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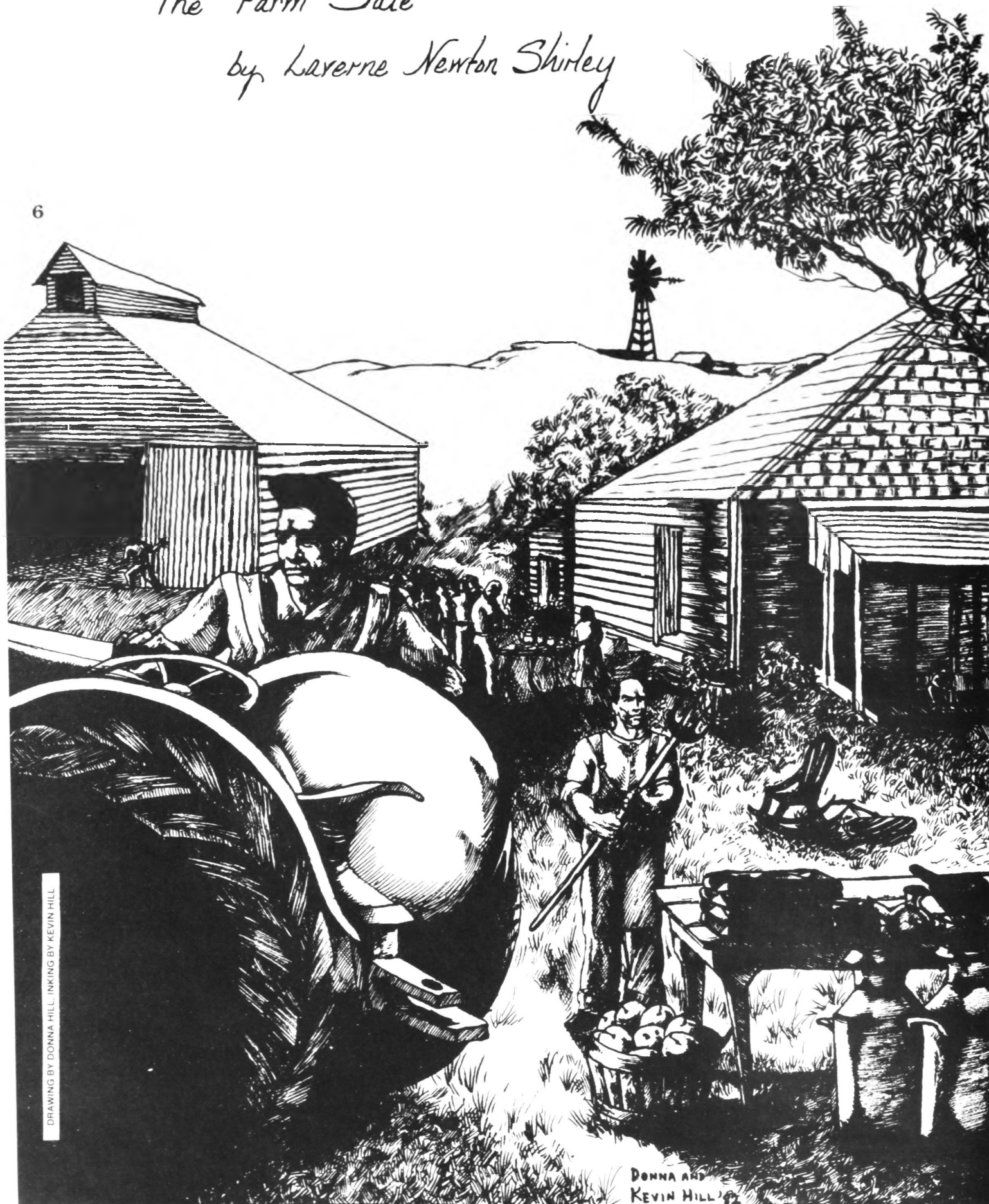
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The Farm Sale

by Laverne Newton Shirley

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DRAWING BY DONNA HILL. INKING BY KEVIN HILL

DONNA AND
KEVIN HILL

"Dad, you've got to slow down or you won't be around much longer." This was the advice from his doctor son, Paul.

