



# PIE

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## APPLE PIE

6 large apples  
½ lemon  
¼ cup light brown sugar  
1 TBS flour or cornstarch  
1 tsp cinnamon  
¼ tsp cloves  
¼ tsp nutmeg  
¼ tsp ginger  
1 TBS sweet unsalted butter  
1 egg white  
Cinnamon sugar

Fresh-picked fruit is always best, of course, but if you have to use store-bought apples, look for crisp varieties, like McIntosh or Granny Smith. Peel, core, and cut them up, but don't worry about making the pieces all the same size — apple pies look best when they're lumpy! Squeeze lemon over the whole lot and sprinkle with sugar, flour, and spices. Toss with two forks and pour into unbaked, pricked piecrust. Dot with butter and cover with top crust. Crimp edges, cut vents in center of crust, and brush with egg white. Sprinkle with plenty of cinnamon sugar. Bake at 350 for one hour or until lightly browned.

*Reminder: Doc Fyfe's favorite. (Birthday: September 27)  
He prefers a streusel topping: 1 stick sweet butter, ½ cup brown sugar, juice of a lemon, ½ cup flour, a handful of chopped walnuts. Work it together with your fingers until nice and crumbly. Sprinkle over apples before baking.*

## Chapter One

*“Thank you very much.”*

Alice was standing beside the bed when her aunt Polly reached a trembling hand out from underneath the leopard-print bedspread (Polly *loved* leopard print) and pulled the girl close to whisper in her ear.

*“Thank you very much.”*

They would be the last words Polly Portman, the Pie Queen of Ipswitch, ever spoke.

• • •

Polly Portman was a natural born pie maker. When she was little, even her mud pies were a cut above what anyone else in the sandbox was doing. Recognizing her talent, Polly’s mother, Hester Portman, bought her daughter a little wooden rolling pin, set her on a tall red kitchen stool, and taught her how to roll out her first piecrust.

As Polly grew, so did her pie-making skills. She learned that scalding milk before adding eggs would ensure a custard as smooth as silk and that whipped cream should be whisked just shy of the point where it would turn to butter. She became an expert at cutting narrow strips of pie dough and weaving them into lattice crusts and discovered that if she raised the oven rack a notch when baking a meringue, the peaks would turn the color of toasted marshmallow. When Polly grew tired of the recipes in her mother's cookbooks, she began to make up recipes of her own, learning to trust her instincts and *listen* to the ingredients. She could pinch a blueberry, sniff a peach, or take a bite of an apple and know exactly how much sugar to use and whether a grating of fresh nutmeg, a squirt of lemon juice, or a dash of salt would enhance the flavor of the fruit. Polly had a gift for baking pies, and she poured her heart and soul into every one she made.

Anyone who tasted one of her pies always said the same thing—"You ought to open up your own shop, Polly!" So when her parents passed away, leaving everything they had to Polly and her younger sister, Ruth, Polly set aside half of her inheritance to live on, and the other half she invested in a dilapidated old storefront on the corner of Windham and Main in downtown Ipswitch, Pennsylvania.

Almost as handy with a hammer as she was with a rolling pin, Polly converted the upstairs into a cozy little apartment. Downstairs she built the pie shop she had always dreamed of

having. It wasn't much to look at, just a big room with a long wooden counter, a couple of tin pie safes, and a secondhand oven she'd picked up at an auction, but as far as Polly was concerned, the place was perfect. Being a humble person, she gave her pie shop a humble name — PIE.

When PIE first opened its doors in 1941, Alice Anderson hadn't even been born yet, but people in Ipswich loved to tell the story, so she'd heard it a million times. The night before the opening, Polly was too excited to sleep. Finally she gave up, got dressed, and went downstairs to the shop. While everyone else in town was still snoring in bed, Polly tied on her favorite apron (leopard print, of course) and began to bake. By the time dawn spread its buttery light across the morning sky, there was a row of beautiful pies cooling on the counter and a crowd of people outside the door waiting to buy them.

Polly had put a great deal of thought into the pies she made that morning. She wanted to make sure there was something for everyone. For the berry enthusiast, she made triple berry pies filled with a medley of ripe blackberries, raspberries, and blueberries. For the more adventurous she created green tomato and Concord grape pies. Of course there were traditional pies like cherry, apple, and rhubarb with golden top crusts spread like quilts over the sweet warm fillings, and cream pies galore — chocolate, coconut, and banana. Polly even managed to come up with something for the pie lover

worried about an expanding waistline—a refreshingly tart low-calorie buttermilk pie, sprinkled with fresh nutmeg.

The citizens of Ipswich had been sampling Polly Portman’s pies at church picnics and 4-H fairs for years, so they were tickled pink that she had finally opened a shop of her own. Their delight, however, quickly turned to concern when they discovered Polly wasn’t planning to sell the pies she made in her shop; she was planning to give them away.

“Why on earth would I charge people money for something that brings me so much pleasure?” Polly asked Reverend Flowers when he stopped by the shop one day to pay her a visit.

“How else do you expect to stay in business, my dear?” he responded, a touch of worry creasing his brow.

“You of all people should know the answer to that.” Polly laughed, then handed the reverend a sour cherry pie, which she happened to know was his favorite, and sent him on his way.

At first, people couldn’t decide what to do about Polly’s pie shop. As much as they loved her pies, nobody was comfortable with the idea of getting one for free. So when no amount of coaxing could convince Polly to accept money for her pies, her friends and neighbors came up with an idea for another way to pay her. Every morning when Polly came downstairs to the shop, she would find an assortment of

fresh ingredients waiting for her on the doorstep. One day there might be a basket of lemons and three dozen eggs, the next day a bushel of apples, a pot of fresh cream, and a giant sack of flour. Whatever people brought her, Polly would put to good use, and in no time at all, every surface in the shop would be covered with delicious fruit pies bursting at the seams with sweet juice, delicate silk pies sprinkled with curls of milk chocolate, chess pies with caramelized cornmeal tops, and custard pies piled so high with whipped cream it looked like they had snowdrifts sitting on top of them.

