我们全家去掰玉米

寒露那天一早，天还没亮透，我爸就把我叫醒了，说起来，掰玉米去。我一骨碌爬起来。掰玉米对我来说，是一年里头最带劲的事。

我们家的玉米地在村东头，过了水渠再走一截路。到的时候雾气还没散，玉米秆子在雾里立着，一棵比我高出一头还多，顶上的天花干成了灰黄色，风一吹哗啦啦地响。我爸说，夏天这些秆子还没我高，一转眼就蹿得挡人了。

我爸在地中间先划出线，我妈和我从两边往里掰。掰玉米的规矩是一只手攥住棒子，一拧一压，咔吧一声就下来了。我头一下掰得太猛，棒子是下来了，苞叶却撕了一半挂在秆子上。我妈说别急，先拧再压，要听那个响儿。我第二下就听着咔吧一声，棒子完整地落进手里，高兴得喊了一嗓子。

摸出窍门以后我就收不住了。左胳膊夹着的棒子越摞越高，摞到夹不住，就往筐里扔。我们的筐是我爸用柳条编的，带两条袢，能背。每装满一筐，我就跑到地头，把棒子倒进三轮车边的大蛇皮袋里，再背着空筐跑回来，身上轻快得很。

地当中间的玉米叶子拉胳膊，先是痒，后来有点疼。我有一回走到地头想歇，看见我爸的背影还在秆子缝里忙，就没吭声，把袖子又往上卷了卷，接着掰。

太阳升起来，雾散了，整个玉米地金黄一片。我回头数，咱们掰过的地方，秆子剩了半人高，地上一片一片的落叶，还有几个漏掉的棒子。我妈一一捡起来，说漏的这几个回家煮了吃，最甜。

中午的时候，三轮车装满了七蛇皮袋。我坐在袋子顶上，我妈在前头骑，我爸在后头扶着，玉米在袋子里挤得咯吱咯吱响。过村口，爷爷端着茶缸在那儿等，伸手进袋子掏出一个棒子，剥开看了看，说今年是好年成，粒儿真饱。

晚上我抬胳膊有点酸，胳膊上还有几道红印子，可一点都不觉得累。躺在床上我数了数，今天我一个人装了六筐。我跟我爸说明年还要接着掰，掰十筐。我爸笑，说行，那到时候给你编个大一号的筐。

Our Family Goes Corn Picking

Early on the morning of Cold Dew, before the sky had fully brightened, my dad woke me up and said, get up, we are going to pick corn. I rolled out of bed at once. For me, picking corn is the most exciting thing of the whole year.

Our corn field lies at the east end of the village, past the water ditch and a little way on. When we arrived, the morning mist had not yet lifted. The corn stalks stood in the mist, each one more than a head taller than me, the tassels on top dried to a dusty yellow, rattling in the wind. My dad said that in summer these stalks were still shorter than me, and in a blink they had shot up tall enough to hide a person.

My dad drew a line in the middle of the field first, and my mom and I started

picking from both sides toward the center. The rule of picking corn is one hand gripping the ear, then twist and press at the same time, and with one crisp snap it comes off. My first pull was too wild. The ear came off, but half the husk stayed hanging on the stalk. My mom said, do not rush, twist first then press, and listen for that sound. On my second try I heard the snap, and the ear dropped whole into my hand, and I shouted with joy.

Once I caught the trick I could not stop. The ears under my left arm piled higher and higher, and when I could not hold any more I threw them into the basket. Our basket was woven by my dad from willow branches, with two straps, so it could be carried on the back. Every time one basket was full, I ran to the edge of the field and poured the ears into the big woven sack beside the tricycle, then ran back with the empty basket, light on my feet.

Corn leaves scratched my arms in the middle of the field, itchy at first, then a little sore. Once I walked to the edge of the field wanting a rest, but I saw the back of my dad still moving between the stalks, so I said nothing, rolled my sleeves up one more turn, and kept picking.

The sun rose, the mist cleared, and the whole corn field turned golden. I looked back and counted: where we had picked, the stalks stood half a person high, and fallen leaves covered the ground in patches, with a few missed ears here and there. My mom picked up every one of them and said these missed ones we will boil at home, and they taste the sweetest.

By noon the tricycle carried seven full sacks. I sat on top of the sacks, my mom riding in front, my dad steadying from behind, the corn squeezing and creaking inside the sacks. At the village entrance, Grandpa waited with a mug of tea. He reached into a sack, took out one ear, peeled the husk and looked, and said this is a good year, the kernels are truly plump.

At night my arms ached a little when I lifted them, and there were several red scratches on them, but I did not feel tired at all. Lying in bed I counted: today I alone filled six baskets. I told my dad I would keep picking next year, ten baskets. My dad laughed and said all right, then I will weave you a bigger basket for that day.