"Slow down?" gray-haired Jake snorted, "How do you think I'd get any farming done? If I get any slower, I'll have to quit as I'm always behind as it is!"

"That's just it, Dad, You'll have to quit farming. Your heart won't hold up to the lifting and straining of farm work. That flat on the tractor yesterday just about did you in."

"I've taken a hundred tractor wheels off in my days. It was more the heat than getting that wheel off and loaded. Humidity was high."

"Yeah, it was a humid day. But, Dad, you're seventy and not forty. These jobs are going to be much too strenuous on you each year. A job that was a breeze ten years ago is too much, now."

"Now, son, how am I going to live if I quit farming? I can't sit in the living room and watch television and expect the cattle and alfalfa to grow themselves. We'd soon have to leave for the tax collector would move us out!"

"I'll tell you how you'd live," said Paul as his dark brown eyes became stern with determination. "Pretty well for the rest of your days. Let's see, good alfalfa and wheat land in the Washita bottoms sells for what? Eight or nine hundred dollars an acre, doesn't it? Machinery and cattle would bring something like forty thousand. You and mother would live well the rest of your lives on two hundred thousand dollars."

"Sell?" Jake had stormed; his tall, muscular frame became taut with anger. His brown eyes flamed and he drew his gray shaggy eyebrows down into a scowl. "I'm not going to sell a foot of this land. It's been my dream to build it up perfect so you and Patricia could have it. I'll die right here on this place!"

"That's exactly what will happen to you, Dad; ten or perhaps twenty years before you should. You and mother have worked hard all your lives. Nothing would make me happier than for you to live out your lives at ease."

"Don't you want the farm?" Jake asked in hurt amazement.

"No, Dad. I'm a doctor and not a farmer. Patricia and Bob have made themselves a life on the West Coast; and besides your son-in-law doesn't know an Angus from a Massey-Ferguson," laughed Paul.

Helen Moore had listened to her husband's and son's argument and had known her son was right. She knew Jake's objection to selling and retiring was not being stubborn for stubbornness sake, but the love of the farm he had labored on for nearly fifty years. Through lean and good years he had worked hard, paid for the land, built it into a productive farm, and developed one of the state's best Shorthorn herds.

It had taken the rest of the summer and into November for Helen to convince Jake that Paul was right. The neighbors and Jake's preacher said Paul was right, also. A couple near heart attacks convinced him they might be right.

"Doggone, if I don't hate to admit I'm getting old!" he had complained to Helen.

Helen smiled sympathetically at Jake. Her clear gray eyes rested kindly on Jake's silver hair, and she remembered how black it had been. Her own brown hair had grayed, too; but she had few wrinkles for a woman nearing seventy.

PERSPECTIVES

Helen set a platter of bacon and eggs on the table midway between the two plates on the table. The toaster on the cabinet clicked. She hurried to remove the golden toast and spread it with soft yellow butter. Her mind was not on the buttering of the toast, but on the day ahead of her. She wondered if it would be sunny or misty and cold as yesterday had been. The dampness and chill would keep some people home—especially the women.

After setting the toast on the table, she went to the east window to see if the sky was still overcast. To her surprise, the sun was coloring the sky a brilliant orange.

"You're what the doctored orderd," she said to the unseen sun. Her mind went fleetingly to Paul. She wondered if he would be able to leave his office in Chickasha to come to the sale.

Turning from the window, she frowned at the food on the table. It would be cold if Jake didn't come in from the barn chores soon. Maybe she should call him, she thought, for there were several things to do before sale time.

As she reached for the door knob, she saw Jake's silhouette against the sky. She dropped her hand from the knob and stepped closer to the glass. She saw his stooped shoulders and how the flesh hung around his jaws and neck in folds. She saw the sadness in his eyes as he looked out over fields and pastures.

Helen's heart ached for Jake. It was going to be harder for him than for her. For several years, she had realized they couldn't continue farming much longer.

Helen tried to be cheerful during breakfast. She talked about the sale, the new house they had bought in town, and which of their neighbors would likely be at the sale. Jake scarcely commented. She gave up conversation and finished the meal in silence.

