

# THE WISE LITTLE HEN • JUNE 1934

## THE MOVIE STORY

**W**ise Mrs. Hen knows she'll need a food supply when winter comes. So she and her chicks start out to plant some corn. But who will help them? "Strong, big" Peter Pig, an obvious candidate, is energetically playing his accordion at home. But when Mrs. Hen asks "Will you help me plant my corn?" the swine seems struck by sickness. "Who, me?" he snorts. "Oh, no! I've got a bellyache."

Mrs. Hen moves on to Donald Duck's houseboat. The Duck is dancing a hornpipe—visibly in fine fettle. But when the hen asks for aid, Donald exclaims "Who, me? Oh, no! I've got a bellyache."

The hen plants the corn with only her chicks' assistance. At harvest time, she tries again to enlist her neighbors. She finds pig and Duck dancing outside their Idle Hour Club cabin. Both bellyache once again at the prospect of work—but sneakily shake hands when they think Mrs. Hen's not looking.

Of course, she's seen them. When the time comes to eat Mrs. Hen's corn, the old girl asks Donald and Peter to help yet again. When they predictably say yes this time, she serves them a bottle of belly-soothing castor oil!

Peter gets an idea. In a scene dropped from most surviving prints, he puts on a gracious manner and tries to give Donald the castor oil as a gift, only to have it handed back the same way. Then—in the more well-known ending scene—he and Donald take turns kicking each other in the fanny.



Storyboard drawing, c. 1933.

## SEE YOU IN THE FUNNY PAPERS

Donald's hatching was first reflected in print via an oft-reprinted, Hen-based *Silly Symphony* Sunday page continuity (September 16 to December 16, 1934). Later reprinted in the Italian one-shot comic also pictured here, the story showed Mrs. Hen trying various ways of teaching the work ethic to Donald and Peter. Scripted by Ted Osborne, the comic also marked the first Duck work of Al Tallaferrò—a devoted Donald pundit who would soon become the fowl's foremost newspaper strip artist.



## THE MAGAZINE RACK

**F**rom the start, Disney seems to have known there was something special about *The Wise Little Hen* (1934)—and about Donald, the sailor-suited Duck. Early publicity for the short touted Peter as much as his co-star, but the waterfowl just had something gunning for him. Maybe it was his voice, the work of the inimitable Clarence "Ducky" Nash. Maybe it was his name—other ducks named Donald had already been among Mickey's pals in early Disney children's books.

Or maybe it was his temper. Though not shown in *Hen*, Donald's famous furies arrived early enough to inspire a second Duck cartoon, *Orphans' Benefit* (1934), before *Hen* was even released. When *Hen* itself turned out a hit, the studio was already in gear to produce more.

*Good Housekeeping's* *Wise Little Hen* was necessarily prepared some time before the short's release; far enough in advance that in it, Donald is not afforded any special attention. On the other hand, the early preparation also means that *GH* shows an extra-primitive version of the Duck—a fat fowl closer to the look of the first model sheets than to the finished film.

*GH's* version of *Hen* was expanded into a full-length prose story twice: first for *Mickey Mouse and His Friends* (1937), a storybook published by Thomas Nelson and Sons, and then for *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* 18 (1942). Interestingly, both stories' authors avoided identifying the Duck star as Donald. *Mickey Mouse* author Jean Ayer renamed him "Daniel," with Peter becoming "Patsy" for good measure. *WDC&S* called Donald simply "the Duck" and erased him from Tom Wood's vignettes. Presumably, the goal was to avoid confusion with the mature version of Donald visible elsewhere in the publications.

## SEE YOU IN THE FUNNY PAPERS, AGAIN

*Wise Little Hen* literary spin-offs continued for decades. An odd comics version in *Silly Symphonies* 1 (1952) features Donald in the Donald role, Fifer Pig as Peter (!), and Horace Horsecollar and Clarabelle Cow as two more lazy neighbors. When in 1994, Carl Barks painted the Hen-inspired "Surprise Party at Memory Pond" for Donald's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it would seem he used *SS* 1—rather than the 1934 cartoon—as his story reference, for Horace and Clarabelle once again appear.



The Wise Little Hen asked quite forlorn, "Won't you help me plant the corn?"

## The WISE LITTLE HEN from a WALT DISNEY SILLY SYMPHONY



The Pig and Duck began to shake. "We can't! We've got a tummy ache!"



The chicks did all they could to aid, And row by row the seed was laid.



But neither Pig nor Duck came round Till the corn was ready to be ground.

"When do we eat?" the shirkers ask, Now that the chicks have done their task.

