

## THE CORN SHOW

AS TOLD BY A GENERAL SPECTATOR  
OF LAST YEAR'S HISTORIC SHOW

**C**orn, corn, corn. Come and watch it grow. Grab a lawn chair. Come enjoy the show.

The man who said this slumped, but he was not monotoned. He stood alone, gesticulating like a tired old maestro to a long row of starlings who listened stolid with indifference across a powerline.

‘What unfolds before you is a show with no beginning. A show with no end in sight.’

Though his voice boomed like a carnival barker’s, the land behind the man was anything but carnivalesque. It was the dead of winter. Sky and earth were gray and brown. Frostdust covered the furrowed soil and leafless trees that flanked the field. In the distance, a legendary buck grazed in stealth out in the open, licking mineral from stone hard clumps of ground.

‘Each year, another revolution. Each revolution, another spin around the wheel of time.’

Lonesome old man. He had skin like ragged cloth. Ravaged, calloused, malignant as he was, he hid something within him like the spark of an inward smile. He spoke with urgency and mystery, his passion steadily increasing until he reached the red-hot fervor of a zealot:

‘For ten thousand years corn has been domesticating those who grow it. For forty thousand seasons corn has paved the way in humanity’s sharp evolutionary ascent. Every last corn cob that this world’s wonder basket has ever provided has been but yet another brick laid down on the long yellow thoroughfare that’s led our civilization to its current lofty status.’

Not one to pace, The Corn Aficionado stood in place, pivoting about on one leg to take in the full splendor of the field that wrapped around him. He spun slowly, resolutely, and when his revolution was complete, he heard the cold hard click and rattle of a gun cocked, loaded and then presumably aimed at the center of his forehead.

‘There’s no corn here to watch grow,’ said a hunter, who was very well-camouflaged.

The starlings scattered.

‘Patience,’ said The Corn Aficionado, aiming back with wisdom, omnidirectionally, to be sure his rebuttal hit its mark. ‘The Corn Show has a rhythm of its own, a trait innate in anything worthwhile.’

‘I see nothing,’ said the hunter, his precise whereabouts unknown.

The Corn Aficionado cupped his hands around his mouth and called out to the sky:

*'BUT YOU ARE ON A STAGE CONTAINING EVERYTHING.'*

'I am in a field,' said the hunter.

Both voices echoed. The hunter's was a whisper scream. The Corn Aficionado's a proper shout.

*'BUT YOU ARE A SUPPORTING ACTOR IN ACT ONE OF A COMPELLING DRAMA.'*

'I am only a hunter who is trying to find a meal.'

The Corn Aficionado bent over at his waist and picked up a handful of not quite frozen soil. It crumbled in its hands, its consistency somewhere between rock and sand.

*'ALLUVIAL LOAM,'* he shouted. *'STARDUST. THREE FEET DEEP.'*

'Could you hold it down?' said the hunter. 'You are scaring away my dinner.'

*'THAT IS WHAT I AM DESIGNED TO DO. IT IS IN MY NATURE TO FEND OFF THE UNSAVORY AND UNWELCOME. I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CURATION OF A UNIVERSALLY ACCLAIMED SHOW.'*

Upon this remark, the legendary buck looked up and turned its head as if to eavesdrop. There was then a report from the hunter's rifle. It sounded off like a clash of thunder from above and did not seem to originate from anywhere around the field's perimeter. The bullet sailed high, ripping a hole

through a distant stop sign, through the very red-hearted center of the *O*.

‘Sir, I am not a game warden,’ said The Corn Aficionado, ‘but I feel it is within my duty to inform you that stop signs are not in season.’

The buck pranced away, gracefully, running for its life.

‘I was aiming at you,’ said the hunter, still unseen.

‘In the off chance you were to hit me it would not change my circumstances in the slightest.’

The hunter cocked his gun once more and said, ‘I’ve been hunting in this field now for over a decade and I don’t think I’ve ever seen you move beyond that spot. Why don’t you go find a greener pasture?’

‘This is my home, where I’ve found my purpose and my calling. I have no need to wander.’

‘Your calling?’ said the hunter. ‘And what exactly would you call your calling?’

‘I am a watchman.’

‘You could hardly call yourself a scout.’

‘I am not concerned with your opinion of my chosen profession. I am doing what I was made for. Unlike you, I am not a scavenger.’

The hunter resolved to himself right then that there was no point in arguing any further with such a brainless thing.

‘Enough,’ said the hunter. ‘One more word and I will shoot.’

With this, The Corn Aficionado fell silent. He felt

like crying, but nothing would come out of him. He'd spent his entire life waiting and hoping. Waiting for things he knew would never happen. Hoping for things he knew would be impossible. His first memory was of a summer evening, long ago, when the vest he'd been wearing his entire life was still blazing blinding bright with safety orange. He'd been thumbing through a fielding guide, teaching himself the customs of sporting men and gentlemanly etiquette when a family in a station wagon pulled off the gravel road to gather around him for a picture. After the father picked two wildflowers to give to his little girls, he'd put an arm around his wife and said, 'What would you give to have a view like this every evening of your life?'

The little girls laughed. The mother smiled lovingly. The father snapped the picture. It was the only time The Corn Aficionado had ever shared his world.

From that day forward, The Corn Aficionado made it a solemn oath that he would wave at every car he saw passing down the gravel road. This he did unflinching. But only on the rarest of occasions would anyone react as if they'd noticed him standing out there all alone. Every now and then, a child in a back seat would roll a window down and for a moment watch him passively. Every once in a blue moon, a bird would land upon his shoulder and sing a song that he imagined was for him. Over the years, the color of his vest had faded, but the view he'd come to

recognize that he was so uniquely blessed to have had colored his eyes until they blazed with the very essence of that beauty. What he wished for was to share his world with others as he saw it, but he had no way to communicate this amazing view that fell upon him every day. In the infinite gallery of his imagination, he could think of nothing more spectacular than watching time march over a cornfield. There was something in it that seemed to satisfy the oppressive loneliness of life. He wiped his eyes to clear away the tears he thought were forming, but his cheeks were dry, like fabric. His tears, he did not know at the time, were of divine worth; they were too fine for this earth.

