at the scarecrow catching his eye. After much wiggling and turning, the scarecrow freed himself from his perch and plopped between two rows of corn. His weak legs wobbled like loose fence posts in a strong wind. Several evenings had passed since his last evening stroll.

Hands like cropped sheaves of wheat reached down and lifted the sparkler from its soft, sandy bed. Perfectly round and boasting a gilded, rosy surface, Julia's wedding ring gleamed in the silvery moonlight.

After studying the ring for a moment, the scarecrow stooped to place it back in the sand but stood straight again with thoughts of a different nature. Perhaps after tonight, Julia would experience a change of heart where he was concerned and allow him to remain intact without the added fripperies she had planned. Resuming his position on the wooden post, the scarecrow waited out the night until morning could reveal a lost symbol.

Sunrise burned away the morning mist and brought Julia and Abraham back to the corn field. The scarecrow watched them sift through the soil and search in-between stalks of corn trying in vain to find the ring.

"It could be anywhere," cried Julia. "I've worn that ring for almost thirty years and never lost it. Why now?"

"Don't worry, we'll find it," assured Abraham.

Julia climbed to her feet and brushed the clinging dirt from her jeans. She turned her head and gazed at the scarecrow. Her eyes widened and her mouth formed a perfect O. Tied loosely about one end of the baling twine encircling his neck was her ring. "Abraham! I've found it."

Together they stood before the scarecrow and wondered. For a moment, his face seemed real to them, his eyes no longer glaring but more shaped and natural, less like a cartoon. His mouth curved upward in a smile and as they looked, the scarecrow winked.

The scarecrow returns to Abraham's field each spring; a crude figure of a man stuffed with hay and fashioned of old dungarees and torn flannel shirt. His face remains a piece of canvas, drawn with oily crayon, eyes wide, staring, crescent shaped mouth turned downward in a frown.

Still silent, absent of a tongue, the scarecrow watches and listens.