

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.

"So he lives in an old house, just outside Fort Washington Park; and he avoids his friends and shrinks away from that portion of the city where previously he had been one of the leading lights. There are no servants even in the old Holt place, just an ancient Irish pair who previously cared for the place as janitors, at the time when Holt and his wife were part of the gay rushing life of Newport and Manhattan. They don't take very good care of the place. It looks dog-eared and run-down, forsaken and neglected. And they take less care of its owner, who too, looks forsaken and neglected. You'd never suspect he was under forty, and a man of means. For he looks more like a tramp. He roams about Fort Washington Park and its environs, looking at the water, and sometimes muttering to himself. He fancies people point him out, and often he turns upon them like a savage and asks them what they are staring at. And he won't go away, because he says it was here he was born, and it was away from here he was betrayed. Friends who had not cut him, he has cut, for when shame throws its black mantle upon us, it is then one's friends drop off like withered leaves, or cling greenly to the branches. And I cling to Lenox Holt, in spite of his oftentimes insulting cynicisms regarding my profession and my aims. For Holt believes all men are knaves and all women wantons and liars.

"Are you asleep, Laura?"

Her face was hidden against his knee. She looked up slowly, her dark eyes moist.

"No," she said gently. "Oh, the poor man, the poor man!"

She was very silent for a long time after that; presently she stood up and, bending over, softly kissed the top of his head.

"Oh, Uncle Dan, dear, why is the world not all sad when there is so much trouble in it?"

"Because the world's so sweet, my dear. It's a recompense for the blacker things. When the sordid, harrowing things of life press the hardest on us, there is still always the sky and the stars left us to see—and be thankful for."

VI.

Dr. Carpenter picked up the telephone on his desk and grunted into the receiver.

"Er-hum! Yes, it's Dr. Carpenter.

"Where?"

"Can't you get—"

"But I want to go to bed. What's that?"

"Er-hum! Very well."

He grunted again, and rang off.

"Oh, Uncle Dan dear," said Laura, in a tone of gentle exasperation: "Have you got to go out again?"

She followed him into the hall and helped him slip into his great-coat.

"You were up all last night, dear," she said plaintively.

"Yes," admitted the doctor, and then clearing his throat with his cheery rough "Er-hum!"

"But remember, Laura—there were twins last night—twins! It was worth it. It was worth it!"

"I had hoped you could get to bed early to-night. Dear old dear! They'll wear you out between them. Who is the call from this time?"

"Barnato's Theatre."

"Little Bonnie Snow in some sort of trouble—conglomeration of sprained ankle and hysterics, I imply from the message. You remember Bonnie?"

"Of course, though I haven't seen her since I came to New York. Tell her, won't you, that I'm here with you now, Uncle Dan."

"Er-hum! Now trot along to bed with you."

He raised her face, with his hand under her chin. Then he flicked a forefinger across the shadows under her eyes.

"To-morrow morning I expect to see these gone," said he.

She smiled sadly and shook her head a bit.

"I'm out of cold cream," she said, whimsically, "and really, Uncle Dan, dear, I don't want to get the regulation 'massage face'."

"Sleep is the best Masseur in the world!" growled the doctor, and closed his gloves with a snap upon each button. "You get into bed and blow your mind adrift, and whenever you find it fastening upon things that disturb you, pull it away with a firm grip, and fasten it at once upon other people's troubles. I prescribe Lenox Holt's for to-night. Think of him—of his tragedy to-night, as Mrs. Holmes has thought of Mrs. Finnerty, and—"

"Did you know," she interrupted earnestly, "that she went to see Mrs. Finnerty, and she is giving her work of a lighter kind than washing, and—"

"Did she say anything about her own—delusions?"

"No, she didn't. You see she was fixing her flat all up for the coming of her mother, and Mrs. Finnerty was helping her. I thought she looked quite well, for her."

The doctor chuckled, and pursed out his lips. Then he kissed his niece with a great deal of tenderness, and hurried

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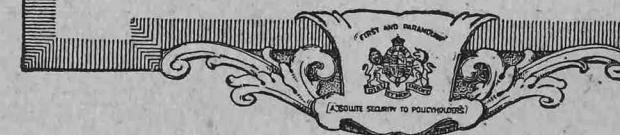
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out, slamming the door cheerfully behind him.

There was some confusion behind the scenes of Barnato's Theatre, but in front a shrill, triumphant voice was wildly proclaiming:

"I'm the cutest thing on Broadway,
so they say!"