‘Oh, cut it out,’ he said to himself, raising his head high with a will that was insurmountable. ‘This is no time for self-pity. *RIGHT NOW IS TIME FOR THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH TO BEGIN!*’

With this, the hunter fired another shot, which missed again. The Corn Aficionado did not flinch. Another shot fired and The Corn Aficionado did not even think to hide. Many more shots followed, and in the silence that rang out between the echoes of gunfire, The Corn Aficionado took note of the clouds creaking by above the cornfield. Each cloud splintered light, emitting its own spectacular explosion. A bullet then tore through his thigh, kindling his spirit. The Corn Aficionado *longed to feel the burn*. He groaned in mock pain (pain he wished was putting him in agony) and at the same time he tuned his

senses and imagined each subtle variation of the earth he would be hearing had he been more sufficiently equipped to do so: He imagined the soft purr of a covey of quail, the sniff of a raccoon looking for a meal, the enormous hush of winter. As The Corn Aficionado swayed his head to the full-throated song of life, he heard, or rather felt, in a trickle up his iron spine, hooves beating. Lightly at first, the hooves rose in a distant drum roll that came from down the gravel road that ran adjacent to the field. This sound was soon overlain with the more percussive grind of wagon wheels. Not a moment later, as a gust of wind was wafting up the smoking embers on his thigh, The Corn Aficionado observed a horse drawn buggy rounding the corner that was carrying atop it two Mennonites who were chirping with the soft melodic chatter of those who have fallen fresh in love.

‘Howdy do,’ said the chipper gentleman, tipping his wide-brimmed hat to say hello.

*Just Married* was written in perfect flowing script along the sideboard of their buggy.

‘We’ve come to watch the corn grow.’

‘For your honeymoon?’ said the well-hid hunter.

The newlyweds looked this way, then that, already functioning as a single unit.

‘Who’s speaking?’ they said in unison.

‘That’s the hunter,’ said The Corn Aficionado, rubbing dirt into his wound. ‘Don’t mind him. He may as well be a voice that’s in your head.’

The gentleman Mennonite took a moment to

stroke his beard in contemplation. He then offered a hand to assist his freshly christened bride down from the buggy. The bride, once ground-bound, curtsied, radiant in her white bonnet of intricate homespun lace.

‘Many elder family members told us that a year spent watching The Corn Show will do us wonders for our marriage. We were told to arrive here early to make sure we can snag two front row seats.’

The bride then pulled two wooden stools from the back of their matte black buggy. As she did, her groom, who still wore his cummerbund proudly, sat a plate of cornmeal before their buckskin mare, which licked its lips before indulging.

‘Welcome,’ said The Corn Aficionado. ‘And congratulations. The transformation of a kernel into a cob is the perfect metaphor for marriage. You’ll learn many useful things by watching all that happens along the way.’

The Corn Aficionado then officially began The Corn Show. He opened without pomp or circumstance, with a brief note on agricultural timekeeping:

‘Plow, plant, irrigate, weed, harvest, eat, store, rest and plow again,’ he said. ‘Carry the momentum forward. You have to play by ear.’

Many of his words were half spoken, his simple framing hinting at larger truths that were intuited:

*‘Nature has a rhythm that yearns for constant resolution...’*



*'Working good land is at once enjoyable and urgent...'*

*'A farmer without discipline will never know the full glory of a field...'*

And so on.

The Corn Aficionado spoke without removing his corn cob pipe, not even for a moment.

'Winter now. That means it's time for regeneration. This is the phase for restoration in the regulation of a field. Nothing here was planted last year. The year prior, you would have been looking at a great expanse of sorghum. Come springtime, this land will be nice and nitrogen loaded. Ideal for growing corn.'

The newlyweds listened patiently, calmly, holding hands, the bell around their mare's neck dinging now and then as it licked its empty bowl.

'Ah, shoot me,' said The Corn Aficionado. (The hunter shot him.) 'You're Mennonites. You've heard all this before. It's clear you've come for something other than dry old tidbits about corn.'

The couple nodded together kindly, not wanting to offend. The Corn Aficionado then produced a handkerchief and used it to smother the flames that were arising from his latest grisly wound.

'Turn the land over in your mind,' he said, his voice ethereal and dazzling, like a starry night. 'Get a

glimpse in your imagination of what this soil is hiding beneath you.'

'Could you at least whisper?' said the hunter.

*'TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE!'*

The bride and groom sat like two humble rulers perplexed by their jester before them. They said nothing.

'Close your eyes,' said The Corn Aficionado.

They closed them.

'Let your imagination spread its roots.'

Their imagination spread its roots, slowly at first, and then with remarkable rapidity.

'Oh my,' said the bride in a nervous whisper.

'What is it?' said The Corn Aficionado.

'I see a rock.'

'I think I see a mineral,' said the groom. 'A small deposit of salt.'

'Keep going,' said The Corn Aficionado.

'I think I see an arrowhead,' said the bride.

'Be more descriptive.'

'It's chinked and serrated. Dried blood is flecked around the ridges of its teeth.'

The groom sat twitching, trembling, twisting his whole face.

'I see bones, skulls, snake holes,' he said, sitting bolt upright in his chair.

'I see an opening,' said the bride. 'But it's dark.'

*'THEN LIGHT IT UP!'*

The bride inhaled deeply. She swept her head

from left to right and then opened her mouth in awe and said, 'My God!'

'What do you see?' said The Corn Aficionado.

'An enormous aquifer containing lifeforms I never knew existed.'

The groom spoke with disbelief:

'I see a box containing a letter, still sealed and never read. Intended recipient and writer both long dead.'

The bride then arose from her chair and opened her eyes as wide as Jupiter and bored them through The Corn Aficionado and soared them over the hills on the horizon and all the way around the earth's circumference. An instant later, her eyes flickered, fresh aflame, reflecting the empty field before her.

'What have you seen?' said The Corn Aficionado.

'I don't want to talk about it.'

It was a secret she'd take with her to the grave.

The groom then opened his eyes as well. Now they both were breathing heavily.

'Very good,' said The Corn Aficionado. 'And yet we've barely breached the surface.'

As the orientation to The Corn Show was occurring, a long thin trail of dust was rising on the gravel road from far out west.

'Now that our imaginations have awakened,' said The Corn Aficionado, 'what we have established is that everything we see before us in the domain of this cornfield is a singular mixture of reality and illusion.'

The legendary buck had returned and was standing in profile in a far-off corner of the field. It looked bigger now, and more majestic, its antlers like a chalice for the sky.

‘In a way, everything we’ve ever seen across the surface of this earth is what has been dreamed up from the elements that this land contains within it. This includes you, as well as me. We are the dreamed, dreaming... beings who one day not long ago were never even dreamed of. Now we do the dreaming.’

As the Corn Aficionado leaned back against a stake to ponder the ramifications of what his words had meant, a yellow Maserati shot over the horizon, like a photon.

‘City folk,’ said the invisible hunter.

The car zoomed by, kicking rocks up as it passed. Once it crossed the next field over (grazing ground for bison), the driver slammed the car’s brakes and began to peel out in reverse. The car fishtailed backwards until the driver punched the brakes again and brought the car to rest next to the horse and buggy. A corn-fed man in a dark green suit and a honey colored tie then exited the Maserati.

‘Are you the owner of this here land?’ he asked  
The Corn Aficionado.

‘No, I am the watchman.’

‘Are either one of you?’ he asked the Mennonites.