8 As soon as Jake left the table, Helen washed the few dishes, swept the kitchen floor, and straightened the bed coverings. The two men, whom she had hired to move the extra pieces of furniture she wouldn't need in the new house out into the yard, arrived. She pointed to the furniture and watched to see that they handled it carefully. The porch was crowded with boxes, tables of extra dishes, crocks, stone jars, and innumerable odds and ends she had wanted to discard.

Before the men could finish moving, cars began to arrive. The first couple to come through the yard gate was Hazel and Felix Scott.

"Good morning, Hazel," Helen called, "A nice day isn't it?"

"It's pretty cold to be standing around at a sale. Folks won't come unless they really want to buy something. Don't count on a big crowd," replied Hazel. Her eyes roamed over the sale items.

Poor Hazel, thought Helen, always peevish and complaining about everything and everyone. Hazel worked long hours in the fields and helping Felix with the livestock. She seldom went anywhere except to church and to Farm Bureau meetings. She and Felix bought farm after farm until it seemed they owned half the county, and they never had children. Helen had known Hazel since all three of them attended the same rural school.

Hazel, with wisps of gray hair blowing across her broad florrid face, walked up to the porch where Helen stood. Felix ambled toward the barn to look at the machinery and cattle.

"Heard you were going to sell some of your pretty quilts. How much do you suppose they will sell for?" Hazel asked.

Helen smiled, remembering that cost was Hazel's usual approach. "Yes, I've put out ten to sell. Mae Burns thinks they'll sell for fifty to seventy-five dollars; and she ought to know for she goes around to sales and craft shops."

"That's too high!" Hazel declared.

Helen smiled at her, remembering Hazel always de-

valued what she wanted to buy but expected more than the worth from what she had to sell. She turned her attention to other arrivals.

The day was sunny but accompanied by a brisk wind. Both sides of the road as far as the orchard and down to the meadow were lined with cars and pickups. The men wore mackinaws, and the women wore their long coats and thick head scarves tied under their chins. Many farm men brought their wives; some men came alone or with other men. Some men wanted to buy certain items while others came to see what was being sold and for how much.

The closest friends, women with whom Helen belonged to extension club and church, clustered about her. The men gathered around Jake. They had all been neighbors for years. They had watched one another's children grow up and leave home. They had sorrowed with one another over family deaths. They had helped one another with sick animals and to get hay in ahead of a rain. They were close, for they shared common problems and joys.

Helen tried to be cheerful and told the women about the new house. She asked about their children and admired grandchildren's pictures. She told the news of her own families. She listened to the talk about the community events and the church. Not once did she voice regret at selling the farm.

She kept searching the clusters of men with her eyes to locate Jake. She hoped Paul could get out to the sale to be with his dad. She could take it all but it was going to be hard on Jake. She wished the auctioneer would hurry and get started before the nine o'clock schedule.

On the appointed hour, the auctioneer stepped upon the porch and began ringing a hand bell and chanted, "Yaw'll come! Yaw'll come!" followed by a long rigamarole of nonsensical words.

The women gathered around the porch while the men drifted up from the barn to stand behind. The household goods were to be sold first. The auctioneer held up a rocking chair with a needle point back and seat covering. "This is a real antique chair. Been in the family for generations. It has rocked a hundred babies to sleep and is still a good chair. What am I bid for this lovely antique chair. Someone say twenty.' Someone say twenty! Twenty I got! Someone make it twenty-five! Twenty-five! Twenty-five I got. Do I hear a thirty? Thirty? Thirty—" on and on he chanted.

The chair sold for \$85.50.

"My goodness!" Helen declared to herself. "Nearly eighty-six dollars! I ordered it out of Sears for twenty dollars the year Paul was born. Generations! I hope no one thinks I told the auctioneer that!"

The lovely pieced and appliqued quilts went fast and high. Her Double Wedding Ring quilt sold for a hundred dollars to a pretty blonde woman wearing a leather coat and green turban. She was a stranger.

When Helen's Rose of Sharon appliqued quilt was offered, Hazel began bidding at twenty dollars. A neighbor raised the bid to twenty-five. Every time the woman made a bid, Hazel would raise the bid fifty cents. Hazel's plain face beamed as she took the beautiful creation from the auctioneer and paid the clerk \$75.50.

In two hours, the household goods were sold.

