DONNA of the BIG TOP

by BEULAH POYNTER

CHAPTER IX

"IT WOULDN'T surprise me if we never saw hide nor hair of Siddal again," Mrs. Planter put in, emphasizing her words by thumping a dish of string beans boiled with bacon on the table before her husband. Nub Planter, a tall, raw-boned, regular man of 40, had taken Bill's place after the young man's hasty departure. Nub was thoroughly enjoying three square meals a day that went with the job. Usually he had "to scratch" for one meal.

He grinned slyly, exposing tobacco-stained teeth and a cavity where two molars were missing. "That'd suit you proper, old lady, eh? With that young up-start out a the way you'd rule up as you please with the old farter. Huh?"

"We'll cross no bridges until we come to 'em," she muttered.

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The rural delivery postman, driving a shiny new car, appeared at the bend of the road. In a lusty, social voice he called a greeting to grandfather Siddal.

"That you, Lem?" the aged man answered. "How are you?"

"Letter for you, Grandpop. Seems you're getting a right smart lot of mail these days. How's your granddaughter that's with the circus?"

"Fine, Lem. Jest fine."

Lem sprang from the car, sprinted up the tree-shaded path and handed the letter to the old man. "Want I should read it to you, Grandpop?" he asked kindly.

"Sy you'd be so good, Lem."

"It's from Bill. I seen him the day he went away. Asked what the hurry was and he said 'business.' Some stepper, Bill!" The postman opened the letter, read the contents to himself and then drew a deep breath. He glanced apprehensively at the placid features of the patient old patriarch. "Grandpop, you gotta brace yourself. This here ain't very good news—"

"Bill—Bill's not coming back?"

"No, it's not that. It's about Madeline. She—"

"Madeline! Read it, Lem. Read it."

Slowly, dwelling on each word, Lem Holden read Bill's letter informing Amos Siddal of his granddaughter's injury. "In another week," Bill wrote "I will bring her back with me—to stay always, I hope. She isn't suffering much pain now, but it will be some time before she recovers completely and we must feel thankful her injuries were not more serious."

Tears streamed down Amos Siddal's wrinkled cheeks. "God is good," he mumbled. "My little girl, my little girl."

Lem helped him into the house.

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Donna's recovery was almost miraculous. Her perfectly trained body responded to treatment in a way that amazed the doctor, but little Miss Saunders, with her romantic eyes, saw more clearly than the physician. Regardless of the fact that Bill was supposed to be a close relative of her patient, she was convinced that love was the healing power.

Yet the barrier that her sudden withdrawal had reared between them was never lowered. Each afternoon he arrived at the hospital and remained until the dinner hour. Sometimes he and Donna talked.

She could describe easily enough the meeting between Madeline and herself that had led up to the formation of their aerial act. Describing life in the circus was easy, too. She dwelt at great length on the rigid moral code of circus performers and explained why it is necessary.

"Maybe circus people aren't so good, Bill, but they are sensible. A girl can't be having affairs and keep a clear head. Cocktails and wild parties would make accidents so common that they could never keep the performance schedule. Family life is the clean life, so circus owners want families with their shows."

"And yet in spite of everything accidents do happen," Bill said.

"Yes. We play with death all the time and when we get too fearless something happens."

Aside from what she told about her own life, the "strange people" interested Bill most. He thought it horrible that such monstrosities should be exhibited to the public and felt they should be cared for by the state. Donna did not agree.

"Why, they're happy, Bill. I mean happier earning a living than they could be any other way. Most of them never thing of their afflictions. They have a separate life from us. They love and marry and have children. They make their fortunes and retire and unless their abnormality is caused by disease never really suffer. At least the old troupers don't. Why, the side show is a blessing to them! One of the sweetest women I ever knew was a freak! Her whole life was a—a poem of unselfishness and sympathetic understanding and love. She never married but she mothered several generations of circus kids. She had the loveliest face I ever saw but she weighed 400 pounds and couldn't walk a step."

"Couldn't the doctors do anything for her?"

Donna laughed. "Her fat was her livelihood. Maybe she did try to reduce in the beginning, but when I knew her she was always trying to take on more weight. She didn't mind it."

The day Bill announced to Donna that they would depart for the farm on the morrow she summoned courage to ask him to write a letter for her.

Her voice was low and strained as she dictated:

"My dear Donna:—Bill and I are leaving for the farm tomorrow. I have to go on a stretcher and I understand they will have to shove it through the car window to get me inside. It will be good to get out of the hospital. They have been very kind to me here and my bones have healed quickly, but being in bed so long is pretty hard for anyone as active as I have always been.

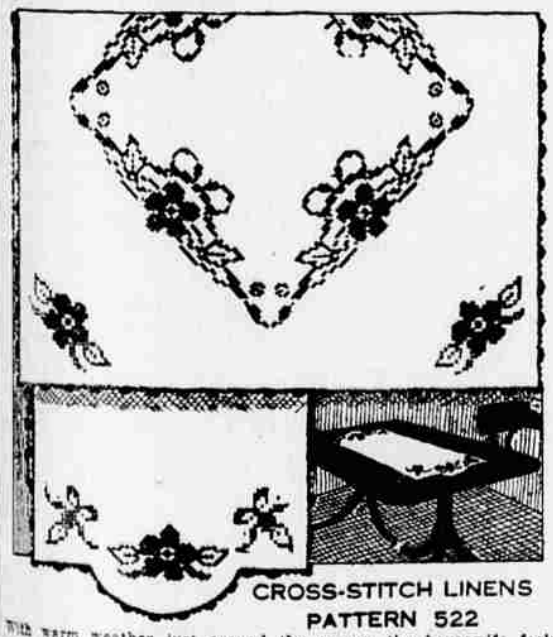
Bill is writing this for me. The right wing is still incapacitated but when I can use it I'll write to you myself. Meanwhile be good and careful. How is the act? You didn't say. I hope Con comes to his senses and discovers what a lovely minx you are.

"Your loving partner, Madeline."

Bill addressed the envelope without directions from Donna. He carried a little route card in his pocket and knew without consulting it where the circus would be the following week.

(To Be Continued)

LOVELY LINENS IN CROSS-STITCH OFFERED BY LAURA WHEELER



CROSS-STITCH LINENS

PATTERN 522

With warm weather just around the corner, the housewife feels the need of a variety of linens to add charm to her home and her entertaining. Cross stitch on linens fills this need for it gives them beauty and color and is quickly done. These motifs done in 5 to the inch crosses should meet with instant approval for aside from the handsome cloth that they make, they can be used on scarfs, towels, pillow cases, vanity and buffet sets, cushions and other articles. The design is easy to do in color because of the distinct color markings in the pattern and can be carried out in a varitey of colors on a light or dark background. The motifs can be effectively combined with those of Pattern 523 and together with them form a large collection of linens.

Pattern 522 contains a transfer pattern of four motifs 5x15¾ inches, four motifs 3x5 inches and eight 3½ inch corner motifs; suggestions for arrangement of motifs, yardage requirements and color schemes.

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