

Excerpt of

Dating in a Small Town and Other Hazards

by Pamela Kenney

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Long before a reality show by the name of “The Bachelor” appeared on television, the good citizens of Buttercup, population 510, were called upon to perform their own particular version of the show. You see it came to be known to the general population that the bachelor Ernest Matthews had finally asked Lillian Hepple out on a date.

Phil over at the gas station found out purely by accident after asking Ernest what he was up to on the weekend. “Going on a date with Lillian,” was the simple answer but Phil’s jaw almost dislocated, it dropped open so fast. So it was the shock more than anything that caused Phil to relate the news to his wife that night at dinner. And when she went to the meeting of the Buttercup Knitting Club later that night well she just had to tell someone and within minutes of that meeting coming to an end, most everyone in town knew. Then Wendy over at the beauty salon found out the date was going to be on Saturday night on account of Lillian making a hair appointment for Saturday afternoon.

Now the entire town of Buttercup was extremely pleased about this date since Ernest had reached the ripe old age of 53 without finding a good enough reason to give up his comfortable bachelorhood. And Lillian Hepple had been the first woman he had ever even noticed existed and had been slowly warming up to her ever since she moved to town five years ago. So there was an unspoken pact around town that everyone should do their best to make this date a success.

So when Sam over at Sam’s Chinese and Western Restaurant got a reservation for two for Saturday night from Ernest, well Sam lay awake for two

nights straight trying to think of ways to increase the romantic nature of his little diner. At first he thought if he rearranged the plastic foliage that it would look more conducive to romance but the glowing wall clock and the linoleum tiles always seem to spoil his idea of a truly romantic evening. Plus there was the privacy issue because shortly after Ernest made his reservation, a lot of other people started calling looking for tables too.

Although Louise Newsom did phone to cancel her reservation for fifteen people that was going to be her ten year old daughter Nancy's birthday party. Sam was so relieved to take that phone call, he hung up the phone and said "Thank you Ernest!" then redoubled his efforts to romanticize his restaurant, although the fluorescent lights were just not doing it for him.

Over at the gas station however, Phil was having more luck because when he remembered the state of Ernest's truck as he was filling it up, he decided to phone Ernest up and tell him that he had won a draw for a free truck detailing, this Saturday only. Of course he had to explain that detailing meant cleaning and waxing and vaccuming and generally making it look as good as new, which pleased Ernest no end who said, "I've never won anything in my life!"

And when Ernest wandered over to the grocers while his truck was being detailed, well Linda almost broke her big toe rushing over to the PA system to announce: "Good morning shoppers, for the next...ah...five minutes only....there is an unadvertised special on boxed chocolates...um...you know the ones with fillings like nuts and toffee and nougat and stuff like that."

It was after ten minutes standing in front of the wall of chocolate options, his brows furrowed with concentration, that Ernest heard another announcement came over the PA:

“The unadvertised special on boxed chocolates pertains to the gold box with the red ribbon on the corner.”

A smile spread across Ernest’s face as he spotted some on the top shelf.