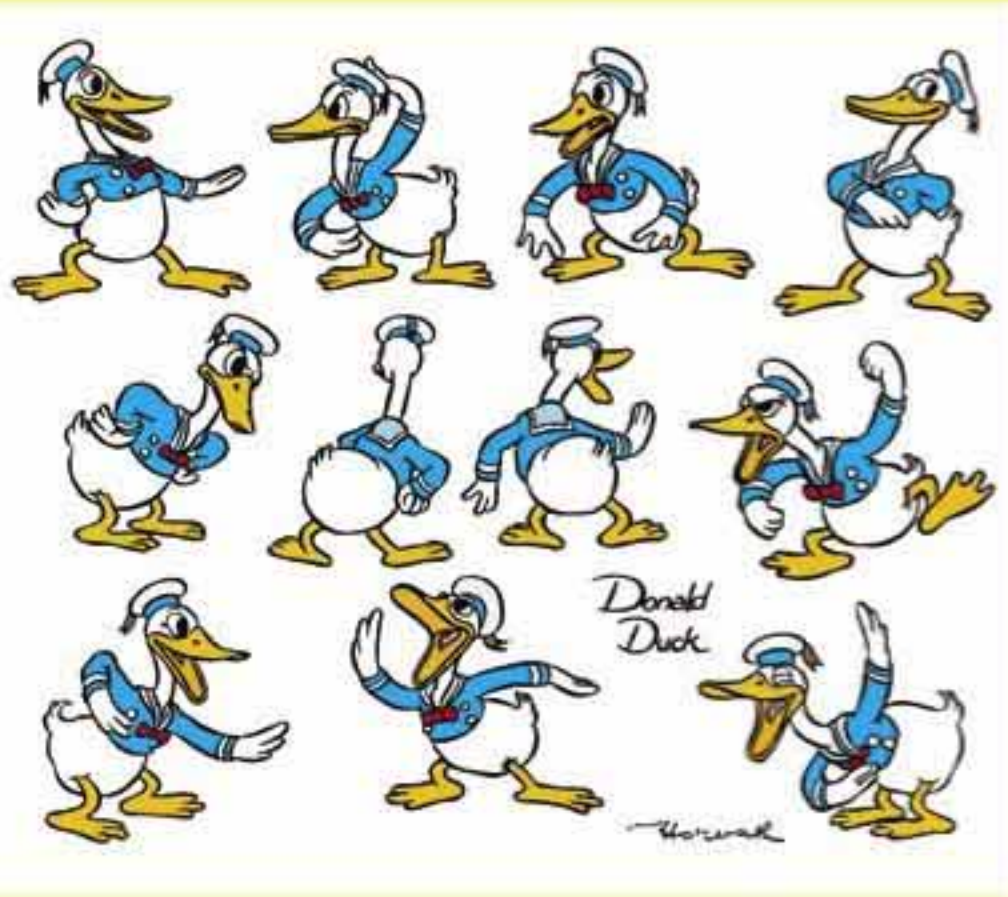


So Mother Hen, instead of cakes, Sent them a "Cure for Tummy Aches"!

**FIRST MODEL SHEET(S)**

Which Donald Duck model sheet came first? Some speculate about the Ferdinand Horvath-drawn sheet at left.<sup>2</sup> But it seems more likely that the Hen-specific sheet at right is the earliest. Main artist unknown, although the update to Donald's tail is by Clyde Geronimi.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Hamilton, "Who Drew the Duck?" *Donald Duck* no. 264 (July 1988).



Publicity drawing, 1934

**STOP THE PRESSES**

Each Disney short released by United Artists (1932-1937) had its own presskit for theatres. Here are selections from the kit on *The Wise Little Hen*: a wealth of funny "human interest" pieces... or is that "animal interest"? We even see unique—and at times self-contradictory—facts about the star characters. According to one mini-article, Peter Pig and the Three Little Pigs are related; according to another, they're not!

Produced entirely in **TECHNICOLOR**

**PUBLICITY ON WALT DISNEY'S**

**"THE WISE LITTLE HEN"**

Released thru **UNITED ARTISTS**

**Exhibitors Press Book**

**DONALD DUCK A NEW STAR**

**HANDLE WITH CARE**

**WORK AND SHARE ALIKE**

**SYNOPSIS ON "THE WISE LITTLE HEN"**

**WHICH CAME FIRST?**

**THE DUCK STEP**

**WISDOM BUSTERS DAILY**

**"The Wise Little Hen"**

**DISNEY "SHOES" HIS CHICKS**



**RADIO DAZE**  
Donald Duck was promoted via special Disney radio tie-ins during his first year on the screen. This drawing advertised a 1934 Christmas broadcast.

**WALT DISNEY'S SILLY SYMPHONY**

**"THE WISE LITTLE HEN"**

*Something for Exhibitors to cackle about!*

**CO-OPERATIVE TIE-UPS**

**PUBLICITY ON THE CUB PLANNED IN FERTILE PHEASANT SPOTS SPROUTS A GOLDEN HARVEST**

**PETER FIG COES OVER BIG**

**DISNEY "SHOES" HIS CHICKS**

**ANY PORK IN A STORM!**

**DISNEY LANGUAGES**

**TWO 2-COLUMN COMPOSITE MATS**

**LIST OF MUSIC USED**

**WALT DISNEY'S SILLY SYMPHONY IN TECHNICOLOR "THE WISE LITTLE HEN"**