

The Free Press' Short Story

GRANDMA BEAN'S BREAD

ANNA BROWNELL DUNAWAY

At the witching hour of two o'clock in the morning a dim yellow light flared eerily in Grandma Bean's kitchen.

Grandma Bean had never included a punching bag in her kitchen equipment, and she would have scorned a "daily dozen."

"Let Miss Puckett take her self-rising for all of me," Grandma Bean said to herself gloatingly as she removed her apron.

She lay awake visioning a brown loaf with a blue ribbon floating from it, the crowds surrounding it, the stares and the envious glances of her neighbors.

Her program for the day that had already begun was as clearly mapped out in her mind as an etching.

"We're on our way to Miltonvale, ma!" cried Hattie exuberantly. She wasn't much more than a girl, and with her little family life on a farm did not afford her many holidays.

"We're going to Miltonvale, Gramma," sang Bertie gleefully, squirming with the discomfort of his stiff new shoes, "to the fair."

"To the fair," chimed in three-year-old Jimmy.

"Well, now that's fine," said Grandma Bean, beaming. "I'll go in the morning then with Frank. I s'pose he'll want to start right early."

"Not till afternoon," said Hattie. "The men are so busy in the fields. One afternoon's all he can afford to take."

"Grandma Bean's erect shoulders sagged. "That'll be too late to enter my bread, Hattie. What shall I do? I was counting on going this afternoon when you folks—"

"And so we did aim to, ma. I declare that's too bad. I never thought about your bread. Tell you what, in girlish abandon she pushed her mother before her up the path bordered with sleepy four-o'clocks—

"My bread," remonstrated Grandma Bean, "it ain't baked yet!"

"That's nothing," said Hattie, laughing. "You take it along with you and we'll bake it at Jen's when we get there. And you'll be right on the spot to enter it bright and early to-morrow morning."

drawer." She cast a dubious look at the ballooning white dough in the pan and shook her head. "I dunno, Hattie—"

"Now, ma, it ain't every day you get a ride with a fast horse and buggy. And you can't enter your bread without you do go."

"That was true. Grandma Bean gave the dough a few swift punches, washed hastily and dressed herself in her best black silk waist and serge skirt. Then before the glass over the comb case she adjusted the mourning bonnet that had been new seven years before on the occasion of Grandpa Bean's funeral.

Grandma Bean stooped over the pan of bread and, tucking the faded red cloth round it tenderly, lifted it in her arms as if it were a child. She set it down on the step and with eager fingers locked the door. In spite of her heavy burden she tripped down the walk, "ereed and youthful."

Hattie clucked to the horse and held the reins taut in her brown hands. "Just set the bread down in the end, ma, and climb in," she directed. "You hold the baby and put Jimmy between us, and Bertie can set in the bottom and hang his feet out. It's going to be a hot day, and this buggy hasn't got a top, but we'll be there soon. Get up, Dan."

For a mile and a half they jogged along smartly. The sun, climbing higher in the heavens, shone down on them with hot rays. Grandma Bean's mourning bonnet, where she pushed it up from her forehead, left a black streak.

"I wonder how my bread is," she inquired anxiously.

"T'm hot," complained Bertie. "Ain't no mist there?"

"Pretty soon now, son," Hattie gave Dan a smart slap with the reins. "Sure you've forgot anything, ma?"

"Navy a thing," replied Grandma Bean comfortably. "We're all here. You and me and the baby and Bertie and Jimmie and the bread."

Hattie laughed. "If Miss Puckett could see that bread—What's the matter, Dan?" She gave the horse another slap. "Why don't you go? Giddap—do." For Dan had stopped stock still on the sun-baked road.

"Mebbe he wants to rest a minute, Hattie," said Grandma Bean. "Horses get tired same as folks."

"Well, he makes me tired," snapped Hattie crossly. For a few minutes she let the reins hang slack. Then, clucking persuasively, she struck him sharply. "Get up, Dan."

