

A NAVRITTO STORY

The Scarecrow That Moved *One Row.*

✦ NAVRITTO STORIES · MYSTERY & THE STRANGE

The Scarecrow That Moved One Row

Written & illustrated by Navritto.

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We bought the farm cheap, which should have been the first warning. My parents called it a fresh start; I called it the end of the world, nine miles of corn from the nearest person my age. Whoever left had left the scarecrow behind, out past the last row — a ragged thing with a sack for a head, watching the house.

“Charming,” my dad said. “It can stay.”



The morning after our first night, I noticed it was closer. Not much — a row, maybe two. I told myself I'd misjudged the distance in the dark; everything looks farther at night.

But I'm the kind of person who needs to be sure. So the next morning I counted the rows between the scarecrow and the porch, out loud, and wrote the number on my hand.



Nineteen rows. The morning after, seventeen. I pushed a stake into the dirt exactly where it stood, to be certain, and went to bed with the number seventeen pressing against my palm like a splinter.

At dawn the scarecrow was four rows past the stake, closer to the house, and the stake was exactly where I'd left it. So it wasn't me moving. It was the corn giving it up, row by row.



I decided to watch it. I sat at my window the whole of one cold night, a blanket round my shoulders, eyes on the ragged shape in the moonlit fog.

It never moved. Not once. I watched until the sky went gray — and it stood exactly where it had stood at dusk. But the instant I blinked the long blink of someone who has not slept, it was nearer, and I had not seen it happen. It only moves in the space you aren't looking.



On the tenth morning it reached the fence at the edge of the yard, close enough that I could see the stitching on its sackcloth face. There was something in its coat pocket — a folded square of paper, soft as cloth.

I opened it with shaking hands. It was a note, in handwriting I knew better than my own — my handwriting — though I had no memory of writing it. Four words. Don't let it finish.



On Halloween it stood on the porch. Right at the door, arms flung wide — but facing away from the house, out toward the black and whispering fields, as if whatever it had crossed the corn to do was not to get in, but to stand between us and the rest of the dark.

We left it alone. We left the porch light on behind it. In the morning the fields were quiet in a way they had never been quiet before, and for the first time since we came, I slept.



That was years ago. The scarecrow still stands on our porch, patient, facing out. Nothing has ever come up the drive that it did not turn back first.

But last spring, out past the last row where it all began, a new scarecrow went up on its own — ragged, sack-headed, watching the house. And every morning, it is one row closer. I've started writing the number on my hand again.

✦ THE END

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