稻草人的守望

稻田中央立着一个稻草人。竹竿做的身子，旧草帽扣在头上，袖子里塞满了稻草，手里还攥着一个红布袋。农民把它立起来的那天，稻子刚刚插稳，整个夏天它都在看云，看稻叶一寸一寸长高，听青蛙在夜里唱歌。

秋天一到，稻穗低下了头，田野变得金灿灿的。稻草人知道，它最要紧的日子来了。真正的对手不是风，也不是雨，是麻雀。

麻雀们成群结队地来，落在田边的篱笆上，叽叽喳喳地开会。它们派一只小灰雀出来探路。小灰雀贴着稻穗飞，一会儿落在稻草人的帽子上，一会儿停在它的袖子上，歪着脑袋打量它。稻草人一动不动。小灰雀啄了啄它的袖子，是稻草的味道，没有危险，就放心地叫起来：伙伴们，快来呀，这个看田的不会动！

麻雀们呼啦啦落进稻田，啄稻穗吃得开心。稻草人心里着急，可它不能喊，也不能挥手。它想起农民插它进土里时说：好好看着田。它就继续挺直身子，把影子拉得长长的，盖在稻田上。

小灰雀渐渐不怕它了，天天落在它的袖子上，跟它讲田野里的新鲜事：村口的小河干了，谁家的南瓜熟了，风把蒲公英吹上了屋顶。稻草人不能回答，可它听得津津有味，风一吹，它的袖子轻轻晃一下，算是回答。

一天中午，一只灰黑色的大鸟忽然从天上冲下来，直扑稻田。小灰雀吓得飞起来，落在稻草人耳边急促地叫：大鸟来了，大鸟来了！稻草人心里一紧。它动不了，只能把自己站得更直，旧帽子被风掀得啪啪响，手里的红布袋呼啦啦地翻。大鸟愣了一下，调头飞走了。那是一只苍鹰。

小灰雀落在帽檐上，冲着天空叫了三声，又转头对稻草人叫了三声。稻草人不知道麻雀的话，但它听懂了那三声里的高兴。

秋天快结束的时候，农民来收稻子，一镰刀一镰刀，稻穗堆成了小山。麻雀们也跟着忙碌，捡落在田里的谷粒。稻草人看着空荡荡的田野，有点想念那些热闹的日子。小灰雀飞来，站在篱笆上叫了几声才走。稻草人想，明年稻穗黄的时候，它还会来的。

The Scarecrow Keeps Watch

In the middle of a rice field stood a scarecrow. Its body was a bamboo pole, an old straw hat sat on its head, its sleeves were stuffed with rice straw, and it held a red cloth bag. The farmer set it up the day the rice seedlings were planted. All summer it watched the clouds, watched the rice leaves grow taller inch by inch, and listened to frogs singing at night.

When autumn came, the rice ears bowed their heads, and the field turned golden. The scarecrow knew its most important days had begun. Its real rivals were not the wind or the rain but the sparrows.

The sparrows came in flocks and perched on the fence at the edge of the field,

chirping as if holding a meeting. They sent out a little gray sparrow to scout. The little one flew low over the rice ears, landed on the hat of the scarecrow, then sat on its sleeve, tilting its head to study it. The scarecrow did not move. The little sparrow pecked the sleeve. It smelled of straw, no danger, so it called out cheerfully: Come quick, friends, this field guard cannot move!

The sparrows swept down into the field and ate the rice grains happily. The scarecrow felt worried, but it could not shout and could not wave. It remembered what the farmer said when pushing it into the soil: watch the field well. So it kept its body straight and let its long shadow lie over the rice.

Little by little the little gray sparrow lost all fear. It came every day, sat on the sleeve, and told the scarecrow the news of the fields: the village river had run dry, some pumpkins had ripened, the wind blew dandelions onto the rooftops. The scarecrow could not answer, but it listened with joy, and when the wind blew, its sleeve swayed gently, which counted as an answer.

One noon, a big gray-black bird suddenly dived from the sky straight at the field. The little sparrow flew up in alarm and chirped by the ear of the scarecrow: A big bird is coming, a big bird is coming! The scarecrow felt a jolt. It could not move, so it stood even straighter. The old hat flapped loudly in the wind, and the red cloth bag in its hand rustled and snapped. The big bird hesitated, then turned and flew away. It was a goshawk.

The little sparrow sat on the brim of the hat, called three times toward the sky, then turned and called three times to the scarecrow. The scarecrow did not know sparrow words, but it understood the joy in those three calls.

Near the end of autumn, the farmer came to harvest, sickle after sickle, and the rice ears piled into little hills. The sparrows kept busy too, picking up the grains that fell. The scarecrow looked at the empty field and missed the busy days a little. The little sparrow came and stood on the fence, calling a few times before leaving. The scarecrow thought: when the rice ears turn golden next year, it will come again.