

# THE SCARECROW

By David R. Storms

## OCTOBER 29

The day was humid out on the farm. The humidity, not to mention the ploughing heat, was all compounded exponentially in the recesses of the main barn. Peter Duncan, and his little brother Daryl, were busy at work stacking straw bales into neat columns. Peter was up in the loft stacking bales, and Daryl was doing the same at the ground level.

"So what are ya gunna be for Halloween?" queried Daryl, breaking the silence.

Peter paused and replied "I'm not sure."

"Well, don't be something boring like last year." The stacking was almost finished. It was a good thing too; both boys were starving for lunch which their Mom would have ready for them when they came inside.

"There was nothing wrong with my vampire costume!" Peter exclaimed.

Daryl laughed. "Be something more creative: like a crazy murderer or something."

Peter tossed the last bale into position and climbed down the ladder to join his brother. Daryl finished with his stacking and raced out of the barn toward the house.

As Peter made his way to the house he thought how this fall was strangely warm. Most residents out in the parries were used to strange climates. The Duncan family farm was out in the open a little outside of Weyburn, about 100 kilometres from Regina. The landscape laid out in front of him was mostly flat land. You could see other farm houses if you squinted good, but it was mostly isolated.

Peter had not given much thought to Halloween, which fell on a Tuesday this year. Normally he would just dress up and go to the sub-divisions in Weyburn for trick-or-treating, but he felt a little strange about this year. He thought perhaps because it was the new millennium.

He opened the screen door and strolled into the kitchen. His mother sat down a plate that had a ham and cheese sandwich on it.

"I was telling your brother that after lunch you two are going to take down that old ratty scarecrow in the west field and make a new one," said Mrs Duncan.

"Sure." Peter quickly ate his sandwich and before leaving took another.

The two boys headed back to the barn where Mrs. Duncan told them that all the supplies they needed would be waiting for them. They quickly started to work on the new scarecrow.

Daryl stuffed the pants with handfuls of straw while Peter worked on the torso. The figure started to take on an eerie shape once the legs were sewn to the body. It seemed as though they were working on a corpse. Peter had just read a novelisation of

*Frankenstein* and he couldn't help but feel a kinship to the good doctor. Peter stuffed a burlap bag and attached it to the body, and then finished it off with an old straw hat that was full of holes.

"Alright, let's put this thing up." He told his brother.

They carried the straw figure out into the corn field that was west of the house. The field was not too far from the barn, and the place where the scarecrow would be crucified was only a short way into the maize.

When they reached their destination, they beheld the dilapidated lifeless mess in front of them. The shirt had been ripped at the mid-section, spilling the old scarecrow's straw guts all over the ground. Similar rips were all over the clothing. Peter thought of the image before him as that of a murder scene, and how scary that corpse up on the stake looked and how much of an excellent costume it would make.

As the two boys pulled down the old scarecrow Peter dreamed of how he would design a scarecrow Halloween costume. Abruptly Daryl interrupted him.

"You know what! I just decided that I'm gunna be a scarecrow for Halloween! It'll be great!" Peter was outraged by this. Daryl had stolen his idea.

"No way! I was going to be a scarecrow." Peter knew he was going to lose this argument. Daryl always seemed to win them.

"I said it first. I'm gunna go make it right now so tough luck." Daryl ran off into the corn laughing and yelling. Peter could not believe that he would do that to him, but he could believe that he would abandon him to finish putting up the scarecrow alone. He kicked the old scarecrow in rage and more of its guts were strewn across the ground.

Because he had to do it alone, Peter was stuck out in the corn field for a half hour trying to position the scarecrow just right. He admired his work for a moment, then grabbed what remained of the old scarecrow and started toward the barn.

Just when he was about to cross the cleared area and into the corn, something struck him in the back. He spun around expecting Daryl to be there but there was no one. He looked down to his feet and saw a rock lying there. His gaze moved up to the scarecrow that sat upon its crucifix, its hat hiding its face. Peter shook his head and walked toward the barn.

## **OCTOBER 30TH**

The prior night, Peter had told his parents how Daryl had left him in the field to put the scarecrow up on his own. But like usual, they took his side agreeing with Daryl's viewpoint that he had to assemble materials for his costume and put it all together.

Today Daryl was sent to cut the front lawn of the house while Peter took some wood planks out to his father in the south field where he was using the combine. When he arrived on the four-wheeler, he saw his father standing in front of the massive vehicle looking at the broken planks.

