

The Last Time

by Walter Bjorkman

"Whhhhheeat" came through her pursed lips as the gentle whoosh of wind from them only accentuated the picture, already formed in Eddie's imagination, of fields of grain arcing in the Kansas breeze. Professor D. Gale always began her weekly seminars on the history of the amber grain in America's Heartland this way. Eddie hadn't missed any of them.

"Kansas has Whhhhheeat" she exhaled again, this time with a glint in her eyes that revealed her youth through ruby sparkles of memories that Eddie could not resist.

'The Last Time' was the topic for this nineteenth week. After the fields had been harvested by the horse and tractor-drawn, the children's chore was to spread out in the fields and gather up the isolated areas of shoots still standing, with the elders swaying the scythe. They were not finished until at least eighty bushels were added for the family's own winter needs, no matter how many days it might take. A bushel is four pecks, but a last is eighty bushels.

Stalks were scythed to submission one stroke at a time, she sweeping the fallen strands from behind her uncle's rhythmic swings, gathering the golden reeds into the fold of her dress.

When the children had gathered a last, their reaping chores for the season were done.

Eddie awoke from a deep sleep in his Topeka apartment and realized it was all a dream. A last would be 4,800 lbs and even with a wizard's help those munchkins couldn't make it happen.