Word of Polly Portman's remarkable pie shop spread when a reporter from *The Ipsy News* wrote an article about it. The Associated Press picked up the story and pretty soon people from all over the country were flocking to the corner of Windham and Main to experience PIE for themselves. They came bearing raspberries from Oregon, sugarcane from Louisiana, pecans from Texas, and cherries from Michigan. Day after day, people flocked to the shop, and whatever they brought with them, Polly would turn into pies.

Alice came along in March of 1945. She was the apple of her aunt Polly's eye. The two of them spent a great deal of time together at the pie shop. When Alice was a toddler, Polly would sit her on the tall red stool — the very same stool Polly had sat on as a child — and give Alice a lump of pie dough to play with while she baked. Later on, when Alice was old



enough to help, Polly would give her little jobs to do, like crumbling the brown sugar for streusel or pulling the stems off cherries.

Alice spent every Saturday at the pie shop. Polly taught her how to weave a lattice and how to crimp the edges of a crust by pinching the dough between her thumbs. Alice was happy to help, but she wasn't really interested in learning how to bake pies. She had inherited neither her aunt's talent nor her passion for it. The reason she came to the pie shop was to be near Polly, and there was nothing she loved more than sitting on the tall red stool, watching the magic happen.

Polly always began by making the crusts. She would mix up a big batch of dough before Alice even arrived, then while Alice cracked walnuts or hulled strawberries, Polly would carefully roll out the rounds of dough, folding each one over her forearm before gently transferring it into a tin pie plate. When she was finished, she would prick the bottom of the crusts five times with a fork, then drop a handful of dried beans into half of them – to keep the dough from cracking while they prebaked for cream pies – and set the rest of the crusts aside to be filled with fruit or custard and baked later.

Working side by side at the long wooden counter, time flew by and Alice and Polly never seemed to run out of things to talk about. The air was filled not only with the delicious

smell of baking pies, but with the sweet sound of laughter. Pie after pie after pie went into the oven, and no sooner would Polly pull them out than the little silver bell over the door would jingle, merrily announcing the arrival of another hungry customer. Polly greeted each and every one with a sunny smile and a warm welcome. People loved coming to PIE, but to Alice it was much more than just a pie shop. It was a home away from home, a safe place where she could truly be herself.

“I’ll miss you, Aunt Polly,” Alice would say at the end of the day when it was time for her to go.

“I’ll miss you even more,” Polly would tell her. Then she’d hand Alice a pie to bring home to her parents, kiss her on the forehead, and send her on her way.

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Ipswitch, Pennsylvania, is a small town. Always was. Always will be. In July of 1955, the population was one hundred and sixty-two. People who visited Ipswitch often commented on what a happy place it was. Folks whistled when they walked down the street, neighbors were downright neighborly, and everyone seemed to be in a good mood. Well, almost everyone.

“Mama always favored Polly,” Alice heard her mother complaining to her father one evening about a week or so before

her aunt Polly passed. Alice's father had snuck out on the porch, hoping to read his newspaper in peace, but her mother had followed him there. It was a warm night, and with the windows open, Alice couldn't help but overhear her parents' conversation.

"Now, Ruthie," Alice's father said, "let's not open up that can of worms again."

"Well, it's true, George. All of that fuss over Polly's talent. I had talent, too, you know."

"Of course you did, dear."

"But did Mama even notice? No, she was too busy falling all over Polly and those stupid pies of hers."

Alice's father licked his lips. He had eaten a big slice of one of Polly's pies that very day. Chocolate cream. His favorite. The creamy filling was made from Dutch cocoa powder, eggs, sugar, and fresh whole milk stirred over a low flame until it thickened into a sweet, glossy brown pudding. Once it was cool, Polly spooned it into a baked crust and slathered the top with whipped cream sprinkled with curls of milk chocolate.

"Those pies are what's keeping this roof over our heads," he pointed out.

"You call this a roof?" Alice's mother snorted. "We could be living in a mansion if it weren't for Polly's selfishness."

"Keep your voice down, dear," her father said. "You don't want Alice to hear."

“I don’t care if she hears. She’s got stars in her eyes just like everyone else in this town. I’m tired of people acting like Polly Portman is some kind of a saint. If you ask me, she’s just plain selfish. Not to mention crazy. Who in their right mind turns down the chance to be a millionaire?”

Alice heard the snap and rustle of her father’s newspaper as he shook it open. He’d been down this road before and knew there was no point in arguing.

“Ten minutes, Ruthie — that’s all I’m asking for,” he said. “Mickey Mantle hit three homers against the Senators last night. At least let me read the sports page.”

“Go ahead and read your paper, George,” said Alice’s mother. “But mark my words and mark them good — when old high-and-mighty Polly Portman finally kicks the bucket, she had better set things right with this family.”

Alice stopped listening at that point and plugged her ears. She knew what “kicking the bucket” meant and she didn’t want to think about that happening. Aunt Polly was her rock, her favorite person in the world, the only one she felt she could really count on. Things between Alice and her mother had never been easy. No matter how hard Alice tried to please her, she always got the feeling that her mother was disappointed. And the only thing her father seemed to care about was being left alone to read his newspaper. Alice couldn’t imagine what life would be like without her aunt Polly. Little did she know how soon she would have to find out.