



A surprise ingredient turns a pie contest into hilarious chaos.

Prudence's Prize-Winning Pie

by Gwen Flanders

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Written by
Gwen Flanders

Art by
Rosemarie Gillen

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ISBN: 978-1-63492-299-9

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

Booklocker.com, Inc.

2017

Grocery Shopping



PRUDENCE ELOISE PEPPERCORN had lived all seven years of her life at 118 Orchard Street with her mother, father, and her overweight cat, Chloe. It was pretty quiet most of the time in Waitsburg, but today was special, and Prudence had waited a whole year for this day to arrive.

It was the day before the annual baking contest, which was held each July at the Walla Walla County Fairgrounds, and this year, Prudence was going to enter. She had thought a lot about what she would make after seeing last year's submissions. She had watched closely as the ladies brought in each item and had finally decided on a blueberry pie—first, because she had noticed that there were not a lot of pies in the contest and second, because she loved blue and there were not a lot of blue foods to choose from.

Prudence rushed to get ready. She finished dressing, grabbed her glasses and quickly yanked up the blankets on her bed. She tugged hard on the spread to cover the lump of sheets that always ended up tangled around her feet by morning and then ran down the stairs, taking them two at a time as she raced for the kitchen.

She knew she had to finish her morning chores before she could tell her mother she was ready to go. She filled Chloe's bowl so quickly she almost spilled it. As soon as the kitty kibble hit the dish, she heard the bell on Chloe's collar jingle from the other room. Soon the enormous tabby came scurrying around the corner, stopping just in time to avoid hitting the bag of kibble and sending it flying everywhere. Prudence barely got the kibble put away when her mother came into the kitchen.

"All my chores are done and I'm ready! Can we go now?" Prudence asked excitedly.

Before she could open the back door, her mother reminded her that they would need to make a list of the ingredients to shop for, so Prudence hauled out the old cookbook her mother used each time she baked some wonderful treat for the family.

The cookbook had been passed down from her great-grandmother, Prudence, after whom she was named. The cover of the book was barely hanging on, and you could always tell the best recipes by how wrinkled those pages were. Her great-grandmother had written notes beside many of the recipes, which was why Prudence was using this particular cookbook for the pie she planned to make.

She turned to the section marked "pies" and found apple pie, cherry pie, pumpkin pie, and, finally blueberry pie. Next to this recipe, her great-grandmother had written in a secret ingredient to be added, so she carefully wrote down each item, including the secret

ingredient, then handed the list to her mother and ran to the door.

When they reached the store, Prudence wanted to push the cart but knew that it was more important to carefully mark off each item on her list to make sure she and her mother didn't forget anything—flour, check; butter, check; sugar, check; until they got down to the final and most important ingredient...**BLUEBERRIES.**

Over in the fruit section, she noticed plastic baskets filled with ripe, red strawberries. Even though they smelled delicious, she moved on. Next was a bin full of the little green apples that were so sour they always made her mouth pucker. She passed a bin of ripe yellow bananas, and yet another filled with purple and green grapes. Just as Prudence began to worry that she would have to use another fruit, she came around the corner and bumped into cartons piled high with blueberries.

According to the recipe, Prudence would need four cups for her pie. She was not sure how many cups each carton held but thought that having too many blueberries was better than not having enough. Carefully, she searched through the pile until she found seven cartons overflowing with the largest, roundest, bluest blueberries and put them in her cart. As her mother pushed their cart toward the checkout counter, Prudence double-checked the list for anything she might have forgotten.

She swore she could smell the blueberries all the way home, even though they were inside paper bags at



the very back of the car. She could hardly wait to start cooking, but the contest was not till tomorrow and she knew that she would have to wait until then so her pie would be as fresh as possible. As she was putting away the ingredients, she carefully measured out the four cups of blueberries she would need and put the rest in a bowl. She tried to think of things she could do to keep busy while she waited and as she thought, she popped a blueberry from the bowl into her mouth. Yummmmm...sweet and juicy.

The Long Afternoon



PRUDENCE DECIDED TO fill out the contest entry form, carefully printing out her name and address and what she was entering and then writing out the recipe for the judges. When she was done, she popped a few more berries into her mouth. She loved the way they rolled around between her tongue and the roof of her mouth.

