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As Harvest Used to Be

by John Cape

A MILE NORTH OF DALTON a dusty road leads off the main highway, across treeless, rolling hills to the west. Follow it for about a mile, climbing and dipping through the hills as though on a roller coaster, and turn in at the first farm place.

The neat white house is closest to the road. To its right and behind it is the big red barn with the bright tin roof, nestling in the sheds, corrals, and post-piles that are a part of every farm. Surrounding all this is a grove of evergreen trees, painstakingly transplanted from the cool depths of the canyons along the north edge of the pasture.

It is one of the brightest, hottest days of early fall. Heat waves are shimmering on the horizon, and the chickens are lazily dragging their wings in the dust in the shade of the cedar trees.



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Suddenly there comes a shout from the front yard:

"Hey Mom! Here come the threshers."

"You kids stay in the yard and keep out of the way."

"Can't we go out by the barn and watch?"

"No, you stay right here by the house. If you're good I'll let you go watch after they get started."

The first of the crew to arrive are the bundle-pitchers, with hay-racks of all sizes, shapes, and descriptions. Some are bright and freshly painted, others weathered and cracked, barely being held together by baling wire.

Pulled by sweating teams, they move on to the fields without stopping in order to be loaded and ready when the threshing machine is set up. Finally into the baryard rolls the creaking rattling separator, pulled by

a huge Rumley tractor with wheels higher than a man's head. After much testing of wind and speculation as to its changeability, a spot is picked and the machine is backed into position.

Ralph Hendricks operates the tractor and separator and is in the height of his glory at threshing time. He is a mediocre farmer, his corn always needs going over and his fences are never in repair, but when it comes to running a threshing rig he knows no equal. He will stand at one end of the machine, eye it for a while, tug on the brim of his battered felt hat, let fly a stream of tobacco juice at some innocent dog or cat, and say:

"Reckon if we drop this corner down about four inches and that one about six it'll be purt near level."

He is always right. The proper holes are dug and the rig is dropped into place. Ralph never bothers to check it for levelness, but he does carry a level in the

tool box for the use of those who doubt his ability. Those suspicious souls who want to be sure that none of their grain is going to pass over the screens and be blown out with the straw.

The long belt is strung out, the blower slowly cranked around and by the time the tractor is in position and the machine oiled up there is a load of bundles on each side of the feeder. The bundle pitchers are waiting on the racks ready to start pitching as soon as the machine is wound up.

The belts and wheels begin to turn, slowly at first, but gathering momentum with every puff of black smoke from the tractor, until there is a steady rumbling howl from the threshing cylinder. Soon the whole machine is shaking and shivering like a dinosaur with the palsy, and steadily devouring a stream of bundles to be separated into straw and grain.

The tractor leans back into the belt and seems to be watching the operation with smug satisfaction. Belching a big black smoke