"But Dan didn't move."

"Get up, Dan. That's a good horse," wheedled Hattie. "Get up. Good horse!"

"Good horse," echoed Bertie. "Good 'ossie," chimed in Jimmy like a flute that comes out a measure behind.

Hattie handed the baby to her mother and jerked Dan's bridle. "Come on, you old cowcatcher," she said wrathfully.

The strange procession started. After a few rods Hattie stopped to wipe her face. Dan stopped too; Bertie, craning his neck round the buggy, announced dramatically—"She's comin' down again, gamin'."

"Come 'down again," chimed in Jimmy in his flute-like tones.

Grandma Bean scrambled out and, going round to the dough, mixed it down once more. This time it was so light that it started rising before she had tugged it in. At half-mile intervals they stopped, and Grandma Bean mixed down the bread. The sun now shone upon them from overhead. It was noon, and they had gone four miles. They had been three hours on the journey.

After the fourth mile Hattie climbed in. "I'm clean tuckered out," she panted, "dragging that stubborn old horse's head. I've just got to rest, if we never get there."

"I wonder how my bread is," said Grandma Bean anxiously. "Take the baby, Hattie, while I knead it down again."

Grandma Bean came round to the side of the buggy a moment later and faced her daughter, tragically. "What'll I do, Hattie? The bread's been kneaded down so much it just won't be mixed again. It's runnin' all over the back of the buggy."

"Throw part of it away," Hattie advised her, laughing. "I'm sure I don't know what else to do, ma."

"My poor bread," lamented Grandma Bean, throwing out great handfuls of snowy whiteness. "It's plum ruint, I know. If I ever do get there and get it baked, it will be hard enough to know down a yearlin'."

"I wish I had a loaf of it to throw at this old mule," declared Hattie.

"I hear a wagon coming," announced Bertie.

"A wagon?" Hattie sat up and stopped fanning with the red turban.

Grandma Bean peered down the long white stretch of road behind them. She made out a team pulling a load of gravel. When it drew alongside the driver stopped.

"We've got a balky horse," Hattie informed him. "I've walked and led him four miles. We've still got a mile and a half to go. Can we hitch on behind your team?"

"Sure," the man agreed kindly. "Just let me tie the critter behind; I'll keep him moving."

Grandma Bean gave the bread a final mixing down before the little cavalcade started. For a mile they jogged on serenely under the burning sun. The town of Miltonvale lay at the foot of a gradually sloping hill about half a mile long. The man with the gravel had no brake on his wagon, and the team kept gaining momentum as they started down the long incline. As they neared the bottom they broke into a trot and then into a canter, dragging Dan after them. "Stop 'em!" screamed Grandma Bean.



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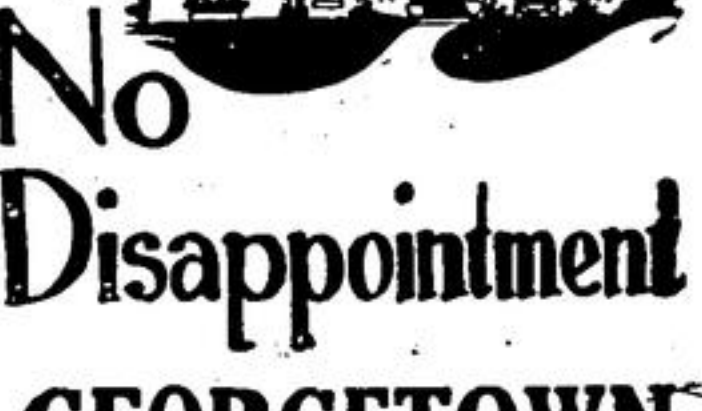
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to think of her bread; she thought only of their safety. Her lips were moving silently as if in prayer.

"We're tipping over!" screamed Hattie as they reached the bottom. But after two or three frenzied whiffs the buggy finally righted itself and stood pat on the smooth road that led into the town.

