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Reaping

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Reaping

Mike Vanden Bosch

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.