‘We’re just here to watch the corn grow,’ said the bride.

‘Well then who is?’

The Corn Aficionado removed his pipe and pointed with it towards the poplar tree line.

‘On the other side of that there windbreak — you must have missed it when you passed — there’s a home with a trio of silver grain bins. The man who farms this land lives there.’

The man made a dough faced sneer and made to return to his idling car.

‘Mind if I ask you what your business with him is?’ said The Corn Aficionado.

‘We’re putting in a billboard,’ the man said, pointing to a vacant location in the sky. ‘Our satellite data tells us that this here geo-coordinate is a very popular crossroads.’ The man took a moment to survey his surroundings. All was static. The entire view looked like a landscape painting, save for a solitary tumbleweed that was blowing down the gravel road as if it were running late for an appointment. The man looked puzzled. ‘Is there anyone out here who can explain to me just what unnatural marvel is driving such massive hordes of people to this god-forsaken—’

A gunshot then rang out like yet another clap of thunder from above as a high-caliber golden round sliced through the Maserati’s front passenger-side tire. The businessman watched helpless, horrified, as the tire deflated completely.

‘Damnit,’ said the hunter. ‘Too low.’

‘Take a seat,’ said The Corn Aficionado, lighting

his corn-cob pipe. 'Sit back, relax and enjoy The Corn Show. The spectacle has just begun.'

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OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, winter thawed, and the earth began to stir, but still the land remained asleep. Very little occurred as far as corn goes. Nevertheless, the site continued buzzing, persistent with activity. Other visitors began to arrive, in ones and twos at first, and then in groups of threes and fours. Soon there were several rows of people sitting in lawn chairs around the cornfield. The initial wave arrived mostly by serendipity. The first of this more hapless subset happened to be a pair of teens-in-lust who'd been out looking for a place to park their car when they spotted the businessman chained to a fencepost along the roadside. (By this point, his car had been generously peppered with bullet holes.) The Corn Aficionado persuaded the teens to stay, saying, 'Feel free to park here for the remainder of the year.' The next to arrive was a hitchhiker who'd been out looking for her friend. She was followed by a murderer who'd been searching for days for a place remote enough to bury a decomposing body. A taxi followed him, stopping only briefly before speeding off again to drop off a plumber who on that very day had commenced a well-earned sabbatical of which he sought to '*spend the entire duration of in a land that had no pipes.*' A family of gardeners arrived next, and

they were followed by a yellow school bus that was filled three to a seat with a group of elderly bird watchers who'd been out touring the prairie on a guided safari in search of the reclusive northern lark.

One day, not long before it was time for the farmer to plow his field, the gentleman Mennonite volunteered to help the businessman erect a billboard from scratch.

'As long as it's used to help advertise the show,' said The Corn Aficionado.

The chain around the businessman's ankle (the ship grade iron manacle which had been holding him securely anchored to the fencepost) was unlocked for most of the duration of construction. The billboard took six days to build. Upon completion, it could be seen from miles away, but for two days, it was blank.

'What do you think it ought to say?' said the Mennonite, craning his neck as he rested on his stool.

The businessman, despite being held against his will, provided an insight that proved to be tremendously useful to The Corn Show.

'You have to admit,' he said. 'Watching corn grow is not the most exhilarating experience. Whatever you want it to say, you'll need to jazz it up.'

'Jazz it up?' said the Mennonite.

'You know. Sell it.'

'How about we just paint a picture of a corn cob?'

'No,' said the businessman. 'Too literal. It won't

stand out. What you need is words. Words that deliver something aspirational.'

'How about: *Come enjoy the wonderful world of corn?*'

'You can't speak to the mind. It must say something that speaks directly to the heart.'

The gentleman Mennonite removed his hat and squinted at the billboard. After a long pause, he said, 'Well shoot. I-am-a-not-a wordsmith. What do you think, dear?'

His wife, who was sitting knitting in a lawn chair, without looking up, said, matter-of-factly: '*See the whole world in a kernel of corn.*'

The gentleman Mennonite jumped out of his chair, clapped his hands exactly once and said, 'Ha! Now that'll do it.'

'I don't know...' said the businessman. 'It's a bit coarse... I think first we should do some market research.'

'I like it,' said The Corn Aficionado. 'It's pure. And it's also unforgettable.'

And so it was.

After the gentleman Mennonite descended from painting *SEE THE WHOLE WORLD IN A KERNEL OF CORN* on the billboard, he proclaimed himself to be a 'Paint Drying Aficionado' and proceeded to commentate late into the night to the few attendees who were interested in watching the paint dry on the billboard.

The next morning, RVs began to file in in droves,



lost souls out rambling the countryside began to trickle in and a blimp flew in and began to circle overhead. The whole affair soon became a festival.

The businessman, drawing attention to the billboard's immediate success, gave a presentation on why he should be allowed to return to his urban loft.

'I am not in a position to negotiate,' said The Corn Aficionado. 'The Corn Show is something you must see through to the end. Maybe you can help us make a few more billboards?'

And so, reluctantly, he did. Over the next few weeks, the businessman assisted the Mennonite in the construction of another twenty billboards to help promote The Corn Show.

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WINTER TURNED TO SPRING. No more frost. It was time to cultivate.

Though the crowd had reached a sizable proportion, The Corn Aficionado arranged for individual copies of his favorite book to be allocated to each spectator:

'When in doubt, consult the Farmer's Almanac.'

The Corn Aficionado expounded on the book's literary qualities throughout the entire lengthy distribution process:

*'Very good read...'*

*'Unputdownable...'*

*'It's a thriller in every sense...'*

And so on and so forth.

The ground shook seismically as the farmer drove his tractor towards the field. Like a great green groaning metal elephant, the tractor creaked mechanically amidst the first bright twitters of spring.

'Cultivation is an art,' said The Corn Aficionado, addressing the crowd through a cheerleader's megaphone. 'It's the time the earth inhales. Soil must first be pulverized before a seed can take to root.'

As the farmer made his first pass, the crowd went wild. Every clump of soil was broken up and leveled off behind the tractor's plow. Moisture long contained beneath Earth's surface was released, giving off the smell of freshly resurrected spring. The crowd's energy swelled with each pass of the tractor. Throughout the day, the head of every spectator turned back and forth as if the event at hand were a very slow tennis match. There were quiet grumbles, sporadic applause and the occasional incoherent outburst. During lunchtime intermission, as the farmer kicked his feet up to enjoy a Rueben sandwich in the cabin of his tractor, the field's edge sang abuzz with enthusiastic gabbing that was tinged with laughter and awe.