The doctor had little difficulty in making his way back of the scenes, for it seems he had been expected. A young, sad-eyed chorus man, with a dejected cigarette hanging loosely in his mouth, seized the doctor by the arm and dragged him along through the wings.

"I tell you what, it's a sad case if ever there was one," he volunteered mournfully.

"No bones broken, I hope," said the doctor.

"No-o. I guess not. Just a nasty twist, ugly enough to knock her flat for a time."

Somewhere close at hand now the doctor could hear sounds of muffled moaning, and as his guide threw open the door of a diminutive dressing-room, the sole occupant changed her moaning to loud wailing, much as a child would have done at the advent of a parent.

"Well, well," said the doctor, briskly, "and how's Bonnie?"

Instead of answering the doctor, she bounced up on the couch, and turned a wrathful face upon the doctor's guide.

"What's the matter with you? Can't you get the doctor a chair. Oh, doctor! Oh-h! Oh-h-h!"

"In great pain?"

"Agony! Torture! I wish I was dead!"

"Stuff and nonsense. Here, let me see your foot. Er-hum!"

He pursed out his lower lip in his characteristic way. Then he frowned upon the girl on the couch.

"Why, this is nothing—nothing! A little measly sprain. I'm surprised at you, Bonnie. To get your good old doctor friend out of his comfortable bed for a mean little sprain like this!"

Bonnie sat up again with a jerk.

"Mean little sprain!" she shrieked. "D'ye know what that sprain's going to mean? The ruin of—my—c-career! The loss of my one ch-chance—my only hope on earth. I wish I were d-dead and b-buried!"

"Aw, Bonnie!" began her friend, but she threw the slipper the doctor had removed from her foot at his head.

"You shut up!" she cried. "It's all your fault!"

The doctor was shaking his head gravely, and was examining the sprained foot from several angles.

"Where would you care to have the amputation, Bonnie?"

"Now, Doctor Carpenter, if you're going to make odious remarks you can just go. I know you're sore because I got you out when you wanted to stay in, b-but I didn't want you because of the ankle. It doesn't hurt anyhow worth a snuffle. It's — it's — other —"

"You're hurt somewhere else?" asked the doctor anxiously.

"Ye-es," she sobbed. "My heart's broke. It is. Literally broke, and you've got to give me some sort of dope to put me to sleep to-night, or I'll—Oh, I could almost kill myself for the f-fool I've been—f-for my dam luck!"

The doctor had moved a bit nearer to the girl, and now he took Bonnie's hand. It was very hot, and he hastily felt her head, blinked, drew out his thermometer and put it under her tongue, holding her pulse meanwhile. She tried to talk with the thermometer still in her mouth, but he stopped her.

"One minute, Bonnie. Now, let's see!" and he held the glass to the light. "I think I'll have to put you to bed, Bonnie, for—say—Can you afford a week's rest?"

"Afford it! Why they'll hand it to me to-morrow in chunks," she said bitterly.

The chorus man threw away his cigarette viciously. It was unlighted, and he had aimed it at an ash-tray, but she shrieked as it touched her hand, and in an instant the boy—for he was nothing but a boy—was kneeling by her, frantically kissing the hand, and imploring the doctor to assure him that he had not burned it.

"Burn!" said the doctor, examining the hand, "Stuff and nonsense!"

"Who said it was?" demanded Bonnie. "I screamed because I'm all nerves. Joe Forrest, if you do that again—"

The doctor looked at his watch, and clicked it closed again. Bonnie threw him a look of such piercing reproach that he resumed his seat.

"I thought you at least would want to know about my troubles, seeing you've known me all my life—and brought me into the world too, for that matter. And I've played with your niece Laura when we were little kids, and Joe there too, is from Newtown, though you mayn't recognize him. He's followed me now for the past two years, and the big gump is working in the chorus himself, because he says he can get nearer to me that way, but I say he's just trying to spy on me, and it's all his fault that my career has ended—and—"

"Aw, Bonnie!" put in Joe again, and again was squelched wrathfully:

"You know it was. If you hadn't held me back talking all that love rot, with me so excited and happy, I let you run on. Oh, Doctor, I felt as if I could love the whole world—anybody—even him! You see the chance I had been waiting for all these months—years—had come to me at last."

"Your chance?"