Hattie jumped out with the baby in her arms and promptly fell down. "I'm that dizzy I can't stand," she cried. "For pity's sake, are we all here? If Dan had fallen down, we'd all been killed. My, what a ride!"

Grandma Bean scrambled out dizzily. "My poor bread, Hattie," she said. "I wonder how it is."

For the second time that day Hattie sat in the road and rocked with merriment. "Bread, ma?" she repeated between gasps. "Bread! If there is any of it left it had ought to be baked by friction!" she roared again. "Oh, what a joke it was on Dan. Oh-oh-oh!"

"He'll be willing to go back, I'll venture," put in the man, glancing at the subdued horse. "Well, if you're ready, we'll get on. I'll leave you where you want to stop."

A few minutes later the queer procession arrived at Jen's. The driver's "whoa," interrupted Grandma Bean's mournful musing. She was visioning Mrs. Puckett's salt-rising loaf adorned with the blue ribbon and Sally Horn's "gra-ham" wearing the red. She herself would take nothing. But when she had lifted the pan from the rear of the buggy her spirits rose visibly. The bread was up to the top of the pan.

"I'll make it right down into loaves," she said to Hattie happily. "And you get the fire ready."

"I've tried a lot of bread receipts," said Hattie later that evening as they all sat round the supper table, with the pungent odor of freshly baked bread filling Jen's little kitchen, "but this is the best I ever tasted, ma."

"I don't think there'll be a great demand for our receipt, Hattie," observed Grandma Bean with a twinkle in her eye. "Unless somebody wants a fast ride and a balky horse."

"I guess I'll be satisfied to ride in a wagon behind our old grays after this, ma," said Hattie.

"And I'll be satisfied, declared Grandma Bean, running an appraising finger along the silky crust of the brown loaf that was to wear the accustomed blue ribbon on the morrow, "to knead down my bread in the old-fashioned way."

SLATS DIARY BY ROSS FARQUHAR Friday—Pa says he guesses he miss Judged Aron Frump when he sed he was to Lazy to live becuz today as he past Arons house he sed he seen Aron winding his Watch.

Saturday—Ant Emma woodent never eat Devilud ham til just lately becuz she all ways that that Devilud ham was ham without the Evil sperits took out like what you read about in the Bible. If you read the Bible.

Sunday—Jenny Cole was at are house today and she told pa she was oney thirty yrs. of old age and pa sed very very Gallantly. Why by goodness you dont look that old and she replied and sed. Well your a Bigger Hie than I am. Fact is she gradulated the yr. pa started to eat out Meal, a cording to what Ant Emmy says.

Munday—Pa cum home this evening and he sed to ma that he was so tired, he Hardy new his own Mind and ma replied and sed to pa. Well you havent mist tuesday at that.

Acton Fall Fair

September 18-19, 1934

Special Prize List

Table with columns for NO., description of prize, and amount. Includes Horse Specials like Best High Stepping Horse, Best Single Turnout, etc.

Table with columns for NO., description of prize, and amount. Includes Cattle Specials like Best Group of Three Dairy Cows, Best Herd of Pure Bred Holsteins, etc.

Table with columns for NO., description of prize, and amount. Includes Sheep Specials like Best Flock of Sheep, Best Pair Marketable Wether Lambs, etc.

Table with columns for NO., description of prize, and amount. Includes Hog Specials like Best Pen of Bacon Hogs, Best Sow, born after March 1st, 1934, etc.

Table with columns for NO., description of prize, and amount. Includes Poultry Specials like Best Pen of 12 Bred-to-lay Pullets, Best Six Bray Hatched Pullets, etc.

Table with columns for NO., description of prize, and amount. Includes Grain, Root and Vegetable Specials like Best Collection of Farm Produce, Best 3 samples of Grain, etc.

Table with columns for NO., description of prize, and amount. Includes Fruit Specials like Best Bushel McIntosh Red Apples, Best Bushel of King Apples, etc.

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