I know. I'll draw a picture of my pie on the bottom of the paper so that the judges will be sure to recognize it. She ran to her room and got her crayons from her desk. First, she drew the silver pie plate that would hold her pie—she had found the antique plate while shopping with her mother in a consignment store that sold things other people no longer wanted. She knew as soon as she saw it that her pie would look very special in it and believed that the judges would think so too.

Next, she drew a big, fluffy pie crust with little bumps all over it to show where each blueberry would be. Then she drew small holes in the top crust. Her mother had said that the holes were for letting out the steam, so she carefully colored in each hole with her favorite blue crayon and drew grey curls above them to represent the steam.

When she was finished, she went up to her room and pulled down her piggy bank. Her bank was not actually shaped like a pig, but rather, like a giant cheeseburger. Her father had won it for her at last year's fair by tossing pennies into little glass dishes. After many throws, he had finally landed one of the pennies right in the middle of a dish where it bounced twice but did not pop out. She had been putting money into her cheeseburger bank ever since to save up for something special and every Saturday, she would toss in some of the change she earned for doing her chores. She was also allowed to keep the change she found between the couch cushions as she helped her mother before vacuuming. Some weeks, she was able to add a little extra money from doing odd jobs around the neighborhood; giving Arnold, the Parker's basset hound from across the street, a bath or cleaning the cage of Mrs. Foster's two lovebirds, Agnes and Archie. She had even earned some money by helping Mr. Topp dig up earthworms to sell as bait in his summer fishing stand.

She carefully lifted the bank off the shelf, as it was heavy from all the coins she had saved up. Last week, she had emptied it and made little stacks of coins all over her bedspread. She had counted it all and saw that she had a total of \$23.12. Today, she flipped her bank over and pulled out the rubber stopper that kept the money from falling out and shook it until she had exactly \$5.00 in change. As she was putting the money in the entry-form envelope, she counted it again just to



be sure. Normally, she did not like to take money out of her bank but she felt that this was a good investment. The first-prize winner of the baking contest would receive a big blue ribbon and a \$25.00 cash award!

After completing the entry form, Prudence could think of nothing else to do to pass the time so she went out and sat on the porch steps, hoping something exciting might happen. Once, the Waitsburg fire truck had gone screeching down Orchard Street with its sirens blaring and had stopped in front of Mrs. Maple's yard. Everyone had stood outside to watch. It turned out that Mrs. Maple's old cat, Pumpkin, had gotten herself stuck at the very top of the old sycamore tree in her front yard. Mrs. Maple had not told the station what the emergency was until after they had arrived. The firemen turned a big metal wheel on the truck to raise their ladder until it reached the top branches of the tree. One of them climbed to the top of the ladder and tried to pluck Pumpkin from the tree, which was not easy as Pumpkin was howling and hissing and kept clawing the fireman when he tried to reach for her. Meanwhile, Mrs. Maple was running back and forth calling out, "Pumpkin, Pumpkin dear, you be good for that nice fireman." Finally, the fireman was able to grab Pumpkin and bring her safely back down.

After sitting on the steps for a little while, it looked like nothing very exciting was going to happen, so Prudence walked next door to see if her friend, Marshall, might think of something to do. As she knocked on his front

door, she could hear the loud banging of his drums from out back in the garage. Like Prudence, Marshall Minkin had lived in Waitsburg most of his life, and his family had moved next door to Prudence's when she was only two. Except for an occasional argument, the two of them were good friends. Each morning, Marshall waited on his porch for her before walking the two blocks to Waitsburg Elementary School. Prudence decided to wait until later to talk to Marshall when she would not have to compete with his drum.

She walked slowly back to her house, being careful not to step on the sidewalk cracks. When she reached her front walkway, she hopped along the hopscotch squares that she and Marshall had drawn yesterday. With Marshall busy and her mind still on her pie, she quickly grew bored. It must be getting close to dinner time by now. She went inside to wash up and watch television until her dad got home from work. Maybe there would be something on TV about the fair.

To use up some extra time, she scrubbed her face and hands twice, then turned on the TV and climbed into her mother's big squishy chair in the corner of the family room to watch her favorite afternoon cartoons.



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