That evening, after the farmer had departed, the businessman pitched the idea that it was time to build a set of grandstands for tiered viewing. The Mennonite began construction at ten that night and had a set of grandstands built by

daybreak. The following night, darkness was lit from dusk to dawn by innumerable incredible sources. Moths danced high in the stadium lighting, some flaming into match-sized flickers as they flew too near enormous scalding lamps. A comet blazed far above the blimp that circled overhead, illuminating the sky with its cobalt tail. The hunter, though he had still not been spotted by a single spectator, spent the entire night sharpening his knife on a whetstone, yielding a marvelous display of sparks that appeared as if spontaneous. The whole while, the buck (which had become a sort of mascot of The Corn Show) paced the field, its antlers shining with a soft white luminescence rivaled only by the moon. There was not a spectator present who confessed to having the faintest thought of sleep that night. Torches were spread throughout the grandstands, each of which were lit by the reverent passing of a flame. So as not to disturb the sacred silence of the vigil, The Corn Aficionado passed out handwritten pamphlets which served to outline the overarching purpose of the next day's planting. Some of the passages he drafted read as follows:

*We are pollinators, not so different than a hive of bees. Corn is our honey, the nectar of our civilization.*

*We eat corn, and when we eat it, we change corn*

*and we are changed. Immeasurable is the surplus  
of a single bushel's worth.*

*There is no chaos in a cornfield. Corn is order  
made manifest; a commodity divinely crafted.*

The pamphlet was considered to be a practical, as well as a spiritual document.

By first light on that momentous day of planting, the crowd had grown to a throng of several thousand. The grandstands sagged in the center of each section and could only support the elderly and the vulnerable. Rows of lawn chairs three and at some places as far as six deep wrapped the field's entire circumference. In the same corner from which the hunter's colorful display of sparks had been seen the previous night, a patch of spectators parted in order to let the farmer drive his tractor through. Upon entering his field, the farmer began to make long drawn-out sweeps with his planter like a Zamboni in an ice rink, leaving only a patch in the middle of his field unplanted.

'Why didn't he plant anything in the middle of the field?' said the plumber, who was lathered up with sunscreen and wearing an oversized Hawaiian shirt.

'What the farmer planted today was his top-yielding hybrid dent corn kernel. Field corn. A record breaker in bushels per acre, but not the kind we eat. This is the main crop he'll come back and

harvest in the fall. Later this week, weather permitting, he'll return to plant by hand his world-renowned delicious sweet corn kernel, Peaches and Cream. He'll put it in the middle of all of his field corn to protect it from such pests as raccoons and hungry crows who won't be able smell it through all that hybrid dent corn kernel that they desire far less to eat.'

As The Corn Aficionado continued speaking, vendors wandered through the crowd selling buckets of popcorn, caramel corn, canned corn and brick hard cobs of Indian corn for souvenirs. The Corn Aficionado could hardly contain his excitement. He spoke like an announcer at a derby, commentating on the farmer's every move. The crowd was excited too. There was a constant murmur of voices, repetitive simplistic chants and a general discordant clutter of whistles and horns and wails. There was talk of a foreign spy among the crowd (sent to poach proprietary genetic information), rumors of grand dukes in attendance who were bejeweled in disguises wholly unconvincing, fevered talk about the weather, as well as speculation from gamblers on how much corn the field would yield come fall.

Before the farmer left the field on his maiden day of planting, he parked his tractor along the tree line and descended to the ground; his first time having done so in this year's extravaganza. As he put his foot to earth (one could imagine him saying, *That's one*

*small step for man*'), the crowd assumed a silence that created a force field of its own.

'Now just what chore will the farmer cross next off from his list?' said The Corn Aficionado.

As the farmer walked past the legendary buck, he showed no signs that he perceived it. The buck did not spook. And the farmer did not even pause to look at it. As the farmer carried out what mysterious chore he was performing, the white noise of anticipation drowned out the tractor's diesel hum. The crowd idled all the same, expanding one by one as more corn bound pilgrims reached their promised land.

'There it is!' said a birdwatcher. 'I see a northern meadowlark!'

The spirits of several birdwatchers almost popped upon this remark, the sighting of this bird, for some, being a transcendental experience. Many of the birdwatchers' physical appearances indeed took on a happy weightless fluff, while others, unable to find the proper portal of release, responded with uncivil fury. There was a tussle over a pair of binoculars, a scream, a bite, a death and then a succession of senile curses which caused a wave of measured hushes to spray out from the crowd. As the contagion of rage and passion spread, the hunter fired a shot at the yellow-breasted lark (which missed), his gunfire having been registered only by those in attendance who had not been emotionally invested in the bird's spotting.

‘The northern meadowlark is not really all that rare,’ said The Corn Aficionado.

Despite the pandemonium, the bird had remained safe on its barbwire perch. All the same, the buck had returned to grazing and the farmer had continued to inspect his field as if he hadn’t heard a thing. He walked purposefully, with deliberate bravado, along the poplar tree line whereupon each bud in the preceding days had burst a brand-new mint green leaf.

‘What’s he doing?’ said the Mennonite bride.

‘I think he’s going to take a whiz,’ said the plumber, thoroughly enjoying his retreat.

The Corn Aficionado continued to announce the farmer’s every move.

There was a collective gasp when the farmer reached the first tree along the roadside. He faced its trunk and stood about an arm’s length away from it. He bit his lip, swung his head left, swung his head right and unbuttoned the chest pocket of his overalls. The farmer then lifted his denim flap and pulled out a folded-up sign.

‘What’s this?’ said The Corn Aficionado. ‘What do we have here?’

As the farmer tacked the sign to the tree trunk, those in Standing Room Only tried to push their way forward for a more advantageous view.

‘Can anyone read what it says?’ said The Corn Aficionado. ‘It’s too far away for me to see.’

A man with a peg leg who was dressed in a

highly decorated naval uniform then pulled out an old brass scope and squinted keenly through it.

'It says: *NO HUNTING.*'

The meadowlark then landed on The Corn Aficionado's shoulder and chirped a sweet nothing into his ear. From this point forward, there was no further gunfire. Many photographs were taken. The Corn Aficionado smiled for every one of them.

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A FEW WEEKS LATER, after the farmer had returned to plant his sweet corn, the field of sunflowers across the road was hit by a devastating tornado. A few of the birdwatchers had been reported missing and all twenty-one of the carefully constructed billboards had blown away like a flock of giant kites. Although most of the crowd had taken cover beneath the grandstands (which had withstood the fierceness of the winds without a problem), several of the attendees' vehicles had been flung into the branches of nearby trees. Among these had been the birdwatchers' yellow school bus, the businessman's Maserati and a couple dozen RVs and Winnebagos. Luckily, the blimp had not been affected in the slightest. As fate would have it, it had been covering a wheat show in a neighboring county that had not been in the line of the storm.