"Funny thing, m'boy. There was some big rock out in that field that wasn't there before. Done broke this plank right off." Mr. Duncan peered into the wagon attached to

the four-wheeler that contained the planks. "Oh, son. You brought the wrong toolbox. This one has the metric wrenches in it."

"Sorry. It was the only one I saw."

"That's alright, I know where it is. Wait here and I'll go get it and be right back." Mr. Duncan climbed aboard the four-wheeler.

"Are you just going to leave that running?" Peter said pointing at the combine. The rumbling engine made an eerie rattling sound and made a constant trembling through the ground.

"It'll be alright. I'll be right back." Mr. Duncan sped off back toward the tool shed that was far out of view.

Peter stood out in the heat and waited for his father to return. His heart suddenly jumped when he heard the throttle on the combine shoot up. He whipped his head around and saw the billowing black smoke jet out of the exhaust pipe. Then he saw someone sitting in the driver seat. He put his hand up to his eyes to try to see who it was. It was a scarecrow!

"What!" He yelled. He could see the face of the scarecrow. The one he made yesterday. But it couldn't be he thought. This scarecrow staring at him had a face. Actually, all it had was a painted jagged smile. The scarecrow reached downward, and the combine started lurching forward. Peter turned and started running toward the house. He felt his heart pounding faster and harder than the pistons in the combine's engine. He kept glancing back to see the combine getting closer and closer to him. The blades in the front had started moving. They were going to chop him to pieces!

Peter closed his eyes and kept running as hard as he could. The next time he looked back he could see the scarecrow smiling back at him. It was trying to run him down! When Peter started to run in different directions to try to evade the combine but the scarecrow kept adjusting its course. In one of Peter's quick movements his foot came across a rock that sent him sprawling toward the ground. He hit with a hard crash. Looking back he could see the combine bearing down on him. Peter screamed as he buried his head into his arms and waited.

It seemed like a lifetime for the combine to come. Then it stopped. The engine sputtered to death. Peter opened his eyes to see his father climbing down from the driver seat.

"Are you alright son?" He ran over. "I'm so sorry. I must have left the parking brake off. You better take the four-wheeler back to the house and lay down for a bit, I'll take care of this."

Ignoring the concern in his father's voice, Peter wanted to tell that he saw the scarecrow driving the combine. But he knew how crazy that sounded. And his father would probably just tell him it was the heat getting to him.

"No. I'll just walk." He stood and slowly walked to the house, frequently glancing back to the combine.

Peter sat in the living room on the couch for about an hour. He was finding it hard to fall asleep, and he became restless just sitting there. Life on the farm ruined him from sitting still. His mother and brother had come in at one point and Mrs. Duncan listened to what happened to Peter out in the south field. She felt her usual motherly

sympathy and comforted him, yet he still felt preoccupied about the figure he saw in the driver seat of the combine. Mrs. Duncan then proceeded to help stitch together Daryl's costume. It was very disconcerting for Peter to sit there and watch his brother take the form of the figure that tried to run him down, so he decided to leave.

"I'm going to go finish cleaning the barn." Peter said standing.

"Are you sure? You can rest a little while longer if you want."

"No. That's alright."

"I'm taking your brother into town in a few minutes to help with some groceries. We'll be back in a few hours." Peter nodded to his mother then left the house and made his way to the barn. He glanced out into the west field to try to see where he had set up the scarecrow the day before. He could not see it however. It was like the corn around the scarecrow grew so tall that it blocked all view of it.

The rest of his day was spent sweeping and moving the cluttered straw that was strewn all over the floor of the barn. He spent about an hour finishing the bottom floor then he started up in the upper loft. It seemed take forever to clean the barn, especially since he had to do most of it all himself. After he cleaned the upper loft, all he had to do was empty the wagon of straw outside the barn and that was it. He almost regretted that school was cancelled for the week. Many of the kids were happy to hear that the school's library had suddenly caught fire on the weekend. To Peter, it just added to the strange feeling he had about this year.

Peter was sweeping straw into a pile in the corner when he heard a rustling behind him. He stopped abruptly and slowly turned.

There it was. The scarecrow.

It was standing across the loft from him in front of the open door that was used for straw elevator. Peter could see the smile, the jagged one. Peter started to move closer.

