THEIR INVESTIGATION

By Grant Owen

Olmstead stood on the uneven platform of the desolate little station watching the red lights on the rear end of the local grow fainter and fainter in the bleak twilight. At regular intervals up and down the platform smoky kerosene lanterns made dull splotches of yellow in the gloom, and here and there the target lamps of the switches showed feeble colorings of red and green.

The lights on the local disappeared around a curve, and Olmstead swung about to survey the barren little station, turning up his coat collar as he did so, for the night wind had a chill breath of frost in it.

Drawn up by the station was a sorry looking barge, near which stood a shabby man bawling lustily: "Carriage for the sanitarium! This way for the sanitarium!"

Olmstead made his way thither, smiling grimly. The four other passengers

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who had alighted from the train had preceded him and were now climbing into the barge.

"Sanitarium, sir?" inquired the shabby man as Olmstead came up. "All right, sir. Git right in. Let's have your checks. I'll git your baggage."

The checks were handed over, and while the driver was getting the trunks Olmstead looked over the other occupants of the barge. There were one man and three women. The man and two of the women were typical consumptives—narrow chested and hollow cheeked. Now and then they coughed spasmodically. They were poorly dressed and evidently of the class who availed themselves of the state's charity fund to bring them here.

The other woman was of an entirely different type. She was well dressed and young. In the dim light from the station lamps Olmstead could see she was decidedly pretty. She did not cough, nor was she hollow cheeked like the rest. Olmstead made two mental decisions—that she was a pay patient and that her case was not as yet a very serious one. He felt a sudden thrill of pity that she should be here, so evidently was she at odds with the dreary surroundings.

The driver returned with the trunks and bags on a truck. With the station agent's assistance they were piled into the rear of the barge and the drive to the sanitarium was begun. It was over a rough, sandy road, lined with gloomy pines through which the wind howled dismally.

Olmstead unrolled his steamer rugs and offered them to the women, two of whom were shivering miserably. The younger woman greeted this act of courtesy with a pretty smile of acknowledgment that quickened his pulses.

"They might at least have some blankets in the barge," he said.

"It would seem so," was her quiet, noncommittal reply, and then there was silence until the sanitarium was reached.

Olmstead paid in advance, received a hurried examination from one of the physicians and was assigned a room on the second floor. At the supper table he met the young woman again. She smiled and nodded as he took his seat opposite her.

"It's not exactly a promising beginning," she said, indicating the table.

"I should say not," he replied. "I believe this fare would prove the undoing of a rugged person, to say nothing of its effects on an invalid."

"Shall you stay?" she asked.

"A week at least," said he. "And you?"

"I shall stay for a time, anyway," she returned.

After that meal they were friends. They strolled about the grounds together. They found quiet nooks where they could discuss freely the inefficiency of the doctors, the slovenliness of the nurses and the general lack of anything like system about the place.

"Why, it's just a dollar and cents scheme," she declared angrily one day. "All they are after is the money of these deluded people who come here."

"I suspected as much before I came," said he.

"Then why did you come?" she asked quickly.

"I wanted to try it, at least," said he.

She looked at him curiously.

"I have my own suspicions about you," she laughed.

"And what are they, pray?" said he. But she only shook her head in smiling refusal to commit herself further.

Olmstead had books and magazines and fruits sent up. These he shared with her, and she accepted them with a grave frankness that pleased him mightily.

They read together; they walked together; they sang together evenings in the so called "music room." Day by day Olmstead grew more interested in her, and finally the interest changed into something deeper.

He stayed out his first week and his second. At the beginning of the third he realized that, consumptive though she might be, he had found the one woman in the world.

One evening just at twilight they strolled down to a little stream that crossed the grounds. The air was clear and frosty. Behind a fringe of pines the sky flared red and gold.

"Of course you know it by this time," said Olmstead quietly.

"What?" she asked.

"That I love you," said he.

She caught her breath. Her face grew very rosy. She turned to him slowly.

"Our condition"— she began.

"Let me tell you something," he said. "I am not a tuberculosis patient. Certain unsavory hints regarding the gross mismanagement of this place have been whispered abroad. I was sent here by the Daily Star to investigate."

She looked across the stream to the pines and the flaming sky behind them.

"That clears you, but how about me?" she asked very quietly.

"I love you," he repeated simply, "and to love nothing matters."

"Not even my—my being here?" she said.

"Not even your being here," he asserted.

Suddenly she fell to laughing softly. Her eyes danced; she fairly shook with merriment. He watched her in puzzled silence. Presently she came close to him and laid both her hands on his shoulders.

"Forgive me," she said, "but it is such an absurd situation. Do you know why I am here?"

He shook his head.

"Well," she said, "those unsavory hints reached further than the Star. The editor of Elliot's Magazine sent me here on a mission very similar to yours."

The color had faded from the sky. The wind grew almost biting in its chill. A group of shivering patients in one of the pavilions saw a much engrossed couple walking toward the sanitarium.

"Which goes to show we have discovered at least one redeeming feature about this place," the man was saying. But the shivering patients were by no means convinced of it.

Who Were the Next of Kin?

A curious case was tried in England about a century ago to decide the question of next of kin. Job Taylor, quartermaster in the Royal artillery, was drowned, with his wife Lucy, in trying to save her after shipwreck. He had made a will leaving all that he possessed to her, but as she did not live to give the will effect a dispute arose among their next of kin as to the proper disposal of the estate, which was valued at £4,000.

It had been ruled, in conformity with a principle of the Roman civil law, that when two perished together in a common calamity and it was uncertain which was for a time the survivor the decision should favor whichever was the more robust. In this case the wife had distinctly the better constitution, but as against this it was urged that, as he plunged in to save her, she probably expired first. After lengthy arguments the judge held that, though strong in constitution, the wife would probably have been more timid than her soldier husband and granted administration to his next of kin.

"Character" Stories.

The giving of a "character" to domestic servants is one of the severest tests of the employers character. An Irish master, being called upon to write a testimonial for a groom whom he was discharging for drunkenness, gave him a good character, but omitted to mention one trait. The groom returned the letter, objecting that it did not say he was sober. The master added "sometimes sober," and the man was content.

The woman who had to recommend the inefficient cook she had kept for seven years only because she was afraid to give her notice went one better. She had covered three pages with undeserved commendations. She had placed it in an envelope and addressed it, and her conscience pricked her badly. Then she had a happy idea and broke open the seal, adding to her letter as a postscript, "God forgive me!" It satisfied her conscience, but history does not relate if it satisfied the other woman.

Cadogan and His Wife.

Dr. Cadogan, a noted physician in the days of Charles II., married a lady several years older than himself. She proved to be jealous and accused him in the presence of his friends of giving her poison to kill her in order that he might marry some one else. He told her she was mistaken and to convince her assured the company that they were quite welcome to open her and see whether she had been poisoned.