

## Grumpy George

By Marilyn Reeves

Jake parked his Honda on the outskirts of the small village, and, notebook in hand, approached the first house he came to. Seeing that the yard was untended and the place was in a general state of disrepair, he thought better of it and decided to walk on up the road. But then he heard someone shouting, "Who goes there? This is private property! Get the [blank] outta here, or I'll fill ya full of buckshot!"

"Just passing by, Mister. Sorry to disturb you," but he could still hear the old geezer's curses as he went on along the way.

The next person he encountered was an older lady who looked up from trimming her rose bushes to say, "Hello. Can I help you?"

"Oh, good morning, ma'am. My name is Jake Sutherland. I'm a journalist for the *Tribune*, and I'm writing an article about some of the small towns in our fair state. Sort of taking a poll on which communities are deemed by their residents as the happiest places to live."

"Well, you've come to the right place, young man. My name is Myrna Lee. And I doubt you'll find a happier community than Cherryville. We've got good schools and nice little downtown with family-owned businesses. And if you're hungry, Ma's Kitchen serves wonderful meals and homemade apple pie. Everybody in town knows everybody else. We're all just one big happy family here."

"Oh, really? I didn't get such a friendly reception from your neighbor down the road there."

"Oh, that's just Grumpy George. There's an exception to every rule, I guess. Don't pay him no never mind. His wife died twenty years ago and his son got sent to prison, so I guess I'd be grumpy too, if that had happened to me."

"Has he ever given you any trouble, ma'am?"

"Well, he did poison my poor old dog, Shep. My own fault for not repairing that hole in the fence. Old Shep thought everybody was his friend, I guess, and ate that tainted hamburger Grumpy George left out."

"Oh, that's terrible! Did you call the police?"

"Well, to be honest, I thought about it. I was pretty upset for awhile there. I really loved that dog. But then I thought, what's the point? Hatred and vengeance take up too much room in a person's heart, and I'd just as soon not go through life trying to hurt other people. Even if they hurt me. Then I'd end up just like Grumpy George, and that would be a terrible way to live. So I forgave him and let it go."

"You forgave him ... just like that?"

“Well, that’s not to say I trust him around my grandkids or my other pets. But, yes, I forgave him. For my own sake as well as his. Harboring hatred is like having poison take over your system and can make you very sick. It hurts the hate-er much more than the hate-ee, if you see what I’m saying?”

“Yes, ma’am, I think I do. Well, thank you for your time. It’s been a pleasure meeting you. Now, where did you say that place was that makes the apple pie?”