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.

我和小军比赛掰玉米

星期六上午，邻居小军隔着墙头喊我，说两家的大人都在地里，咱俩比一场掰玉米，一人一行，从地界那儿往两头掰，谁先装满三筐谁赢。我一口就答应了。

我们两家的玉米地挨着，中间踩出来一条窄窄的地界。到了玉米地里，小军他爸用脚在地界上划了一道印子，说就从这儿起。我分到的那一行棒子又大又密，我心里得意，觉得赢定了。

开头我掰得飞快。咔吧一声接一声，棒子顺着胳膊滑下去，夹不住我就往筐里扔，扔得哐当响。掰到一半，我回头一看，小军那一行才掰了没多远，我早就超过他一大截了。我更是放开手脚，连拧都懒得拧到位，胡噜一下拽下来就算。

结果问题出在装筐上。我的筐看着满，其实棒子横七竖八，有的还架在筐沿上。我往地头倒的时候，一路跑一路掉，棒子骨碌碌滚进秆子丛里，我还得回去找。有一根滚到别人家的行里，还是小军他爸帮我捡回来的。

小军那边安安静静的。他掰一根，在筐里码一根，棒子头朝一个方向，码得服服帖帖。他往地头倒的时候，两只手端着筐，走得慢，可一个都没掉。等我装到第二筐半，他三筐已经满了，整整齐齐摞在地头的袋子边上。

我输了，坐在秆子堆上生闷气。小军他爸过来说，小子，你手不慢，掰得比他还快，就是装筐的时候毛躁。干活跟掰玉米一个理，咔吧那一下痛快，码整齐才是收成。

小军把赢来的三筐棒子倒进我们两家的公共袋里，说他答应过的，比完一起给两家装。我脸一下热了，赶紧也抱起筐来装。这回我学乖了，一根一根码，码满一筐再走，走到地头一个没掉。

中午两家大人坐在田埂上喝水，数一共装了十一筐。小军他爸说，这十一筐里，有俩小子的六筐。我听了比赢了还高兴。

回去的路上，小军跟我说，下回比装筐不比掰，我肯定还输。我说去你的，下回我肯定赢你。嘴上这么说，我心里其实服气，掰棒子要听咔吧那一声，装筐要码得整整齐齐，这两样我都得再练。

Xiao Jun and I Have a Corn Picking Contest

Saturday morning, my neighbor Xiao Jun shouted at me over the wall. The grown-ups are all in the fields, he said, let us have a corn picking contest, one row each, from the boundary line toward both ends, whoever fills three baskets first wins. I said yes without thinking.

Our two family fields touch each other, with a narrow boundary path trodden between them. When we got into the corn, Xiao Jun dad scored a line on the boundary with his foot and said, start here. The row I got had big dense ears, and I felt smug, sure the win was mine.

At the start I picked blazing fast. Snap after snap, the ears slid down under my arm, and when I could not hold more I hurled them into the basket with a clang. Halfway through, I looked back and the row of Xiao Jun had barely moved, while I was far ahead. So I let loose completely, not even twisting properly, just yanking an ear off and calling it done.

The trouble came at the basket filling. My basket looked full, but the ears lay in every direction, some balanced on the rim. When I carried one to the edge of the field, I dropped ears all along the way, rolling into the stalks, and I had to go back and hunt for them. One rolled into another family row, and Xiao Jun dad picked it up for me.

On Xiao Jun side everything was quiet. He picked one ear and placed one in the basket, all heads pointing the same way, stacked neat as can be. When he carried his to the field edge, he held the basket with both hands and walked slowly, and not a single ear fell. By the time I had filled two and a half baskets, his three were done, stacked tidy by the sacks at the edge of the field.

I lost, and sat on a pile of stalks sulking. Xiao Jun dad came over and said, kid, your hands are not slow, you pick faster than him, but you are careless when filling the basket. Work is like picking corn, the snap feels great, but stacking it neat is the harvest.

Xiao Jun poured his winning three baskets into the shared sack of our two families, saying he had promised, after the contest we load them together for both families. My face went hot all at once, and I hurried to grab a basket too. This time I learned my lesson, placing one ear at a time, and when a basket was packed I carried it out, and not one ear dropped.

At noon the grown-ups of both families sat on the field ridge drinking water, and counted eleven baskets in all. Xiao Jun dad said, six of these eleven baskets belong to the two boys. That made me happier than winning.

On the way home, Xiao Jun told me, next time we contest on basket filling and not picking, and you will still lose. I said get lost, next time I will definitely beat you. Talking tough aside, I was truly convinced. To pick an ear you listen for the snap, to fill a basket you stack it neat, and I still need practice in both.

