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## Shortgrass Viewpoints

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## NOSTALGIA

give up his horses. While everyone else used modern machinery, he hitched up his team and plowed straight rows. When he finally bought a Ford tractor in 1950, he grumbled about it. During the next five years, however, he learned the inner workings of that tractor and thus adapted to an easier life without his horses, but he was never able to plow a straight row with a tractor.

Even up to his last days, Little Elmer was a gregarious entertainer. He had favorite sayings like "Oh, he'd gripe if he'uz gonna be hung with a new rope" and "It's as hard to get him to talk as it is to count a hen's teeth." Also the strains of music would make him break into a lively jig. He also could do an impersonation of a dog fleeing itself, which is impossible to illustrate in writing.

He never owned his own farm; he always lived from one crop to the next—always hoping to break even after paying off loans, always working extra for other farmers in the hope of having a few extras. He also kept up his life-insurance policy. When Little Elmer died in 1955, Emma had enough money from the policy to give her husband a decent burial and buy a modest frame home in Mangum. There she lives today at the age of 77—with her memories of fishing for channel cats on a Sunday afternoon, of breaking Little Elmer of the grape wine habit, and of thirty challenging years with that good man.

ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE TOAHTY



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— by Alma Eileen Dill

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### CLEAN COTTON GROWING

The cotton rows are long, and the reckless sun  
Spills heat profusely on the sagging shoulder  
That Jim swings backward — forward. Hoeing is done  
By measured effort as the arm grows older.

It's done by looking out across the rows  
Already cleaned — and not the ones that wait.  
Clean cotton growing cheers a man who knows  
How fat, white bales help meet a mortgage date.

### THOUGHT AT DAWN

This moist, tender wind is beauty's breath.  
A nameless scent, a texture at its core,  
Is gentle witness that no gust of death  
Can close the spirit's wide and brightening door.

### THESE ACRES

*For better, for worse. . . a grudging dry-land farm,  
Till death do us part . . . the scarcity, the alarm  
That comes to those, at the mercy of chance and weather,  
Who have no margin of capital. Together  
They have met the seasons, always toiling  
With singleness of aim and spirit, foiling  
Loss of love and joy, for these acres  
Know happy wells — the faith of homemakers.*

### TWO WOMEN

She made my garden seem too much abloom;  
She had such tailored, sleek, expensive grace.  
The car she drove was long as our front room.  
Her bored and petulant unhappy face  
Smoothed out and looked plain housewifely when she  
Examined my hooked rug and crocheted spread'  
But when her shadowed eyes looked up at me,  
The restlessness had all come back. She said,  
"But what in God's name does a woman do  
To exorcise her devil off out here?"  
Although I knew that she might laugh, I drew  
A breath and made my timid voice clear  
As I defended my own simpler ways:  
"I have no devilish moods — just busy days."