Reaping

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Uncle A. is the first farmer in our area to own a mounted two-row corn picker. The machine rustles through the fields, a double-throated rhinoceros devouring corn stalks like golden licorice in choking dust; it wrestles ears of corn from stalks into husking rollers between which sits uncle, unmasked. Wagons pursue the picker-like mammoth toys. My dad L.T. says No to the machine—the air’s fresh, work courts sleep. But the picker—“God’s gift”—can creep faster than any colt can walk, pick more corn in a day than any man can in a month. Some farmers envy uncle. Others come by night, ask his fee for picking their corn. Uncle figures out a fair profit and soon, rarely sleeping, picks corn for months on a dozen, then two dozen farms by day and by tractor lights into snow. By the end of the first fall, uncle coughs till midnight. By “Stille Nacht,” syrup slows his cough and come spring plowing, he says, L.T., I think my cough is cured. When dad asks if he will take more jobs come fall, uncle says, I think so, adding he may buy a second picker since his oldest son’s now old enough to man it, and It’s good money to boot. Soon dad forgoes fresh air, buys a picker, and Uncle A. sleeps where good money’s moot.