As the auctioneer moved the crowd over to begin selling an assortment of steel posts, leftover rolls of barbed wire, grease guns, and hand tools, Helen saw Paul coming. She felt a flood of relief. She smiled as she watched him in his long dark blue overcoat thread his way among the people toward her. He nodded and smiled at those he knew. Some of them were his patients.

"He's so smart and handsome," Helen thought proudly. "I've done a good job with my children."

Paul came up to her, put his arm around her waist, and hugged her. He spoke to the women nearby and Helen noted that he was always mannerly. He smelled clean and

slightly antiseptic. It was good to have him near them today, she thought.

"How's Dad doing?" he asked.

"It's hard on him. He's so quiet. He's over there," she pointed.

"How are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm doing fine!" she hastily replied and smiled as brightly as she could.

"Five years from now, you'll be glad you did this, Mom. You and Dad are going to have many more years together. This farm work would get him in a year or two."

"I know," Helen admitted. "It's the giving up things I've used and loved--like this farm. Many people have done it before me and I can, too. The preacher said I couldn't take it with me, anyway," she laughed. In spite of herself, her eyes sparkled with tears.

She and Paul wound their way over to Jake's side. She put her arm through his and felt his body tremble. It's not the cold, she thought.

A look of relief spread over Jake's face when he saw Paul. Having his son at his side today is worth more than medicine, Helen thought.

After the greetings and how-are-yous were said and questions were answered about the grandchildren, they gave their attention to the auctioneer and the bidding. Everything was going high.

Helen overheard several men, who were not interested in buying tools, discussing the cattle, "I'd say the cows will go from \$700-\$1,000. They're good cows," one farmer said.

"Yeh, they are. Jake's been improving this herd for years. Really the best bunch of Shorthorns in this section of the state."

"Wouldn't doubt it a bit. That bull is the best Shorthorn ever in this area."

"Next to that'n Rufe Medlock had back in the forties!" spoke up an oldster in a high defensive voice.

"I don't remember him," the man explained.

"He was the best'un!" the old man's voice rose to a higher note.

"I wouldn't know about that."

"He dang sure was! I know. I helped Rafe unload 'im when he brought 'im to his place!" the old man defended; his voice had gotten more shrill.

The other men chose to ignore him and took up another topic of conversation.

At twelve o'clock, the auctioneer stopped selling for lunch. All the people rushed to the tables set up by the church women on the south side of the house out of the wind. Paper plates of baked ham, baked beans, slaw, and thick slices of homemade bread were bought for \$1.25. Ham sandwiches sold for 75¢. Apple pie and scalding hot coffee were in great demand.

Helen could eat little of what was on her plate. Jake wasn't hungry, he said; but he drank three styrofoam cups of hot coffee. Paul was the only one with a healthy appetite.

At one o'clock sharp, the cattle began selling. Helen, Jake, and Paul stood in the great circle with the other folks and watched as the cows were led out and sold. Helen's mind wasn't on the money they sold for, but more as to the buyers. These were good cows; she and Jake had great pride in them.

When the bull was led out, Helen and Paul moved closer to Jake. Helen looked closely at Jake and saw a tear in the corner of his eye. The folds of his jaws sagged even more and his face looked gray. She felt his body tremble and saw his hands shake.

The bull saw Jake and pulled at the halter trying to go to him. Paul put his arm around his father's shoulders. While the bidding was going on, the bull kept looking at Jake. He sold for \$2,000. He kept trying to turn his head to look at Jake as he was led away.

"He was worth every cent of that!" declared a farmer behind them.

"If I was a Shorthorn man, I'd of bought him," a second man said.

"He's a good 'un all right; but not as good as that'n Rafe Medlock had!" It was the old man again.

Hazel and Felix were standing close to Helen and her folks. Hazel told Felix loudly, "They sure sold for more than they would have brought on the market! No cattle are worth more than market prices!"

Margaret Turner leaned closer to Helen and whispered, "Hazel thinks only of the money value of everything. I'd hate to be like her."

Helen thought she could have said many things in Hazel's defense but doubted she could have changed Margaret's opinion.

