

## COMMON AS A LOAF OF BREAD

by Sandra de Helen

Child, don't get underfoot. I've got to get this bread worked up early today because I got to get those tomatoes picked before they rot on their blamed vines. Cockeye! Now see what you made me do! I've dumped in too much flour. Hand me that can of lard.

*Can't she see I'm busy here? Lord love her she's quick as a trout, but she WILL hang about asking questions.*

Diana May will you set your hiney down in the corner? If you're going to watch, I'd druther you watched from over yonder.

*Oh now she's going to pout. Here she is plumb grown up with young'uns of her own, still pouting when her grandma don't pay her enough attention. Well, I guess it won't kill me to tell her how to bake bread, though God knows why anybody would want to do it lessen they had to. I'd go to the store and buy light bread if I had the money.*

Here now. You see the ingredients ain't nothing but yeast and scalded milk mixed together good, then flour and lard. How much? Depends on how many loaves you're aiming to make. Just dump some in until it looks right. Now take this ball here and start working it. Wait, wait, dust your hands first ... that's good, you don't need to cover the whole kitchen floor. Okay, now work it. Here the table's big enough for both of us I reckon. Just do what I do.

*Look at her. Thirty-three years old and never baked a loaf of bread in her life. Ask me, Gladys spoiled that child. Of course, Gladys is near sixty and I never caused her to bake bread, so I guess it's my fault when you come down to it. Ain't none of us had it easy though, what with one thing and another. There ain't a one of us could ever tolerate a man for any length of time. Although I'd still be with Donald if he hadn't of died.*

What? No, we got a ways to go yet. I was just thinking about your grandpa. Yeah, he was a good 'un. Don't let up! You got to knead that dough till it's as stretchy and smooth as the elastic in your drawers. If your arms hurt, you have to think about something else.

*She's evidently got something on her mind. Looks like the kneading is taking her mind off IT instead of the other way around. Whatever it is, she'll either tell me or she won't.*

What time does that gal you brought down here get up out of the bed? Well, what did she stay up so late for? Didn't the light keep you up too? I never could of stood nobody reading in bed. You know how I am about that. When it's time for bed it's time for bed. Reading is for some other time. Where did you meet this gal... okay, Judy then. Where did you meet Judy?

*Theater. I can't figure how she has time to write them pieces and put them on. Works all day,*

*raises little Serena all by herself and now she's putting on plays to boot.*

Any men in the plays you put on? Well, I just wondered, that's all. Curious, you know. I don't know when's the last time you mentioned a man, and you're young and healthy yet. Why your mother had been married four or five times by the time she was your age.

*Look at her blush. I wonder if she's got a beau she ain't mentioned.*

How's your dough doing? Why look at that! It's as pretty as a new Playtex! Here, let's let 'em rest a spell. Just put her in a ball, slap her in that bowl and cover her up. Good, good. Let's clean up our mess now.

*She seems disappointed. Look at her, she's deep in study. Wants to tell me something, I can see that. I sure wish she'd go ahead on and spit it out. Whatever it is, it can't be that bad.*

Child, are you fixing to move to Alaska again? or what?

*Her face has gone red again. What in the world is so hard to say?*

Is that all? Well, Diana honey, it don't matter none who you love, long as you love somebody. This Judy person seems okay. Is she good to you? That's all that matters then. Don't you worry about what people think. People ain't dumb, they know there's always been women who loved other women, and men who, well, you know. You told your mom yet? You better do that, you know she worries about you. Yeah, you go on and do that now, I got to see to the tomatoes myself.

*Poor thing. All that upset just because she's gone and fell in love with a girl. I could tell her a thing or two, but she'll find out what she needs to know. I'm glad her father didn't live to see this day. Men don't understand these things. I know John never understood about me and Betty Jo. Had to go all crazy and get a divorce. Betty Jo would have had a laugh about Diana May. Funny how things turn out.*

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