The farmer drove his flatbed to the field the following morning to check what damage had



befallen his dear beloved corn. The soil had held its own, the tree line having served its purpose as a windbreak. His perfect rows of short spry tufts of green had persisted standing firmly rooted to the ground as if there hadn't been the slightest gust of wind, let alone a powerful tornado. As planned and right on schedule, his more sensitive sweet corn in the center of his crop was growing far faster than the field corn that surrounded it. The farmer snapped his suspenders with approval.

'Close call,' said The Corn Aficionado. 'Now it's time to irrigate.'

To the plumber's great dismay, the farmer spent the next several days assembling an above ground series of ultramodern pipes. Each pipe shimmered silver in the high noon sun, as if silks of glistening web spun by a giant spider. About midway through the farmer's second day of installation, he was paid a visit by a crop consultant who had come to help him form a greater understanding of the system's specs and uses. As the consultant and the farmer toured the field, only snippets of their conversation could be overheard by those attendees sitting in the first few rows of the grandstands.

'Center pivot,' said the crop consultant. 'It'll help you maximize absorption for maximum yield...'

'I can just go home and let it roll?...'

'The electric motor does the work for you...'

'Pneumatic wheels...'

'I want the entire system customizable...'

‘It can be used for fertilizer, and for pesticides too...’ ‘No need for aerial application...’ ‘You’ll grow so much corn that you can buy a plow of gold...’

And so on.

Over the next month, as spring blended into summer, the corn inched skyward. New billboards were installed, this time with a logo drawn on each that depicted a kernel of corn of which was topped with an animated drawing of The Corn Aficionado — to which he humbly protested. In a marketing stunt to pander to untapped demographics, the message from the original tornado-destroyed billboards — *SEE THE WHOLE WORLD IN A KERNAL OF CORN* — was translated into Mandarin, Egyptian, Russian and Swahili. Also constructed during this season of frenzied building was a concession stand, a swing set, a line of plywood porta-potties and a crop observatory deck that doubled as a stage for vulgar nighttime entertainment.

It was a time of good cheer and merry making. But none of these fine structures would endure the disaster that foreshadowed them. There had been little rain, and though the field itself was appearing to grow robust and green (what water had not fallen from the sky had been pumped up from the aquifer below), the land of the surrounding area had been slipping into drought. Dust blew in from near and far, coating the cornstalks brown. The earth became thirsty and dry. What the entire region needed was

rain, but what it got was a great deluge that destroyed nearly everything.

‘Quick, dig canals,’ said The Corn Aficionado when the floodwaters began to rise. ‘Stack the sandbags high. We must work together for The Corn Show to survive.’

Tens of thousands of spectators banded together as one mighty desperate crew to redirect the flow of the incoming water. Whatever The Corn Aficionado said, they turned into a song. As the great chorus sang, the grandstands crumbled, shredded to debris by the murky tide. The newly constructed billboards were wiped away by the wrath of nature yet again. A sea, waist deep, covered the entire area with the notable exception of the cornfield. The multitudes that had gathered, through a series of hastily dug canals and artificially constructed dikes, had sprung into action without hesitation to overcome a force that a lesser crowd would have thought unstoppable. Yet still, the flood had been formidable. Despite the collective miracle, mud covered everything, the soil was drenched and the future of The Corn Show was uncertain.

‘If I can’t hunt, then I will fish,’ said the hunter.

‘Suit yourself,’ said the plumber, slipping into his coveralls. ‘It appears that my sabbatical is over.’

There was then a swirl of the most efficient action. The cornfield soon looked like a rural Venice, fortified by a web of brilliant hydraulic engineering

that had been manufactured by the plumber. A few minutes later, the farmer was spotted paddling bare-back on a log. As the farmer pulled the log onto his field, he appeared to be surprised to find that water covered everything in sight except his cornfield. Mystified, the farmer walked between his planted rows in shallow trenches of soggy soil, kneeling here and there to gape at hidden drainage grates of which were funneling water into pipes he'd never realized veined the underbelly of his field. The farmer began to mumble to himself with consternation. It sounded as if he were trying to convince himself, with confounded effort, in a false rendition of his past, that he'd forgotten he'd hired someone to install this very drainage system in the aftermath of a flood that had ruined his corn crop decades prior. A flood indeed had struck this land a thousand moons ago — *A great flood*. One that had drowned and buried in mud The Corn Aficionado's less attentive predecessor.

'Well that's something else,' the farmer mumbled to himself. 'I was expecting I'd find something more reminiscent of a rice paddy.'

And as the farmer stood there slack-jawed gazing out across his cornfield, the legendary buck advanced to a puddle before him and slurped up an amount of water that could have filled a pool. From the farmer's point of view, the puddle had simply vanished.

'The devil is always thirsty,' the farmer mumbled with suspicion.

If he would have been more optimistic, another explanation of the world from his viewpoint could have been that there was an angel hovering above him drinking through a straw.

The farmer curled his lips into a smile. He was not naïve. This was not his first encounter with a peculiar set of circumstances. He began to investigate his field judiciously, joyfully bewildered. But his sharp attention swiftly melted into reverie. Though the farmer rarely departed the rural compound of his farmland, he was a man of great adventure who was not a stranger to miraculous events. He'd learned that what besets the eye is often a mirage, and that there exists a grander truth beyond the world of appearances; one of which the mind can only access when it surrenders the inexplicable to the imagination, a force he'd learned was far more powerful than every last assembled star across the universe. The farmer considered, at first, that it was perhaps a most improbable stroke of luck that had spared him the ruin of his farmland. But what he felt deep down was that the reason had its roots in something far more beautiful. The farmer paced his field, leaving footprints in the mud. He was so profoundly deep in thought that he failed to realize he was heading straight for The Corn Aficionado, who was standing frozen stiff atop a lump of dirt, staring off with a vapid stare, remaining so supremely still that the farmer almost bumped into him.

*'Hmmmggghhh.'*

The Corn Aficionado cleared his throat.

The farmer shook his head abruptly, shaking out of his daydream. When he looked up, he found that he was standing face to face with The Corn Aficionado. The farmer looked over The Corn Aficionado's shoulder and found no reason for concern. He took a step back and scanned his field with a prying eye. But he could see no signs of life. Not even the legendary buck, which in that moment was slurping up another puddle right beside him. A horsefly then buzzed the farmer's ear. The farmer took his hat off and prepared to swat at it. When it landed on The Corn Aficionado's button nose, the farmer whacked it, killing it with the first strike.

The Corn Aficionado let out an internal scream.

'What is going on here?' said the farmer to himself.

The Corn Aficionado said nothing. He did not even blink.

The farmer kneeled to retrieve The Corn Aficionado's pipe, which had fallen to the ground. Before he refastened it, the farmer removed a piece of straw that had been dangling from The Corn Aficionado's pants leg and began to chew on it. Everything he said to himself thereafter was slurred and mostly unintelligible.

'Wells I say, seems all's swell and squeered away.'

