

DONNA of the BIG TOP

by BEULAH POYNTER

CHAPTER XXIX

DAY after day Amos Siddal lay on his bed unable to lift a hand or move the body that had known such strength and agility and endured such hardships.

Donna, sitting beside him, wondered that thought could be passing through his mind. There were hours that she was to recall in after life, when she read aloud his favorite passages in the Bible and listened as his feeble lips repeated the words after her. Often before lamplight banished the shadows of the little room she would hold one of his hands in hers while he talked of the struggles he had known as a youth.

Donna felt a morbid fascination in listening to him talk of Madeline's childhood. The chubby little girl he described, who made mud pies in the bog pen, who fell from apple trees and almost broke her neck when she tumbled through the hay mow, who was red-haired and freckled and often dirty, had nothing in common with the Madeline whom Donna had known.

Sometimes as she read the old man fell asleep. Always when his eyelids were lowered the waxen whiteness of his cheeks, the sunken eyeballs and his frailty about her with a physical pain. He could not live with this constant wasting away. He was little more than a wraith now, though his spirit was as strong as ever.

"When you're young and everything ahead of you, Madeline," he said, "there's a kind of terror, which it shouldn't have. But after you've lived your life—lived it as best you know how, making mistakes, of course, and sometimes sinning, why a long sleep is a kind of pleasure. It'll be a wrench to leave you and Bill, but there's no more to be had of it."

"But why a first time? Why write him at all?"

"Why—why—I hadn't heard from Mad—from Donna for some time and—"

In her wild attempt to find a logical excuse without admitting the truth, names became twisted on her tongue and her voice thickened.

"May I see the letter?"

"There's nothing in it, Bill. Nothing that is disloyal to you. I swear it."

"Then let me see it." He moved toward her. She snatched up the letter and crumpled it in her fist.

"No. If you doubt me and have to have proof—"

"Give me that letter!"

"No!"

Afterward she was to regret the action bitterly, but as he reached toward her, whether to take the letter from her or with a gesture of command she did not stop to realize, she tore the envelope into shreds and flung them into the open fireplace.

"You know," he said slowly, his face almost as white as his own, "that gives me the right to believe anything."

He swung about abruptly and left the room. Donna stood horror-stricken as the import of his words forced themselves upon her. For months she had been prepared to face a crisis, but not an accusation of this kind.

(To Be Continued)

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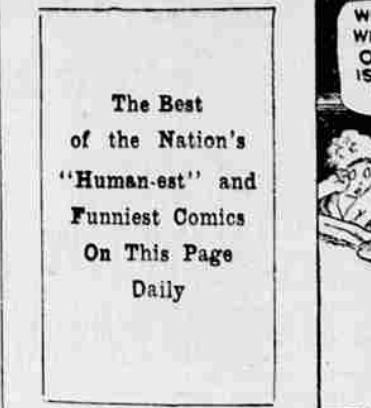
Pattern 759 comes to you with a transfer pattern of two motifs, each in color and two reverse 4 inch corners; complete instructions for doing cutwork, illustrations of the stitches and material requirements.

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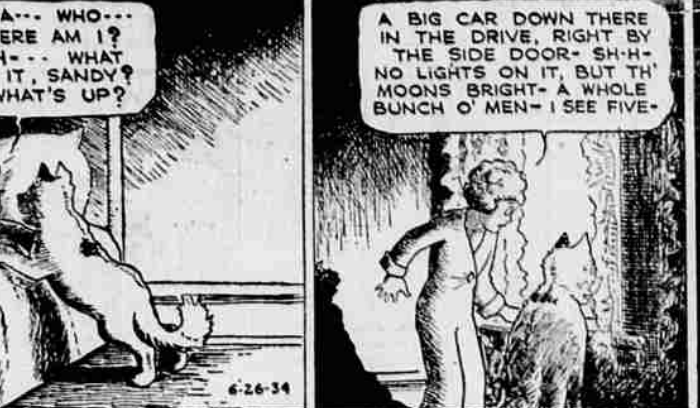
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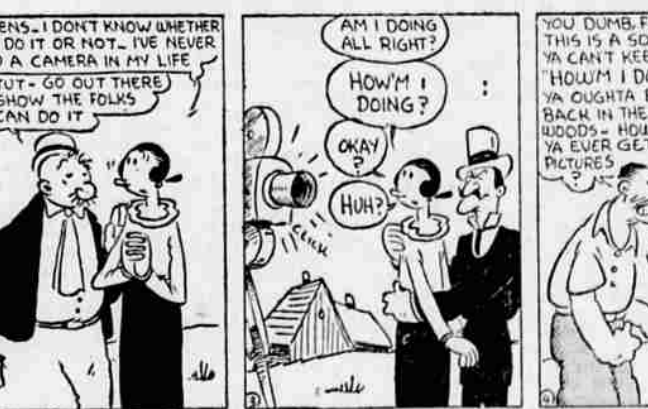


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