

# Other People's Troubles

## An Antidote for Your Own

By Winnifred Reeve (Onoto Watanna)

Author of "A Japanese Nightingale," "Heart of Hyacinth," "Wisteria," "Marion," "Me," "Delia," etc., etc.

**SYNOPSIS:**—"Other People's Troubles" is the new type of a continued story wherein each episode is a complete story itself, but the whole is connected through the central figure of Dr. Carpenter, a very fine character, who believes that to get interested in other people's troubles is the best cure for your own. Dr. Carpenter has his niece, Laura, living with him, and also the servant, Katy. Laura, too, has had some trouble, and the doctor is trying his medicine upon her by telling her of the great sorrow of Lenox Holt, a lawyer, who has been accused of killing his wife's lover, and, although let free by the court, has the stigma of murder attached to his name. To him the doctor is going to entrust Laura's case. In the last episode, the doctor is summoned to attend a little chorus girl, Bonnie, who has had a slight accident and thereby lost chance of advancement. He starts giving her the history of a famous actress, Mme. Mazurka, who gave up her profession for marriage.

"And he made her pathway very rosy, for he was as much in love with her as she was with him.

"The deterioration of his fortunes was more gradual than is the case usual with men of his sort. They found themselves obliged to cut down, to some extent their living expenses. She did this willingly and prettily, but he loomed over it, and, as he told me afterwards, his nerve for the first time, began to fail him. He acquired the malicious habit of a prophetic imagination, and literally tortured himself by imagining this or that possible misfortune. And strangely enough, just as he feared and imagined things, so they came to pass.

"The time came when they found themselves part of another social life, simpler suburban community, and it was at this time he should have saved himself. But he thought his wife meant only for luxury. He wanted her crowned with diamonds and roses, and he plunged and fought frantically to win back the fortune he had lost. "She did not tell him so, but there it came to her meanwhile, an irresistible desire to return to the stage, and her husband's failing fortunes, she thought she now saw an excuse. She would appear for just a short season. It would be a brief triumphant tour, and then, with the money earned, they would settle down happily once more.

"Now, like many men who have married women of the stage, he had the most unreasonable prejudice against it. Though her associates had been of the best, he had cut her apart from them all. It irritated him even to have her allude to her past, and the thought of her returning to the footlights was beyond his darkest dreams.

"He first learned of her intentions through the chance remark of an acquaintance, who knew the manager to whom she had gone. He rushed home like a madman, there to overwhelm her with reproaches and pleadings. She had ceased to love him, so he said. She had but loved the luxury with which he had surrounded her, and now that it was gone, she too, meant to desert him. All her protestations and tears were unavailing, and he finally literally wrung from her, not a mere promise, but an oath, that she would never act upon the stage again.

"And now he began a furious campaign to win back the fortune that would make the woman he loved supremely happy once again. That year was a bad one anyhow, and more than one firm went under in the panic. "Mazurka's husband when he learned the truth, that his last throw,—for he had staked practically all they had left—had failed, and he was now penniless, went into a public telephone booth, called up his wife, and then while the frantic woman heard the shot at the other end, and the telephone girl without saw the act through the glass door of the booth, blew his distracted brains out."

Bonnie's eyes were almost starting from her head. She was literally hanging upon every word spoken by the doctor.

"Tell me," she cried, breathlessly, "did she keep her oath?"

"For—fifteen years," said the doctor slowly. "I don't know exactly what she did during that period, but she managed to live somehow. She must have reached a pretty desperate condition, however, before she brought herself to return to the stage, for she told me that her life was literally a haunted one. She blamed herself for her husband's death, because she fancied his sudden knowledge of her stage plans was what first drove him to his frenzied end. For some time afterwards, she said, she used to pace up and down her room, just repeating the oath he had extracted from her.

"For a time she lived with some old friends—stage folk, like yourself, Bonnie—for oddly enough the only ones who rallied about her at this time, were the people she had known when she was on the stage. None of the fine friends they had made after her marriage seemed to remember her existence even; but her old stage associates rallied about her at that time. I know there was some benefit given on her account, at which many notable actors and actresses played, and for a time at least her needs were cared for. But even her actor friends had no sympathy with her determination not to appear again, and gradually they too, slipped away from her, and she was left alone again, neglected and forlorn,—she who had known nothing but adulation and flattery.

"As I said, it was fifteen years before she returned to the stage. She was then a woman of fifty-eight, broken of spirit and of heart. There was not even a ghost of her old imperial beauty

to recall her past. No one shows age so sadly as an old actress. I sometimes think all the lines and creases they have painted in their faces in the past seem to become a deep reality. Weakly they resort to the make-up tricks which in their youth they have reserved for the footlights only. There is nothing so ghastly as peroxide hair on an old woman, unless it be her rouged cheeks and lips.

"How shall I tell you of her pathetic, wandering life from this time on. At first she inspired compassion at least among the profession, and she appeared here and there; but pretty soon her voice went out, for she suffered from asthma, and even to play the part of an old woman a certain strength is necessary. Mazurka wandered about from company to company, and then there came a time when she could not get even the smallest of engagements.