The farmer began to file through the chores on his mental checklist, weighing decisions in his head as he tossed his eyes from side to side. He tried to

account for any projects he'd left abandoned or simply hadn't gotten to. But nothing that he felt like doing came to mind.

'No works out here but hopes and pray.'

He poked The Corn Aficionado in the belly.

'Wells I guess it can'ts hurts to move you.'

The farmer then lifted The Corn Aficionado by his iron spine and threw him over his shoulder. The Corn Aficionado immediately became motion sick. As the farmer carried him across the field, he began to feel as if he was going to puke. He tried to hold it in but couldn't. The Corn Aficionado vomited violently — silently — over the farmer's shoulder. When the farmer finally sat him down on the opposite side of the field, he removed The Corn Aficionado's filthy flannel hat with ear flaps and replaced it with his ballcap (which had been thoroughly smudged with horsefly blood and guts). In the wake of the route they'd walked, there was a strewn-out trail of mildewed straw.

'That'll do,' the farmer said.

The Corn Aficionado's change of scenery was indescribable. He had never seen the world from this superior perspective. The sight vanquished his sickness at once. He felt as if he was viewing this only land he'd ever known for the first time in his life.

'Alls you've ever seen is the sunset,' said the farmer. 'Now alls you'll ever do is watch it rise.'

The Corn Aficionado could not believe this gift that he'd been given. All he wanted to do was show

his gratitude, but he was wise enough to wait until the farmer had returned to his log and was paddling back to his farmhouse to whisper: 'Thank you.'

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IN THE FOLLOWING WEEK, as the floodwaters subsided, reconstruction began. After six new billboards had been installed, The Corn Aficionado arranged a groundbreaking ceremony for a wooden astrodome with a retractable roof, a most ambitious project of which the Mennonite vowed to have completed within the coming month. This renewed the crowd with an enthusiastic energy. A similar exuberance returned to the corn's performance in the field. After a precarious week of post-flood wilting, the corn had returned to edging ever skyward yet again.

'Isn't it about time to pick some sweet corn?' said the businessman, who'd been unchained from his fencepost and was now observing The Corn Show voluntarily.

'We need to wait for the silks atop the stalks to brown just a little more,' said The Corn Aficionado.

'How much longer?'

'Only five or six more days.'

In the meantime, close to one hundred thousand spectators (some estimates have placed the number far larger) gathered on the side of the cornfield where the Mennonite had yet to reach in the construction of his dome. A few hundred dignitaries



were placed in temporary seating, about twenty thousand were seated in lawn chairs and the remainder of attendees were left to stand and mill about the field's edge on their own. Unprompted masses began to form around the most charismatic storytellers in each section. As they began to tell their tales, the crowd distorted, twisting and shuffling, self-sorting, amoeba-like, like a human form of continental drift. While the best storytellers ascended in their statures like the peaks of mighty mountains, crowds gathered around their bases, admiring them for the secret truths that they divulged.

'Let me tell you how to use a corn cob as a weapon,' shouted the murderer. 'What other object is there that can be used for both feast and slaughter? In its most blunt and basic form, a corn cob can be used to bludgeon someone into a bloody pulp. Or if your murder is of the more premeditated genre, you can tie two cobs together end-to-end to make a pair of nunchucks.' The murderer then lifted his shirt and exposed a disturbing scar. 'In prison, I was stabbed with a cob that had been filed into a shank. I nearly died. I laid half-conscious in my own blood, thinking, that if I were to survive, whatever I would do, I would never again make the mistake of bringing a banana to a corn fight.'

The scowl that flashed across his face was frightening.

This unplanned storytelling phenomenon soon

turned into a story fair. A clown walked around on stilts. There was a tale about a cornstalk the size of tall tower; an account about a cob the size of canoe; there were legends of corn cob cabins, cathedrals and castles; and a gripping science fiction fantasy about a caravan of space exploring pioneers who were intercepted and enslaved by a civilization of farming aliens who sustained themselves by growing their own slimy green colossal corn on the planetary discs throughout their galaxy.

Late one night, on the final eve of the weeklong story fair, beneath the glow of a billion fireflies and other strange and fabulous lights, The Corn Aficionado waved his arms to gather everyone's attention. He took a deep breath and waited until all conversation had ceased and all eyes were set on him. He spoke only when he saw nothing moving except the billion fireflies that drifted in a hurricane of light above the cornfield.

'I need one thousand volunteers to help me pick some sweet corn.'

Every hand shot up, including the businessman's.

'Just so you know,' called the hunter. 'I'm raising my hand, too.'

The Corn Aficionado selected the volunteers one by one, choosing seemingly at random. He instructed each, in a stirring speech, so as not to give the farmer undue reason for suspicion, to return with not a corn cob more than one hundred per each person.

‘I permit to you, this legion I have chosen, the honorable task of retrieving one-hundred thousand cobs. Pick one ear only for every ten stalks that you see. If we must wary the farmer into seeking out a bandit, let him put his condemnation on nature’s foibles and not us. Let him blame his loss on corn borers, rootworms, crows, critters, cows or whatever fault that may impress upon him in his stars. Let him spell out in that alphabet soup of his astrology any culprit that he sees, but let him know not that this was us, less we aim to make an adversary of a dear friend who we only wish to please.’

Like lamp lit motes, several million fireflies began to descend, squadron by squadron, to float among the crowd. They carried themselves searchingly, as if probing, through the endless rows of cornstalks. They flew in excursions over the adjacent fields of cotton, sunflowers and bison, and then around the half-built framework of the astrodome, illuminating the entire region with their pallid, rippling light. The volunteers entered the cornfield under such spellbinding conditions. As the column of sweet corn pickers marched in unison through the neck-high field corn, they were observed from afar by The Corn Aficionado, who, if it has not already been inferred, suffered from a certain immobilizing disability that prevented him from leading the troop of harvesters himself.

‘*PICK WISELY, GOOD FRIENDS,*’ he shouted

from his post. *'MY HOPES AND WISHES ARE UPON YOU.'*

And as the band of volunteers, the chosen thousand, entered the thicket of much taller sweet corn in the center of the field, they all together, as if connected by a single destiny, disappeared from sight in one fell mighty swoop. Silence. Stillness. The fireflies hovered and flew no farther. From that point forward, onward, upward, in that night's fleeting hourglass of time, all motion in the field became so sparse so as to cease the continuity of reality itself. The fixed huddles of fireflies hung suspended in the sky, shining down like an array of resplendent spotlights, blinking on and off in an uncanny secret code. Now and then, a rustle could be heard as the tip of a tassel-topped cornstalk tossed back and forth while a volunteer snapped an ear off from below. The work was hurried and yet restrained. The hunter had been assigned to this clandestine regiment and he lent a certain credence to their stealth. For the entire duration of this extremely careful harvesting, the legendary buck's antlers could be seen gliding like a set of meandering fins above that cornstalk sea.