奶奶家的玉米地

国庆放假，爸妈带我回乡下看奶奶。一进院，奶奶就拉着我的手说，明儿个早起，咱掰棒子

去，你尝尝自己掰的棒子香不香。

第二天鸡刚叫第二遍，奶奶就把我喊起来了。她挎一个旧竹篮，拎一个小马扎，领我往村后的玉米地去。路两边全是玉米地，露水打湿了裤腿。奶奶走得不快，见人就打招呼，说这是俺孙子，从城里回来掰棒子的。说得满脸的光。

到了地里，奶奶把马扎往垄沟里一放，坐下，就开始掰。她的活儿安排得明白：她坐在地头掰，我提着小筐来回跑，把她掰下的棒子装进筐，装满了倒进地头的大筐里。她说她腰不行了，站不住，可是手没坏，一只手的劲儿还够咔吧那一声。

我头一回看见人坐着掰棒子。奶奶的手在秆子上摸一下，就知道棒子沉不沉。她说顶梢压弯的才是好棒子，粒儿能长到头；梢还翘着的，多半没长圆。她专挑压弯的掰，一根一根递给我，我接过来码进筐里。

有一根棒子长歪了，两头细中间粗，我觉得好玩，想拿走。奶奶一把抽回去，说歪的孬的不下筐，留着掰碎了喂鸡。她还把秆子上挂着的破苞叶撕干净，说装筐要装利索棒子，回头脱粒的时候不掺脏东西。

我在两行玉米地中间来回跑，筐从轻到重，又从重到轻。太阳出来以后，地里像扣了一口锅，闷得人出汗。奶奶的马扎边上堆了一小片棒子堆，金黄金黄的。我劝她回去，她不肯，说再装一筐，一筐就够吃半个月了。

到晌午，大筐装了四筐尖。奶奶从里头挑出两根最大的，塞进旧竹篮，说这两根不脱粒，给你同学捎去，让他们也尝尝。我说我同学又不在村里。奶奶说，城里的娃没掰过棒子，更没吃过自己掰的，带回去给他们看看，棒子是咋从秆子上下来的。

回去的路上，奶奶在前头拎竹篮，我在后头背大筐。筐带勒肩膀，勒得有点疼，可我背得稳稳的。村里人隔着地看见我们，问谁背的筐。奶奶说，俺孙子背的，一筐他一个人背的。她说这话的时候，头都不回，声音却大了一倍。

晚上奶奶煮了那两根大棒子，一根我吃了，一根我带着去车站。车开出去老远，我还回头看见她站在院门口，马扎放在脚边，脚边是满满四筐金黄的棒子。

Grandma Corn Field

Over the National Day holiday, my parents took me back to the village to see Grandma. The moment we entered the yard, she took my hand and said, tomorrow we get up early and go pick corn, and you will taste how sweet your own picked corn is.

Next morning, when the rooster crowed the second time, Grandma woke me. She carried an old bamboo basket in the crook of her arm, took a small folding stool, and led me to the corn field behind the village. Corn fields lined both sides of the path, and the dew wet our trouser legs. She walked slowly, greeting everyone we met, saying this is my grandson, back from the city to pick corn. Her whole face glowed

when she said it.

When we reached the field, she set the stool down between the rows, sat, and started picking. She had the work arranged plainly: she sits at the edge and picks, I run back and forth with a small basket, putting her picked ears into it and emptying it into the big basket at the field edge. She said her back is no good and she cannot stand long, but her hands are fine, one hand still has enough strength for that crisp snap.

It was my first time seeing someone pick corn sitting down. Grandma ran her hand along a stalk once and knew whether the ear was heavy. She said the ear that bends the top of the stalk is the good one, its kernels grow all the way to the tip; an ear whose tip still points up is mostly not filled out. She picked only the bending ones and passed them to me one by one, and I stacked them in the basket.

One ear grew crooked, thin at both ends and fat in the middle. I thought it funny and wanted to keep it. Grandma took it right out of my hand and said crooked or poor ears do not go into the basket, we save them to crumble for the chickens. She also tore off every scrap of torn husk hanging on the stalk, saying the basket should hold clean ears, so nothing dirty gets mixed in when the kernels are shelled later.

I ran back and forth between the rows, the basket going from light to heavy and heavy to light. After the sun came up, the field felt like a pot turned over on our heads, close and stifling. By Grandma stool a little pile of ears grew, golden yellow. I urged her to go home. She refused, saying one more basket, one basket is enough to eat for half a month.

By noon the big basket held four heaping loads. Grandma chose the two biggest ears and put them into the old bamboo basket, saying these two will not be shelled, take them to your classmates and let them taste too. I said my classmates are not in the village. She said city children have never picked corn, let alone eaten their own picked corn. Take it back and show them how an ear comes off a stalk.

On the way home, Grandma carried the bamboo basket in front and I carried the big basket on my back behind her. The straps cut into my shoulders a little, but I carried it steady. Villagers saw us from their fields and asked whose basket was being carried. Grandma said, my grandson is carrying it, a whole basket on his own. When she said this she did not even turn her head, yet her voice grew twice as loud.

That night Grandma boiled those two big ears. I ate one, and carried the other to the bus station. Long after the bus pulled away, I looked back and still saw her standing at the yard gate, the stool at her feet, and beside her feet four full baskets of golden ears.