"When the end came she was in a room so tiny that it barely was large enough for her bed. It looked out upon an almost completely dark court, and the room next to it was the family's kitchen. The people she lived with were desperately poor, too, and I suspect at some time she must have befriended them, for although they would not bury her—or perhaps could not—they seemed to feel her death in a really sincere way.

"I went myself, to two of the newspaper offices, and got in a story about Mazurka's life and its pitiful ending. This, as I had expected, brought a number of noisy contributions from members of the theatrical profession, who got themselves written up as burying the famous old actress.

"I never understood why Mazurka did not enter some home or institution. I presume her pride kept her from this. After she was buried, scores of her friends wrote to me, and to the papers, claiming in the past to have constantly helped her and expressing surprise at her utter destitution. But destitute she was, whether she heedlessly spent the money when she had it, in the shiftless manner of people of her temperament, or whether the assertions of her friends were untrue, and she had been unsuccessful, as it seemed."

Bonnie's head, back on the pillow, moved restlessly. After a moment's silence she said gravely: "Doctor, I guess you think me a pretty mean little lot, eh?"

"Why should I, Bonnie?"

"Oh, to make all that scream about my own petty tale of woe. Gee! when I think of that other actress—well, I tell you what, Doctor, I just feel 's if—well, as if I'd never had a real trouble in the world at all."

An illuminating smile of satisfaction lighted up the doctor's tired face.

"And that's exactly how I like my patients to feel!" he said.

### VIII.

"That bell has rung exactly eleven times since I sat down to lunch," said the doctor reflectively.

"Yes," said Laura, "but all the same you are going to finish it. They can wait. It isn't quite one yet anyhow."

Katy flooned through the dining-room back into her kitchen. She had been kept pretty busy with waiting on the table and answering the bell, and now, as she returned from the eleventh time, to her kitchen, her face was wrathful. But she was back in an instant with some hot scones and honey, and these she slapped down before the doctor. Then she stood back, her hands on her hips, and surveyed him defiantly—one might say commandingly. For the doctor had folded his napkin and had pushed back his chair.

"Ye'll be eating these," said Katy in a very ominous voice, "and before they fall flat, what's more," she added.

The doctor glanced up warily over his glasses at Katy. Then he drew his chair up hastily to the table again.

"Why certainly, Katy, certainly. They're very fine indeed, and—er—hum! don't you think you might spare a few for—"

"Is it furnishing them now wid me hot bishkits ye'd have me?" she demanded.

The doctor smiled apologetically. "I thought you might save a few for Miss Scovel, Katy. Didn't you say she was out there? You know she

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does 't get—she'd appreciate something exceptionally fine like these!

Katy looked a bit mollified.

"Well, sure she's welcome to some, but not out there, wid the rest of them looking on. Shure the bunch of them wud be schrambling for thim thimselves. However, I'll ship a fresh pan into me oven, and ye'll send Miss Scovel back here in exactly twenty minutes, no sooner nor later."

"Thank you, Katy, and I'm sure she'll enjoy them as much as I did."

He had pushed back his chair, examined his vest for any errant crumb adhering, and with a slight throw back of his chest, strutted professionally down the hall, Laura following him. She saw him safely seated at his desk in the alcove, ere she opened the door of the reception room and threw a quick glance at the various waiting patients.

"Who was first?" she asked, and two women instantly pushed forward. The one regarded the other with indignant scorn, and the younger one with an insinuating smile shook Laura by the hand.

"Dear Miss Laurence, I've been here since 11.30 really, though I didn't come in, knowing your uncle's hours. In fact he let me in himself, and told me he would see me at once."

"I got here," said the other woman angrily, "before the doctor himself, and —"

Off in a corner of the room a baby whimpered, and then fell to coughing desperately. The doctor's head suddenly appeared between the portieres.

"Bring me that baby," said he, and withdrew just as the two warring females turned toward him. They watched the thin, shabby little woman carry the baby wearily across the room, and their glances met, but neither of them spoke.

Laura had discreetly withdrawn, and the other inmates of the room continued staring apathetically before them, or turned over the pages of the magazines and journals.

From inside the doctor's office came a sudden wailing from the infant, and the voice of the mother raised in alarm. Then a sound of choking and coughing.

"You shouldn't have brought Buster out on a day like this," said the doctor, gravely. "There's a great deal of congestion here, and I wish you would heed my orders and keep the child indoors for the present."

"I can't do that," she said bitterly, "for I've got to go about my work."

"You don't mean to tell me you take the baby with you?"

"Yes, I do," she said wearily, "I'm afraid to leave him alone. I read in the paper of some children burning up when their mother was away, and I couldn't work if I had that on my mind."

The doctor drew his brows together, pursed up his lips thoughtfully.

"What are your hours?"

"Well, they change, doctor. I'm on the night shift just now, and working from eleven till eight in the morning. I'm a scrubwoman, you know, at the Grand Central Hotel."

"You mean you take the baby out with you at night?"

"Yes. I have to."

"Why didn't you tell me this before? You'll kill the child. No wonder it's not improving. A baby with a bad case of congestion like this can't be taken out nights—or in the day-time either for that matter."

"I roll him under my shawl, doctor, —and they're real good about it at the hotel. My cousin there is head of the laundry and —"

(To be continued)



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