"Yes, the chance they say comes only once to an actress!" said she, tragically. "I was understudying Adele Hopper, but she got healthier every day and there didn't seem a ghost of a show for me. And Mamie Langhorne was at it too—both of us. I knew I had it in me to make the high hit if I was only given the chance. Then Jimmy there got a brilliant idea, and he fixed it up with Miss Hopper's chauffeur, and to-night she's stuck somewhere up Westchester way on some lonely road near her home, and she couldn't get

here even if she could fly now. And so my chance was come, and everybody was ready to lick my boots. And I was all dressed up for the part, just crazy for the chance, when that loon there began to squirt his love-talk at me, and I—feeling grateful, was listening when my time came, and I lost my wits and went running on, and I tripped over Annette Sibley's black cat and twisted my toe in a loose board. There I sprawled flat on my face, with everybody laughing at me in front, and everybody cursing me behind. And then that Mamie Langhorne jumped into the breach—and—and—Joe carried me here, and indeed I wish I were dead and buried, for my only on earth to do, and—and I'll be fired to-morrow anyhow and—"

"Bonnie," said the doctor, gravely, "How much do you get a week?"

She stopped her wailing a moment: "\$25.00," she said.

"That's not so bad," said the doctor.

"Why, I'm not a mere chorus girl," said Bonnie, with dignity. "You see I'm one of the two ladies that hold the canopy over the queen's—that's Miss Hopper's—head. We don't say nothing, but we dance when she sings, and we laugh and nod our heads at her jokes. Mamie's—the other one." She sighed heavily. "But after to-night I suppose she'll be doing something more than kicking."

"Aw, I don't know," said Joe. "I seen her do the stunt, Doc. Thought she was on the blink, after Miss Hopper."

"What's your business, Joe?" inquired the doctor.

"Don't you remember me, Doc?"

"No, I can't say I do."

"I've swallowed many of your pills, Doc, when you were practising in Newtown, and my father—well, he used to have most of your trade."

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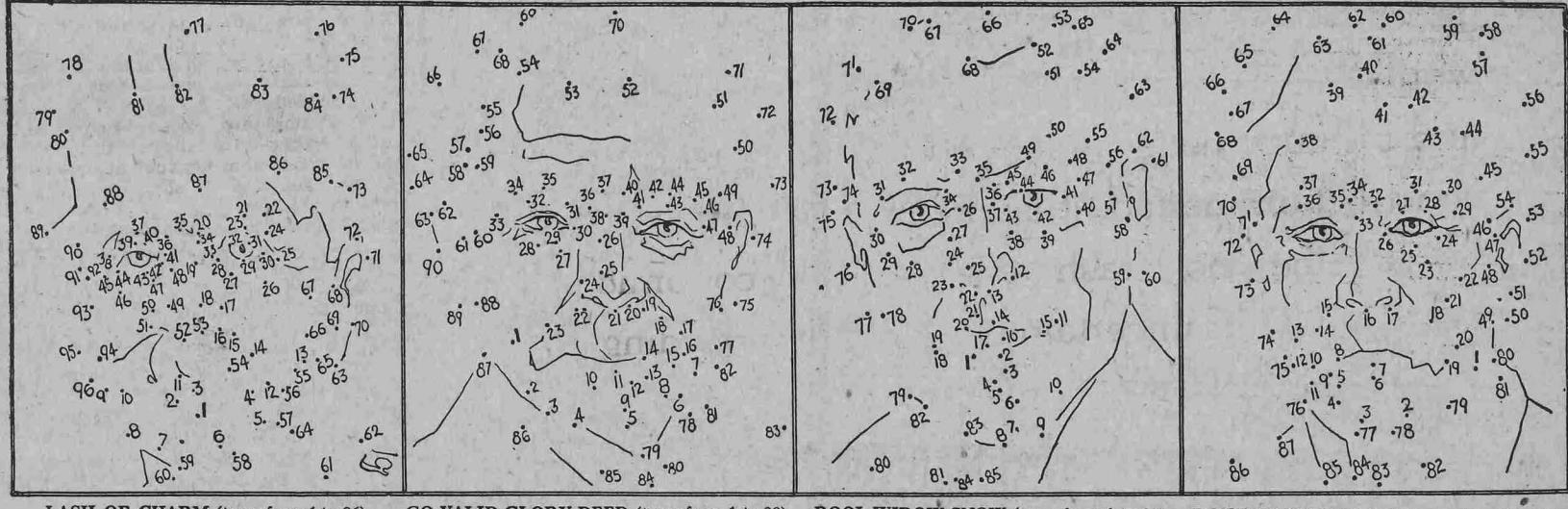
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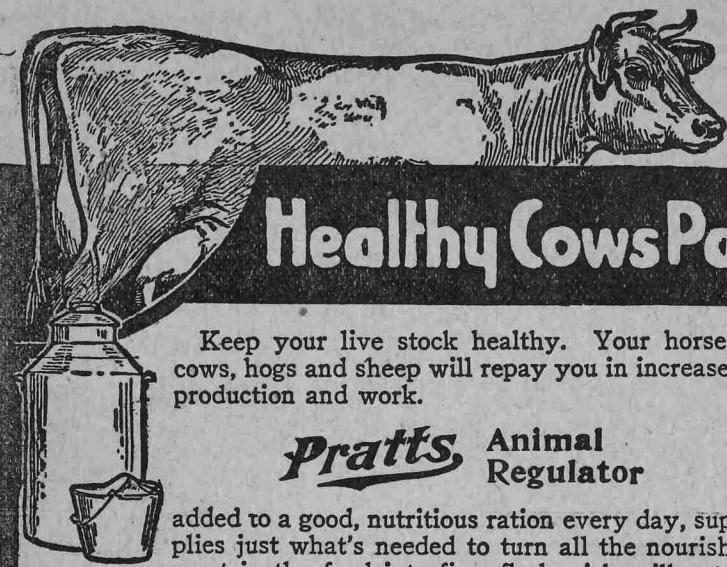
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"You are not Joe Forrest's boy?"

