

# DONNA of the BIG TOP

by BEULAH POYNTER

CHAPTER XVIII

DONNA and Bill decided to be married in September. From the day the decision was made Donna was in a fever of excitement. One moment she was determined to tell Bill the truth about her coming to the farm; the next she was just as determined to go through with the ceremony, keeping him in ignorance as long as possible.

The longer she postponed the telling the more fearful she grew that in some manner she might learn the facts from someone else. She had visions of the real Madeline walking into the church just as the minister was about to pronounce her Bill's wife; visions of an indignant letter arriving to inform Grandfather Siddal that the girl had taken into his heart and home was an impostor; visions of Bill repudiating her, casting her out without even giving her a chance to defend herself.

Although these fears overshadowed her happiness, Donna continued to reassure herself that Madeline could not do such a thing. Through the deception Madeline had won the man she loved. From her letters she seemed perfectly content to let another take her place at the farm and never to see her relatives again.

Donna regretted that she had destroyed the letters. Madeline had written for her would have supplied proof that she was the real Donna. Now all she had to offer was her own word, for she doubted that Madeline would come forward with any statement that might blacken herself. Sometimes Donna wondered if Con knew the truth.

Mrs. Planter went about her duties with pinched lips and a silent disapproval that expressed itself in everything she did. Sometimes Donna could feel the narrow eyes studying her and the girl determined that, once she was Bill's wife, the housekeeper should be dismissed.

Yet the days of preparing for the wedding were, on the whole, happy ones. Long hours with Bill only increased her love for him. Although his physical magnetism, obvious good looks and cheery nature had first won her admiration, now it was those sterling qualities of character—his sense of honor, unselfishness and high principles—that each day made him dearer. The fact that she knew Bill to be the soul of integrity himself made her even more afraid to tell him what she had done.

It was not so much her return to the farm after her injury that made her feel guilty as it was the first deliberate deception that had brought her there. Looking back at those 24 hours when she had led Bill to believe she was his cousin, when she had taken advantage of the old man's blindness, Donna's cheeks burned with shame. Loving Bill with every throb of her heart and every breath she drew, finding his presence dearer than life itself, she could not bring herself to risk the loss of her happiness when it seemed so close within her grasp.

The night before the wedding, which was to take place in the little Methodist church Grandfather Siddal had attended since he was a school boy, Donna wrote to Madeline. "I hope the route hasn't been changed and that this reaches you. It's been so long since I heard from you that I'm wondering if you received my last letter. For a long time I've been wanting to tell you that Bill and I are going to be married but I've been

afraid to. It's sort of the same feeling you have about an engagement, you know—not wanting to tell anyone until the contract is signed, for fear it will fall through.

"It doesn't seem possible that all I've wanted so much is going to be mine—a home, a husband and I hope, children. I love Bill so. Maybe not any more than you love Con, but it seems to me that no woman could ever love a man as much as I do Bill. And I'm keeping my fingers crossed for fear something will happen between now and tomorrow morning to prevent our marriage. Yet what could? I'm sure you wouldn't do anything to hurt me and I know Bill loves me, though it took him a long time to make up his mind to marry me.

"Wish me happiness, Madeline. There are going to be some tough days ahead, I know, when I have to make explanations, but I'm trying not to think about them. If you ever decide to come back here, for heaven's sake let me know beforehand.

"Do write, please. By the way, I have to be married under your name. Do you think it will matter much? Does Con know that I'm supposed to be you? Of course he knows that we aren't sisters and that it's your grandfather I'm living with, but does he know the rest?"

"Heaps of love, Donna."

It was this letter, the first he had ever read of Donna's that opened Con David's eyes to Madeline's deception. One of the wild west riders had gone to the postoffice and brought the letter to Madeline just before her entrance out. Madeline had opened it, read the signature, and, being in a hurry, had tossed the letter on her dressing table and left the room.

