

The Perplexing Puzzle of the Purloined Pies

By Marilyn Reeves

Ralph was a very large dog of indeterminate breed. Long, lean and lanky, by age three Ralph presented quite a formidable sight to see. A couple of years ago when he was just a poor, abandoned pup scratching at the door, Mrs. Schmidt took pity on him and led him out to the barn, where she petted him and fed him and gave him a place to stay, keeping company with four little pigs, a half dozen cats, and Sally, the old gray mule.

The Schmidts had no children of their own, but there were five Olson kids living next door, a stair-step mix of boys and girls, who took to him right away. And every day when they would come out to play, Ralph joined right in, running, chasing and scampering about their heels.

During the warm months of the year he would also help watch over the pie stand that stood in the shade of the big cottonwood tree down at the end of the lane, where the kids sold pies ... whole pies and slices of pie to hungry passersby. So while the older children proffered pieces of pie on paper plates and counted out the change, Ralph stood by keeping an eye on the pie, but he never took a bite ... unless a crumb or two accidentally happened to fall his way, and then it was okay.

Mrs. Olson was the premier pie baker in all of Piedmont County. Her pies always took the prize at the county fair each year. So to help supplement the family's income she spent her days baking pie after pie after practically perfect pie, and let the kids take turns manning the stand.

One warm summer evening Mrs. Olson set a couple of her pies on the kitchen window sill to cool in the evening breeze. Then she cleaned up the kitchen and went to bed. The next morning she went out to the kitchen and noticed the curtains fluttering in the open window. But no pies. "Oh my, oh my! Whatever happened to those pies?" she wailed. "Did some perpetrator purloin that pair of practically perfect plump peach pies? Who could have done such a thing? Oh, dear. I bet it was Ralph!"

So she marched next door to have a word with Mrs. Schmidt about the dog, but it was her husband who answered the door. Before she had a chance to say a word, Mr. Schmidt said, "Did you hear that ruckus out there last night? First I heard some crashing and banging and then I saw ol' Ralph shoot out of the barn like a streak of greased lightning. And then I heard some growlin' and yippin' as he tore into a couple of coyotes who was hunkered there in your yard, and sent 'em packing."

So, rather than give him a scolding, Mrs. Olson patted Ralph on the head and said instead, "Come on Ralph, you've earned yourself a nice slice of pie."

Tail wagging proudly, Ralph trotted at Mrs. Olson's heels to accept his reward: a precious piece of practically perfect pear and pineapple pie. Ala mode.