"That's me, O.K."

"Well, you've certainly changed. What are you doing with a show like this? Any talent in that line?"

Bonnie snorted loudly, turned over on her sofa pillow and closed her eyes with contemptuous weariness.

"We-el," said Joe, with a touch of bashfulness, "to tell you the truth, Doc, I'm just toting along with it because of Bonnie, there."

"Well, you needn't trouble on my account," said the lady in question, thumping her pillow viciously. "And let me tell you, Joe Forrest, if I ever get over this, I'm going to take advantage of Mr. Gunslaw's offer."

"He's a mutt," said Joe, savagely.

"Oh, I don't know," said Bonnie, loftily. "There are others; and besides, next to my ambition to be a prima donna, I've always longed to be one of a vaudeville team, and this'd be my chance."

"Aw, Bonnie, you know you wouldn't

"I appeal to you, Doctor Carpenter. I'm feeling down-in-the-mouth, and it don't add to my health to have that gentleman there hanging around me. Won't you please, as my doctor, get him out of here?"

"Aw, Bonnie —"

"Suppose you see about getting a taxicab for Bonnie," suggested the Doctor.

"Aw—aw-right," and he went out forlornly, shutting the door very gently behind him, as though he feared a bang might disturb his lady-love.

"Ain't he the limit?" was her comment, and then returning to her grievance: "I'm all in, Doc—just heart-broke. Really, kidding aside, my sole chance to make a hit has slipped through my fingers like dishwater. I'd rather become a famous actress than—than—well, than become the bride of a Pittsburg millionaire, and that's a fact. But look at me, will you? Can you imagine anything worse? Why nothing worse could happen to an actress."

"Oh, yes, something could," said the doctor, gently.

"What—now, I defy you to tell me what?"

"You really want me to tell you of another actress' misfortune?"

"Yes, I do. Oh, I know there's lots of hard luck tales of the stage—but you can't beat mine as a starter. You see my career is blasted just at the beginning."

"Which is better than having it happen at the end," said the doctor, gently.

"I don't see that."

"Well, because you can start over again. The woman I am going to tell you about was old and hopeless at the time. Now, lie back there comfortably, don't think about your own case ever, but give me your attention. Er-hum!"

VII.

"Madame Mazurka's fame was before your time, Bonnie, but you may have heard of her?"

"Heard of her!" ejaculated Bonnie, sitting bolt upright. "Heard of Mazurka! Well, I should smile!"

The doctor sighed. He was running his hand a bit wearily through his shock of iron gray curls, which were one of his characteristic features.

"Mazurka was quite an actress in her time, but she retired somewhat early from the stage, and married a man who earned his living in stock gambling—a broker, in other words. When I first knew them they were rich, and lived in a high manner. In fact my first thought of them was that they were living on the crest of a wave which was bound to break over against the shore, as waves have a habit of doing. For I knew not only that his method of livelihood was precarious but that he was impractical and somewhat reckless.

"She was radiant in those days, quite the most radiant creature I have ever seen. Passionately in love with her husband, she was surrounded by a coterie of people who lavished upon her the adulation without which an actress' life feels flat and unreal. She lived on excitement—and flattery, heard it literally shouted, sung or breathed into her ears on all sides.

(To be continued)



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