A few minutes later Con entered the room, looking for her. The sheets of paper attracted his attention as he bent to take a last glance at his makeup in the mirror. The name "Donna" brought back all that the other girl had meant to him, and quite shamelessly he read the letter.

He crumpled the message into a little ball and thrust it in his pocket. Then he strode out of the dressing room, black fury in his heart. Madeline, at the entrance, turned to smile at him, and though his scowl indicated something was wrong she had no idea that the situation was so serious.

During the act Con flayed the beasts unmercifully, taking a savage delight as he cracked the great whip in their faces and saw them cringe in terror. Once he struck Lucy, Bengal, across the nose and when a streak of blood mingled with the orange and black of her fur he laughed insanely.

Madeline covered against the barred door, expecting at any moment to see the tortured beasts turn upon him. "Con!" she moaned. "Con! For God's sake, what's the matter with you? Stop it!"

He turned and smiled at her, a smile that was more terrifying than the snarl of the wild animals. She tumbled with the catch on the door, opened it and, trembling as she had not trembled since the first time she entered the lion cage, escaped to the arena.

There was a sudden roar, followed by another and another. Con, blind with anger, came suddenly to his senses and realized his danger. He leaped, caught the door, jerked it open and put bars between him and the menagerie, just as Carlo and Sander sprang toward him.

(To Be Continued)

## LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

Cloudy, with Showers

BY HAROLD GRAY



## TIM TYLER'S FLYING LUCK

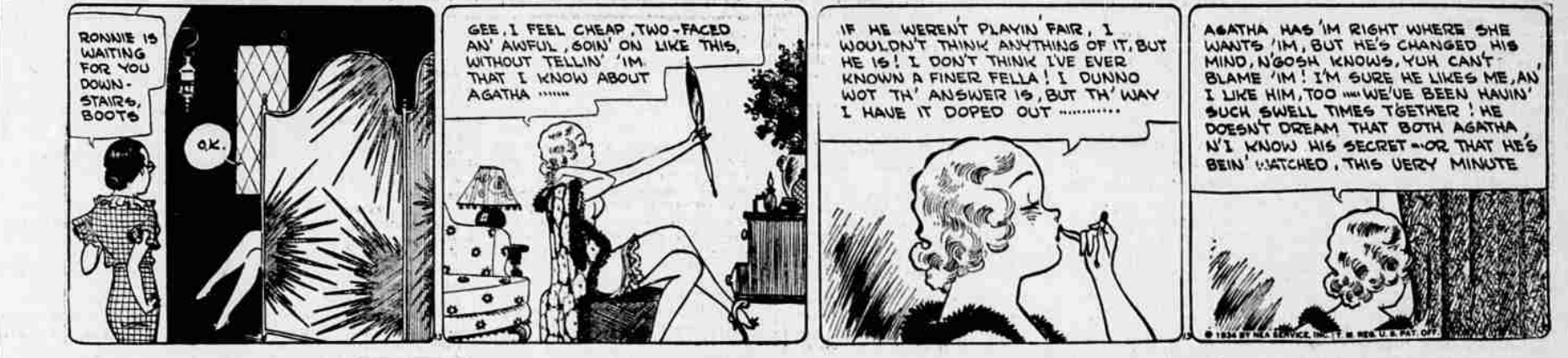
BY LYMAN YOUNG



## BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES

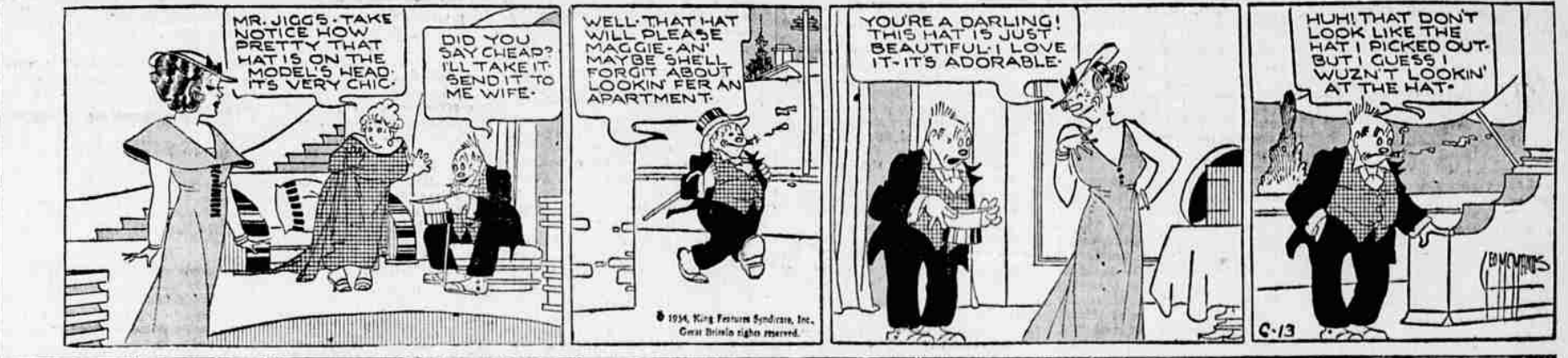
That Guilty Feelin'

BY MARTIN

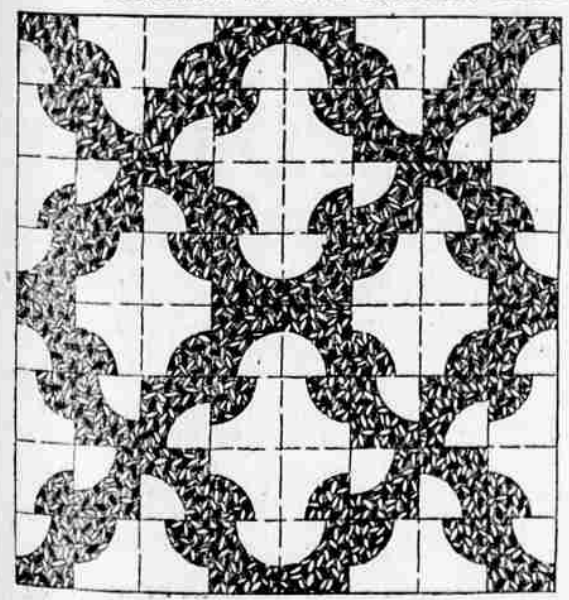


## BRINGING UP FATHER

BY GEORGE McMANUS



## LAURA WHEELER OFFERS OLD TIME FAVORITE IN TWO PATTERN PIECES



Drunkard's Path—sometimes known as Wonder of the World—is a quilt that has been a favorite since the earliest days of quilt-making. Its name, Drunkard's Path, is honestly come by for one look at the illustration shows what a winding design this is, a feature that makes the finished quilt so lovely. To the quiltmaker it is indeed a world wonder for it is formed of but two pattern pieces. These interchange in the light and dark materials forming a simple block which, when joined, makes a seemingly intricate pattern. And that certainly sounds like something to wonder at!

Pattern 480 comes to you with complete, simple instructions for cutting, sewing and finishing, together with yardage chart, diagram of quilt to help arrange the blocks for single and double bed size, and a diagram of block which serves as a guide for placing the pattern and suggests contrasting materials.

Send 10 cents in stamps or coin (coin preferred) for this pattern to Register-Guard, needlecraft dept.

## THIMBLE THEATRE Starring POPEYE

NOW SHOWING—"COLD TURKEY"

TOMORROW—"ON AN EMPTY STOMACH"

BY E. C. SEGAR



## OUT OUR WAY

BY WILLIAMS

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

BY AHERN



**QUALITY GUM**

**WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT**

THE PERFECT FLAVOR

AIDS DIGESTION