"Who are you?" He ordered. Now, from this elevation, he could see into the west field from an open window. He could see the stake where he had put up the scarecrow.

The stake that had nothing on it.

"Tell me who you are!" A deadly combination of fear and anger rose up in him. It erupted and he sprinted at the scarecrow, his arms outstretched to rip the burlap bag from its head. The scarecrow stepped aside at the last moment presenting the open door behind him. Peter was moving too fast to stop. He looked down to see the wagon of straw below barreling toward him.

He landed with a tremendous crash on his back. Pain ricocheted to every corner of his body. He felt everything slipping. Just before he blacked out, he looked up the barn to see the scarecrow looking down at him, smiling.

## **OCTOBER 31ST**

Mr. Duncan had found Peter lying in the wagon the day before and helped him into his bed. His parents were greatly worried about him and his claims that a scarecrow

was trying to get him. He chose not to say kill him because he knew his parents would not receive that too well. They simply told him that the Halloween season was just getting to him. Maybe they thought that this was all just a practical joke. Daryl had thought so and had come into his room to tell him that he was not falling for it.

Peter sat in his room all day and listened to the rain pour down. The day had turned really dark, and it lulled him into sleep.

In Peter's dream, he saw himself walking toward the spot where he put up the scarecrow in the west field. He held a torch in his hand. He knew it was Halloween and his brother and parents had already left. It was just him against the scarecrow. Peter ran through the corn to the crucifix stake. He moved into the area that was cut for the scarecrow. The scarecrow was nowhere to be found. He searched around with the torch but it provided almost no light. Then there was whispering all around him and the air suddenly went very cold. The torch gave no light and no heat. The whispering started to get louder and louder. Then, as if hundreds of fireflies lit up all at once, little red dots of light sprung up all around him. Peter spun around and around, and the red dots which became red eyes looked at him menacingly. And the whispers became words; then became one word: "tonight."

Peter bolted awake. His clothes soaked with sweat. His breathing was harsh and fast. Peter sat still for a moment until his heart began to beat at a normal rhythm. One thought remained in his head: "tonight."

Peter's back was feeling much better after his rest but his mental condition was still strained. He had a shower and went downstairs for dinner. He was very quiet at the table and barely listened as his brother went on and on about how he was going to spend his night trick-or-treating.

"Peter?" He looked up from his plate to his mother.

"What?" He had not even heard that his mother was asking him something.

"I said will you be alright here by yourself tonight?"

"Huh?"

"We are dropping your brother off with the Crowes. Then your father and I are going to a Halloween party. Are you going to be alright here by yourself?"

Peter's mind flung back to his nightmare. He was left all alone there too. After a moment he answered, "Yeah I'll be fine." He thought his voice sounded reluctant, but his mother seemed fine with his decision.

Two hours later he had the farm to himself. His brother was gone and his parents had gone to their party. Initially, Peter was petrified about being left alone, but now he knew that he had to stop the scarecrow.

Peter went to the main barn and slipped the huge door open about half way. He grabbed a chair and sat it in the middle of the floor facing the door. Then he went to the wall and grabbed a pitch fork. Peter sat down in the chair with the fork and waited for the scarecrow.

He had nodded off several times during his vigil and he tried to shake it off. The pain pills he had swallowed at dinner were making him drowsy. He tried to stay awake, but he could not.

A rustling behind him had awoken him. Peter jumped to his feet and spun around. Something was moving in the shadows, the moonlight pouring threw the door had created a vast grouping of shadows everywhere in the barn. Then the figure emerged. It was the scarecrow. It moved toward him with its arms raised and emitting a low growling sound.

"Leave me alone!" Peter yelled as he ran at the scarecrow. He raised the pitch fork at the figure. The scarecrow raised its arms in panic. The fork made contact with the abdomen and pierced it deeply. Peter looked down in satisfaction as the scarecrow fell to its back: dead.

Peter bent down and reached to the burlap bag. As he was pulling off the bag, tufts of straw fell from around the neck. He ripped off the burlap sack and stared in horror. Peter looked down and stared into the face of his brother: Daryl. He stood and began to stumble backwards. He had stabbed his brother. Peter ran into the chair and fell to his back.

The door behind him slammed closed. Peter spun his head around toward the door but could not see anything. Then, a lamp was lit. Holding the lamp was the scarecrow, staring at Peter with the painted on jagged smile.

**THE END**