

Love, Lies, and Pumpkin Pies

by

Scott William Foley

Matthew Campbell leaned over the chain-link fence he shared with Ramona Stocks and said, “Ah, don’t you just love these crisp October mornings?”

“I do,” Ramona said as she tugged her summer flowers out of the soil. The first frost had arrived and done them in. She didn’t mind, though. Ramona possessed an infinite amount of patience, and so the endless planting and replacing of flowers each season did not bother her. “In fact,” she resumed, “fall is my favorite time of the year.”

“Mine, too,” Matthew agreed. His hands were loosely clasped and hanging over the fence, just a few feet from Ramona’s head as she toiled in her flower bed. He twisted his wedding band around his finger—something he started doing after his wife passed away many years ago. “Whenever the leaves start changing and a chill enters the air, I always think about my mom’s cooking. Dad mostly grilled our meals in the summer time, so fall meant Mom was back on the job.”

Ramona smiled.

She’d been a high school science teacher, and, because she’d given every ounce of time she had to her profession, had remained single. She enjoyed retirement, and as she glanced up at Matthew, thought perhaps it was the right time to start dating.

She had moved into the house next to Matthew two years ago after occupying an apartment for most of her adult life. Renovating it was something she did for amusement, and

gardening had quickly become a passion for her, too. It also gave her an excuse to chat with Matthew, who never failed to appear when she was outdoors.

“Was your mother a good cook?” Ramona asked after pulling out the last of her impatiens.

“The best,” Matthew answered. “She kept my brother and me plenty fed, let me tell you.”

Ramona stood and removed her gardening gloves. “I bet she could bake well, too.”

“Oh, yes.”

Sensing an opportunity, Ramona said, “Well, baking is something I’ve been meaning to take up. What’s your favorite treat?”

Also sensing an opportunity, Matthew wasted no time in answering, “Pumpkin pie, without a doubt. Mom’s were to die for, but I’ve never found one made quite like hers.”

Ramona patted away the dirt on her knees while asking, “Maybe I could practice by baking you a few pumpkin pies? You could sample them and then offer some advice on how to make one like your mom’s. Once I get it right, I’m sure I’ll be winning contests in no time.”

Matthew adjusted his cap, grinned, and said, “Why, it’d be my pleasure, Ramona. You just bring those pies over whenever you like.”

Two days later, Matthew’s doorbell rang. When he opened it, there stood Ramona with a fresh pumpkin pie. She beamed when she saw him lick his lips.

He practically sang, “Let me put on some java.”

Once the coffee was brewed, they both sat down at his kitchen table. “Some people put whip cream on their pumpkin pie, but not me,” he informed. “I appreciate it for what it is. Of course, that doesn’t apply to my coffee.” He then dumped two spoons of sugar into his mug.

“I can’t wait any longer, Matthew!” Ramona exclaimed. “Go ahead and take a bite.”

Ramona saw a flash of ecstasy on Matthew’s face followed by what seemed to be a concerted effort at looking disappointed. Teaching had given her the ability to read body language without error, and Matthew was a poor actor.

Nonetheless, she asked, “Is something wrong?”

“No! No, it’s delicious,” Matthew responded between chews.

“But?”

“Well, if you’re really trying to make it like Mom’s, she always served it after it’d spent the night in the refrigerator.”

Ramona chuckled and said, “So you like it cold.”

“Yes, but you couldn’t have known that,” Matthew said. “I should have remembered to give you that detail the other day. I can’t really comment on the ingredients unless it’s cold, you know, because the coldness changes the flavor.”

It was all Ramona could do to keep from laughing. “I understand, Matthew. Think nothing of it. Why don’t you keep this one and I’ll bring you another one—a cold one—in a few days and we’ll take it from there.”

“Perfect!” Matthew agreed. They then passed several hours talking while Matthew nibbled away the entire pie.

As the weeks passed, Ramona brought pie after pie to Matthew, and though each pie was delicious in its own right, Matthew always recommended a few things. A bit more ginger; a little less salt; a dash of extra cinnamon; add lots of sugar; just a hint of vanilla extract; go easy on the ground cloves; and on it went.

But after each sampling, Matthew and Ramona spent an increasing amount of time together. They went to the movies, out to dinner, took drives in the country, and even rode the train to the city for a few days of sightseeing. A relationship slowly developed, and both of them were perfectly happy with the way things progressed.

Finally, near the end of October, Ramona dropped a pie off at Matthew's while his younger brother, Peter, happened to be visiting.

She didn't stay long because she didn't want to intrude upon the brothers' time together, but also because she didn't want any kinks thrown into their farce.

After exchanging some friendly words with Peter, Ramona told Matthew to tell her later what changes needed to be made to get it more like his mom's. The stunned expression upon Peter's face did not go unnoticed.

The boys sat down to try Ramona's latest incarnation. It was, as usual, scrumptious. Before they knew it, Peter and Matthew had devoured the entire thing.

Leaning back in their chairs, Peter finally asked, "What was that about Ramona trying to make pie like Mom's?"

Shame spread itself across Matthew's countenance as he said, "She wanted to learn to bake well. I really like Ramona, and I really like pumpkin pie, too. So I told her she could

practice by making it like Mom's. I wanted to continue seeing her, so I kept suggesting little changes to the recipe here and there."

Peter's mouth hung open. At last, he revealed, "Matthew ... Mom hated pumpkin pie. She couldn't even stand the smell of it. She always bought it for you at Parlier's Bakery!"

"I know," Matthew confessed.

"Good to see you again, Ms. Stocks."

"Hello there, Jeremy. How are you?" Ramona asked her former student.

"I'm doing very well, ma'am. What can I get for my best customer today? Yet another pumpkin pie?"

"That's right, Jeremy," she said. She didn't even bother to peruse the bakery that Jeremy had inherited from his father, Robert Parlier. "Yet another pumpkin pie."

"You sure you don't want something else?" Jeremy asked. "I would think you'd be tired of it by now. At least let me make you one fresh with some different spices."

"No thank you, Jeremy," Ramona said with a sly wink. "Your pumpkin pie is perfect just the way it is. Don't change a thing."

Copyright © 2009 Scott William Foley

All Rights Reserved. This story may not be used or reproduced without the express written consent of the author. Originally appeared in the October, 2009, issue of *News and Views for the Young at Heart*. To buy Scott

William Foley's books, click [HERE](#).