

## Shortgrass Area Is Dreary Place Since Uncle Whiskers Left

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11-2-67

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MERTZON — Nothing has worked right the past two weeks. The livestock are going into the winter in good shape, yet there's no joy in watching them languishing in the shade. The frost hasn't completely burned the scenery, but the pasturelands look as dull as an old maid's memoirs.

The reason the surroundings are so devoid of lust is the fault of my compadre, Uncle Goat Whiskers. You see, a couple of weeks ago he passed on to wherever sheep and cow persons are shipped in the after-life. Following a long summer illness, Uncle Whiskers moved on without giving any of us near enough warning.

His unannounced departure was a typical maneuver, though it caught everyone by surprise. He always was a poor hand to go blabbing it around the neighborhood when he made a change of plans. As a matter of fact, during the 35-odd years that I was associated with him, I can't recall his doing much idle chattering about anything.

The countryside could be burning up with a hot item of gossip, and the grey-snouted old scoundrel wouldn't make the slightest effort to help spread the news. There's no telling how many scandals he ignored during his life. A double-headliner human wreck could have taken place within a mile of his headquarters, and Whiskers wouldn't have ruffled his mustache to add one comment about the incident.

This close-mouthed attitude was an annoying flaw in his makeup. As you know, small ranch communities have difficulty enough manufacturing news without someone failing to do his part. Most happenings need the cooperation of everybody to turn them into a worthwhile story; unless every citizen adds as many embellishments as his imagination will allow, any event will quickly fade away unnoticed.

Well, that was Uncle Goat Whiskers' biggest fault. He'd just sit back and clam up as if he were thinking about something else when the conversation became gossipy. Though he could bounce blue expletives off the walls when speaking on such topics as dishonest politicians or high taxes, he was indifferent to any topics involving family fights or husband-and-wife shakeups.

But that doesn't matter any more. The Goat whiskers era has closed, and there's no way of knowing how he's getting along since he left the Shortgrass County. I do know that if the citizens where he is do any gossiping, Uncle Whiskers is going to be as out of place as a wash woman at a debutante's ball.

As I started out to say, the scene is mighty bleak at this time. Less than half the fall shipping is done, and nobody seems to care when we finish. Cold, dry northers are headed this way, instead of the days growing shorter as they usually do in winter, the mornings alone are as long as the founder's day meeting at a woman's club.

Blast old whiskers anyway. Why did he have to check out and leave us in such a dreary mood?