*'WHAT A NIGHT!'* shouted The Corn Aficionado. *'WHAT A TIME TO BE REMEMBERED!'*

The next day, after the fireflies had dispersed to recharge their electric physiologies, The Corn Aficionado held a massive banquet. The sweet corn was shucked and eaten in every way it could be consumed: it was roasted on grills and steamed; it

was baked in ovens and boiled in cast-iron cauldrons; it was wrapped with foil and cooked underground in coals; it was cooked in RV microwaves; it was eaten raw; it was peppered and salted and smothered with butter; it was dipped into batter and fried; it was caramelized; it was air dried and generously doused with molasses. Some corn cobs were eaten lengthwise, like a typewriter, while others were mowed down in a spiral, like a screw. Some cobs were cut into two and skewered, while others were grated and packed into tin ribbed cans that were sealed and then labeled and shelved in a network of doomsday bunkers beneath the field.

As for the murderer, he failed to eat his corn with the slightest regard for the etiquette that the occasion required.

‘That is not how you eat corn on the cob,’ said the businessman, who had tucked a fine white table napkin into his collar.

And it was true. The murderer was eating like a heathen.

‘I’ll eat my corn however I damn well please,’ he said.

‘What a brute,’ said the Mennonite bride. ‘I feel as if I am in the presence of a hyena.’

The murderer was trying to bite down on the cob itself. He was trying to eat it whole. When he finally managed to sink his teeth into its core, his gums were bleeding and he was drooling. He snapped off a chunk and began to chew through the chaff, the

woody ring and the pith, all at the same time, as if the corn cob's core were nothing more than a fluff of fresh baked bread.

*'WHAT CROCODILE STRENGTH,'* announced The Corn Aficionado. *'I DIDN'T KNOW SUCH A THING WAS POSSIBLE.'*

The murderer then approached a stack of discarded cobs that had been piled high for compost and proceeded to greedily chew through them. At this point, a few curious bystanders bit into their kernel-less cobs as well, only to find that doing so was like trying to sink their teeth into a block of cinder.

*'At least he's not filing them into shanks,'* said a birdwatcher.

The pilot of the blimp circling overhead then released a basket of leaflets that fell from the sky like confetti. Hands reached above others to catch them as they drifted to the ground. Printed on each was a picture of the cornfield taken from the sky view of the blimp. Each leaflet read the following:

*CROP CIRCLE: THIS IS NOT A HOAX*

Beneath this heading, the leaflet revealed a low-resolution image of a portion of the field that had not yet been covered by the astrodome's construction. In this section was a crop circle of complex design that can only be described as a Mandelbrot set with a

fascinating arrangement of curling Fibonacci fractals.

Upon analyzing this leaflet, a few spectators scurried into the cornfield to investigate. Most stayed back, fearing radiation.

*'PLEASE DESCRIBE EXACTLY WHAT YOU'RE SEEING,'* said The Corn Aficionado.

Some in the crowd began to climb trees for a more profitable view. Others started running to their cars to flee. Several of the birdwatchers were turning their binoculars directly towards the sun and frying their eyes. Mayhem overtook spectacle.

*'We've found an opening,'* said the businessman, his voice muffled in the cornfield. *'The stalks are bent, but not quite broken.'*

*'Some of the stalks are intertwined,'* said the plumber. *'It looks like they've been... weaved.'*

*'There are many malformations on the stalks,'* said the Mennonite bride.

*'PLEASE DESCRIBE IN FURTHER DETAIL,'* shouted The Corn Aficionado.

The hunter then hurled a sample stalk, like a javelin, from his location in the field. After tracing a spectacular parabola, it landed before The Corn Aficionado's iron post, sticking into the ground as if that is where it had sprouted from the soil. It was covered in warts and boils.

*'GET OUT OF THERE, NOW!'* shouted The Corn Aficionado.

Word spread fast. A news chopper flew in and

began to report the event live on a regional network. Apparently, someone (no one saw exactly who) had climbed one of the billboards and painted over it: *YOU ARE NOT ALONE*.

‘But I am alone,’ said The Corn Aficionado. ‘I have always been alone. And I always will be.’

This message had filled The Corn Aficionado with a feeling of impending doom. Until this instant, a small part of him had begun to feel as if his lifelong wish were finally on the cusp of being granted. And yet, he had always known that the granting of this wish would be impossible. The world around him muted. For a moment, all he saw was an ordinary cornfield.

‘Are you okay?’ said the hunter.

His voice seemed but a whisper in the sky.

The Corn Aficionado began to imagine what it would be like if none of this were here. He wondered, if instead of orchestrating The Corn Show, what would have happened had he left this field to its own devices with only him there to watch it. In reality, nothing would be different. The farmer would fare neither better nor no worse. And yet still, this place would be lacking something monumental of its essence. There would be a void among this cornfield of what is not but what could be. This land would be haunted by the ghost of something beautiful.

‘The farmer is en route,’ said the plumber. ‘What are we to do?’



The Corn Aficionado stood unmoving, completely inert before the historic crowd that had joined him in his solitude, his external appearance betraying nothing of the extraordinary spectacle that had been going on inside him.

‘Chances are,’ he said, as a blue jay landed on his shoulder, ‘that the farmer will never find us.’ The Corn Aficionado began to shake his head in disappointment. ‘The likelihood that he will sense us here in truth is very slim.’ He stretched his arms before him in an attempt to step away from the post he’d been attached to, only to find he couldn’t, as the case has always been. ‘Come what may, we have danced upon this field,’ he said, not letting his tears escape him. ‘We have flooded it, loved in it and whipped it with wind. The farmer has nothing to fear but the world he knows already. And yet he knows so little of what he has to gain.’ The Corn Aficionado was now writhing at his post. ‘Let us force upon him at least a glimmer of our splendor. Let us push the clouds aside for just one day. Let us fill this field with meaning until he finally comprehends the truth of our reality. Let us paint this land with such a feeling that he can’t help but realize we are here.’

As The Corn Aficionado finished speaking, the Mennonite swung his hammer home to drive in the last nail of his dome. The wooden structure stood complete, the newest wonder of the world. The retractable roof was open and the sun was pouring in. Attendees were filing into the stands, many of

whom were commenting on the crop circle, some declaring it to be 'the work of a celestial genius.' There had never been a show so grand and stunning. It was the roar of life, and the ability to perceive; it was the smell of fresh cut wood and buttered popcorn; it was the sound of laughter and awe as a thousand balloons were released to rise out of the dome; it was the perfection of the human voice, so rhythmic and encoded with meaning; it was the imprint of a hand left in the condensation on a glass of ice-cold lemonade; it was the momentary image of a familiar face in the murmur of ten thousand starlings; it was the recollection of a forgotten possibility, a memory revisited and then finally understood; it was the feeling when the sky itself rips open and reveals an insight that in our heart we've always known to be true; it was the sum of all the senses and affections that make a summer afternoon a celebration for all eternity.