"It's three o'clock, ladies and gentlemen! Let's get this farm sold and go home!" the auctioneer shouted. He was standing on the porch again. With his arm, he swept the farm area, "Let's don't start this bidding out low! Let's save some time and get out of the cold."

"I'm not telling you a thing you don't know when I tell you this is the best two quarter sections in this community. Yes, siree! Excellent improved pastures. Good firm comfortable house. Barns in excellent condition. Ladies and gentlemen, this farm has been loved and cared for better than you have your own mother!"

A ripple of laughter went through the crowd.

The auctioneer began his chanting and a bid of \$400 an acre was quickly offered. Bids came fast, upping the price by \$25 and \$50 until a bid of \$700 was reached. The auctioneer pleaded and cajoled. The going-going-going was usually said before a reluctant \$25 would be upped.

The people almost held their breaths. Many glanced at Felix Scott wondering why he didn't bid. He usually bought every farm that was auctioned off in the county. He kept his eyes on the ground.

The final bid of \$975 was made by a stranger. He was a well-dressed man with a small, neat mustache. The blonde woman wearing the leather coat who had bought the Wedding Ring quilt stood beside him.

The price was good. Neighbors and friends crowded around Helen and Jake, shaking their hands and congratulating them on the good price their farm sold for.

Many people went over to get acquainted with the new owner and find out if they would be neighbors. They wouldn't. He was buying the land for a large company that owned many tracts across the state.

The numerous buyers quickly loaded their purchases and went home. Paul said he'd have to go in order to make his hospital rounds.

"I'll get supper on the table. I'm sure you're hungry since you ate no dinner," said Helen.

"I could eat," Jake replied. "Maybe we ought to go to town to eat as you're tired."

"The women gave me all the left over ham and baked beans they didn't sell. Even a whole apple pie. I'll fix something to go with it. Want some hot tea?"

"Rather have coffee," Jake answered.

Paul wanted his father to cut down on his coffee drinking. Why not, Helen thought, this one time won't hurt him that much.

They were sitting down to eat when they heard a light knock on the kitchen door. They looked at each other.

"I'll go," Helen offered.

There stood Hazel and Felix. Helen was so surprised she couldn't think to invite them in. She stammered. "Why, Hazel, we thought everyone had gone home by now!"

"Could we talk to you and Jake?" Hazel looked pleadingly at Helen.

"Of course you can! You and Felix come in. We are just getting ready to eat. There's plenty, for the church women left enough for days. Sit down here with Jake."

Hazel and Felix acted embarrassed and awkward. "We don't mean to intrude, but we want to talk to you," Hazel said shyly while Felix nodded his head in agreement.

PERSPECTIVES

"Farm Sale," cont.

Hazel took a sip of coffee and set the cup down and began talking, "Me and Felix are getting up in years, too, you remember. Felix's back is bad and the doctor says it can't hold out much longer. Arthritis is botherin' me so I hurt all time. We don't have any children to leave our land to, we been thinking of selling like you folks have done."

Felix spoke for the first time, "A man can't enjoy his land and stock when his back hurts so bad he can't stand it to take care of 'em." Hazel nodded in agreement that time.

"You're right, Felix; but we all get to that place sometime. When we get too old to be stewards of the land, God expects us to move over for younger people to take over," Jake said.

"So that's the way it is, now," thought Helen amusedly, "after all the struggle Paul and I had getting him to sell. He sees his stewardship has come to an end."

Hazel went on, "There's a new house just been built that Felix and me looked at. It's right behind the one you folks bought. I--we are just wondering if you'd care if we bought it and would be your neighbors?"

Helen was so taken aback she couldn't reply. She saw the pleading looks on their faces. She knew they would feel more secure if there were others close they knew.

She felt hot tears sting her eyes as she put out her hand and covered Hazel's. "Oh, Hazel, we have known each other since we were children. Of course, we would love for you and Felix to be our neighbors. We won't get so lonesome with you living close."

Tears rolled down Hazel's weathered cheeks. Felix blew his nose.

PHOTO — COURTESY OF JOHN DEERE COMPANY



The mechanical picker today, with one man at the wheel

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PHOTO — COURTESY OF KIOWA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Jesse and Nancy Brown's cotton crop near Snyder, OK in 1902 (with a baby on a cotton sack)