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Harvest Festival

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Harvest Festival

Author Bio

She started sweating profusely as she ardently tried to think of something interesting to write about herself. "Oh no," she thought, "now the world shall know that my script is a facade to mask the truly unremarkable."

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The harvest festival had begun. The weeklong celebration culminated in a night of feasting around the towering bonfire, fueled by dancing and laughter. As the fiddles sang, Heather twirled around the flames with the other villagers. She wanted tonight to last forever. The harvest festival was the one time each year that the villagers all gathered together—their large plots of farmland forced the villagers to live relatively far from each other. This was the last night of the single week in the year that Heather felt she was part of a family. Heather had lost her parents in a house fire three years earlier. Since she was an only child, the villagers had come together to help her rebuild her log cabin and begin her first crop, but after that, she had been on her own.

Tonight Heather wasn't on her own, and she relished the company. She danced and twirled with all her might and sang along with the violins at the top of her lungs. She knew that an empty cabin awaited her that night, on a plot of land that seemed so big that it would swallow her. But now it was time to make merry and enjoy the festival. Drops of sweat fell into her eyes as she wiped her forehead. She detached herself from the dancers, making her way over to the refreshment table to retrieve another mug of hard cider to cool off.

She put the cold drink to her lips and looked around the clearing. She observed the silhouette of a young man leaning against a nearby tree. As she looked more closely, she noticed his face was obscured by the shadows. She stared at him, trying to discern his features. He beckoned to her. She walked over to him and brought an extra mug of cider. Before she could engage him with a polite greeting, he simply asked, "Can I have the next dance?" She was taken aback by the informality, but her curiosity overcame her caution, and she readily agreed.

She led him to the bonfire and her heart beat loudly as he placed his hands on her waist. Her breathing quickened as they danced around the fire, their bodies moving closer together in sync with the howling fiddles. She still was unable to study his face; the shadows from the bonfire only added to her difficulty. The violin players began to play faster and faster. The faster they played, the closer the two dancers were drawn together. The music became so fast, and the dancing so intense that, to Heather, everything became a blur of heat and flame.

She awoke the next morning in her empty cabin—her last memories were of the frenzied dance around the fire. She was not aware of how she got to her cabin. She stared out the window at the empty cornfield, cold fingers of loneliness piercing the recesses of her heart.



The distant, smiling face of the lone scarecrow in the field was the only greeting she could expect for a while.

Within nine months time, Heather's lonely life was interrupted by the arrival of her first child—a beautiful baby boy, whose father's face she did not even know. As she held the baby in her arms, she cried, wondering what kind of life the child would have with a single mother in a large, lonely cornfield.

The child grew, and harvest week came again. The boy became sick and restless, so Heather decided to stay home the night of the bonfire. As she sat in the baby's room by his cradle, gently rocking him back and forth, she closed her eyes and remembered how different the night had been a mere year ago, as she had twirled and danced with a stranger—a stranger who would end up altering the course of her life. She opened her eyes and stared out the window. For a split second, she thought she saw the silhouette of a man peering in the window. Startled, she stood up suddenly and rubbed her eyes. She looked out the window again, but the only sight that met her eyes was a dark, empty cornfield, and the distant, lonely scarecrow.

The second year after her child was born, the harvest festival came and went, and Heather again decided to skip the night of the bonfire—old memories made it too painful for her to return to the scene. The next year came, and her child grew into a sturdy young toddler with sandy blonde hair and big brown eyes. She still often tried desperately to imagine what his father might have looked like. The boy brought a newfound joy to her life as he drove the loneliness from her little cabin. As she worked in the cornfield, he would run, play, laugh, and sing, chasing the crows away and falling asleep under the lone scarecrow deep within the cornfield. She wondered if his father had such a joyful spirit. The boy often was so tired out by dinner that he could barely keep his eyes open through the whole meal. She would always carry him to bed, tuck him in, and gently kiss his sandy blonde head. At first, she had thought the child was a curse, part of the inexplicable tragedy that had become her life. As he grew, she realized that this little child was the light that brought her out of the world of darkness that she had fallen into.

The week of the harvest festival came again. As in the previous years, on the night of the bonfire, Heather still felt that she could not go. Instead, she read from an old book to her son as he sat propped up on pillows. He listened to her intently as she read to him by his bedside. As she read, the boy suddenly looked up and pointed at the window, "Who's that, Mother?" he asked. Heather looked up as her heart dropped to her stomach. She saw the dark, familiar silhouette of a man briefly before it



disappeared.

"It must have just been our imaginations," she said as she closed the book in her lap. She kissed his head and left the room. She loaded her small rifle and lit a candle. She circled the house, searching for the cause of the dark silhouette. Finding no one, she returned inside, trying to convince herself that the shadow had been an illusion. She fell asleep at the kitchen table with her gun in her lap, and the candle still lit.

She awoke early the next morning with the gun still on her lap, and she laughed at herself for being so frightened the night before. She turned the stove on and began making preparations for breakfast. She walked to her son's room to wake him. She opened the door and noticed he was not in his bed. She assumed he was using the outhouse, and returned to the kitchen to put the eggs on the frying pan. She finished making breakfast and called out her son's name. He did not answer. She checked his room again, and sighed. Sometimes in the mornings, after his usual outhouse run, he would go out and play a little in the cornfield before breakfast. She had asked him not to do this in the past and to come inside and help with breakfast, but he had often ignored her requests. She suspected he was again avoiding the breakfast preparations in favor of playtime. She went out to the outhouse just to make sure he was not there before she shouted his name. Again, he did not answer her. She walked around the outskirts of the empty cornfield and could not see him. Her heart rate quickened and she began walking quickly in between the rows of stubble, calling his name and scanning the horizon. She walked deep into the empty field, past the scarecrows to the edge of her plot. She racked her brain for where he could have gone. "Maybe he's playing hide and seek," she thought. She began walking rapidly back to the house and past the scarecrows. But then she stopped dead in her tracks. "Scarecrows?" she thought, "There should only be one scarecrow." She turned around slowly and stared at the two scarecrows. The man-sized scarecrow—the one that had been there as long as she could remember—was now joined by a smaller, child-sized scarecrow with big brown button eyes and a sandy straw-covered head.

The following year, the night of the bonfire came, and Heather sat alone at her kitchen table, quietly dozing after drinking a cup of warm tea. She was awakened by two small knocks at her door. She opened it cautiously, and was embraced by a small boy and a man, their faces obscured by the shadows that danced upon them from the fireplace.