News had spread around the world and now the event was being broadcast across the globe. The stadium seating stretched so high that The Corn Aficionado could not imagine where it ended. The dome, it seemed, was the sky itself. The crowd was never-ending.

The Corn Aficionado's image was projected onto a massive screen as he addressed the crowd through his new microphone:

'Here the farmer comes,' he said.

The new sound system could be heard reverberating from miles and miles away.

‘Today he arrives in his flatbed with a trailer. I am being told that he has just pulled off the gravel road. Here he is. We see him enter this incredible dome we’ve built for him... Let’s give him a round of applause.’

The crowd grew so loud that it made it difficult to hear him.

‘He walks in with an empty basket on his back. He enters the cornstalks and now we’ve lost him. We can’t see him directly, but we can see the corn warp as he walks between its rows. It appears that he has no knowledge of our legendary buck ten rows to his west, or of the crop circle two hundred rows ahead of him.’

The roar of the crowd was deafening.

‘He’s come to pick his sweet corn! It appears he’s picked his first cob of Peaches and Cream. Now he picks another. And another. And another—’

This went on for the next thirty minutes.

‘Now he’s exiting his field. It appears he’s not suspicious. We see him empty his sweet corn into the bed of his trailer... And now he enters his field again—’

The farmer picked his corn all day, walking back and forth to his trailer to empty his basket each time he filled it to the brim. He followed the same tracks to and from his secret patch of sweet corn in the center of his field on every trip he made. Not once

did the farmer wander towards the crop circle in his field corn. Not even for a moment did it appear that he suspected a record-breaking crowd was there surrounding him, watching him, cheering him on with a passion that no one in attendance would forget for as long as they existed.

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THE NEXT MONTH was extremely hot and miserable. Daytime became one long drawn-out siesta in which the retractable roof was closed. The businessman worked with the plumber to draft schematics for a maze, although the plans were never implemented. As the flattened stalks in the crop circle slowly stood back up and regained their wholesome luster, the harvested stalks of sweet corn in the center of the field were matted down and used for bedding by those who had grown weary of The Corn Show. Wasps built nests in The Corn Aficionado's armpits. Not until fall did his spirits rise again.

'Finally, the field corn is turning brown,' he said. 'Another year coming to a close.'

On the night of the harvest moon, The Corn Aficionado organized a bonfire. It was a cloudless night. Over the course of the year, many friendships had formed in the crowd that would last forever. The Mennonites, over the course of their honeymoon, had bonded as everlasting partners, the plumber had had an eventful sabbatical and the hunter had

still not been seen by a single spectator. The businessman had become The Corn Aficionado's right-hand man (the year could not have been a success without him), and the birdwatchers had learned to look out for one another and not just for the bird of their dreams. The Corn Aficionado had come to discern each and every person in attendance with such a clarity of mind that the entire crowd had begun to interfuse with his innermost self and become an integral part of him. This knowledge had helped him form the basis of who he was. He would strive to become the composite entity of this year's cast of assembled characters. It was an imaginative vision to seek, one that would take him great effort to attain, and as far as he knew, it was a chore that had never been attempted before throughout the whole of history. What this conglomerate identity would help him to achieve was companionship in the depths of his loneliness, awareness in his emptiness and vitality in the hollowness of his existence. As is the same for all lifeforms throughout the entire universe, including corn itself, what had allowed The Corn Aficionado to evolve into a creature of dimension, a vessel of wishes and a spirit of resolve of which was endowed with sensations, thought, intention, volition and love in the very act of watching the sun come up each morning was the refreshed hope that each year's harvest yielded. Each year, The Corn Aficionado found within himself yet another newly iterated self-variety of

highly differentiated vigor. He was proof of possibility itself.

‘Sometime in the following days,’ he said (as fireworks exploded in the night sky above the dome, as the bonfire’s smoke billowed through its retracted roof, as all attendees in the crowd were joined together hand in hand), ‘the farmer will arrive in his combine and harvest his field corn. As we reflect upon this year we’ve shared — upon this remarkable show we’ve had the opportunity to witness together — I ask you this: Have you seen the whole world in a kernel of corn? Have you seen that life in every moment is bursting out of everything? Have you seen that there is no thought nor place nor thing that’s insubstantial in any way no matter how small or mundane that it may be? If you have, then I have just one last kernel of the truth to share with you: We have filled this field with meaning. And because we have, we exist, whether fact proves that we are here or not.’

The farmer arrived exactly one week later to harvest his field corn. The operation took him a full morning and half the afternoon. The farmer failed to look to where The Corn Aficionado was standing even for a solitary glance as his combine swept the field throughout the entire harvest.

That evening, after every stalk had been razed, when there was no longer any corn remaining to watch grow ever skyward, The Corn Aficionado told the crowd the show was over. This announcement

was followed by a monumental silence in which the crowd refused to move. At first, a single voice shouted, 'We're not ready to go home!' And then a few more followed. Soon, someone called out, 'One more year!' And then the entire crowd began chanting for an encore. The Corn Aficionado spun around on his post, looking to a mass of people that stretched up beyond his sight into the very heavens. Some threw sunflowers at his feet. The crowd yelled so loud, at such ear-splitting decibels, that The Corn Aficionado began to feel their roar resounding in his chest.

'It's only fall,' yelled a birdwatcher. 'It's time for hayrack rides and pumpkin carving. Soon, we'll have the holidays, the best time for holding galas and award shows. After that, we'll take a rest and then it will be time to watch the farmer plow his field again. We'll never go home. The show must go on forever.'

The crowd cheered and cheered, making as much noise as they could. When The Corn Aficionado finally made a gesture to indicate that the show would carry on, the crowd grew louder. So much so, that the noise they made began to shake the very earth.

The farmer, at this point, could be seen approaching his field on an ATV. He was driving as fast as it could take him. As he parked on the edge of his field, a pair of fighter jets flew over the astrodome with streaks of yellow smoke trailing out behind them. The farmer did not see this. As far as he could

tell, his field beheld nothing in it except the stubble and shreds of cornstalks. But it did appear that he could sense the swell of something mighty in his presence. His hair was standing on end. And his brain was firing signals to his heart for it to beat as if it were a cannon. The farmer couldn't hear the crowd, but he could sense the surge of something immense occurring all around him. He could feel a current flowing through his field, the energy of something immeasurable that was just beyond his grasp, as if the very air, at any moment, were about to be ripped in two to expose the profound truth that hid behind it.

The whole while, as The Corn Aficionado watched the farmer from afar, he signaled for the crowd to yell louder and louder. They were almost there.