

SUCCESSFULLY DISABLED ?

by

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Let's start with a quick overview of the story.

TWIS begins, as many of the adventures do, in a sitting room.

The author, either Watson or Doyle, (though we all know in our hearts which is true,) has already given a twist to the most common format of the adventures.

Indeed Watson is in a sitting room although not with Sherlock.

He is with a different partner.

It is his life partner who although not named, we assume to be Mary Morstan Watson.

Soon a visitor appears (surprisingly not Sherlock) and Watson has been given a reason to leave hearth and home.

Watson's effort to help an old friend leads him to an opium den where he finds Sherlock and now the true adventure begins.

We assume the visit of Kate Whitney is a device to get to Holmes (More on this later).

Watson, without any hesitation, throws in with Holmes and is off to Kent, seven miles from the scene of the crime (More on this later).

On the journey to Kent, we the reader and Watson are made privy to the data that Holmes were given by his client Mrs. St Clair.

Upon arrival in Kent, Watson and Holmes are greeted in a manor that must have shocked the very foundation of Victorian sensibilities.

I must admit it did conjure images to my adolescent mind when I first read TWIS, that I still remember vividly and with great pleasure.

At this point in the story Holmes receives more data relating to the case in the form of a letter and a ring.

Upon reflection, Holmes decides this case has become a one ounce of shag problem.

He gathers pillows together and solves the mystery by daybreak.

At daybreak Watson is once again yanked from a comfortable bed and is on the road at a moment's notice.

Our heroes return to the city and uncover the truth about Hugh Boone. The beggar was a gentleman, or at least had the income of a gentleman.

We hear Neville's back story and all is well.

When asked how he solved the mystery Sherlock replies, "By sitting upon 5 pillows and consuming an ounce of shag".

The reality of the story is that nothing is what it appears to be.

Hugh Boone was not a beggar, but the Gentleman Neville St Clair.

Neville St. Clair was not attacked but in shock from being discovered and had never truly been abducted or done in.

An apparent disability was in reality a monetarily successful venture.

The brother of a respected theologian was in reality an opium addict.

An opium addict was in reality Sherlock Holmes.

Mrs. St Clair may or may not have been as devoted as she appeared and I admit the jury is still out on that one.

So let's take a closer look at the story, especially the opening sentence: "Isa Whitney, brother of the late Elias Whitney, D. D., Principal of the Theological College of St. George's, was much addicted to opium".

The respected brother to a principal of not just a college but a theological college no less, before the sentence ends turns out to be an opium addict.

A man who was probably well respected becomes a "yellow pasty faced wreck and ruin of a noble man".

This is before the end of the first paragraph.

How could I not suspect a beggar turning into a gentleman by the end of the story?

The author of the story (and we know in our hearts who we believe it to be),

is telling us that people's lives are guided by a mixture of talent and character.

It's how people combine their talents with their character that one should measure their success.

So, let us compare the three couples in the story.

First we can assume that since Isa Whitney is brother to the president of a College he too must be intelligent. Intellectual curiosity is a talent that should be an asset.

After reading DeQuincey's "Confessions of an Opium Eater", Isa's curiosity led him to experiment with opium.

Soon as Watson noted it is a "practice easier to attain than get rid of".

Isa's lack of character may have kept him a slave to the drug.

How do we know he lacks character?

Consider his choice for a life partner, Kate Whitney.

This is a wife incapable of handling her problems.

"I'm in such trouble...I do so want a little help".

It's her husband that needs help, not her.

Help, which she is incapable of providing, thus enabling his disability.

Good old Watson agrees to help her because as he notes, "How could she, a young and timid woman, make her way into such a place and pluck out her husband".

Kate and Isa seem well suited for each other.

Neither making demands upon themselves or each other.

The St. Clairs, on the other hand, are quite different.

Neville has used his talents to acquire an apparently successful life.

When Sherlock persuades Neville to convince the police they have no case against him he states, "I received an excellent education...I traveled...Took to the stage... and finally became a reporter on an evening paper".

Neville was a man of means, all be it ill gotten, educated, an actor and a man of letters.

Now compare his life partner to the timid Kate Whitney.

Mrs. St. Clair was far from timid.

She had no fear of retrieving a small parcel from one of the less savory neighborhoods.

She had no fear of charging into a den of iniquity to save her husband.

She had no fear of having not one but two gentlemen spend the evening in her home while her husband was not there.

She had no fear of greeting them "clad in some sort of light mousseline de soie, with a touch of fluffy pink chiffon at her neck and wrists.

She stood with her figure outlined against the flood of light".

When you include the fact that she was a brewer's daughter, how could Neville not fall in love?

Yet, there must be some flaw in his character as evidenced by his ability to take money under false pretenses as Hugh Boone.

Also, how could a woman of such strong will allow herself to be duped for so long?

Of course, she actually could have chosen to look the other way to maintain her lifestyle.

Her motive to have Sherlock stay at her home when the crime was committed seven miles away could be questioned.

Perhaps there is some truth to the rumor that Sherlock brought Watson along more as a chaperone than a colleague.

Now let us compare these two couples, the Whitney's and the St. Clairs, to the gold standard of a married life, the Watson's.

John and Mary Watson are always exactly as they appear to be.

Watson, a true friend that is willing to abandon his wife to accompany Holmes across three counties and spend the night with a young woman and never feel the slightest bit amiss.

Watson, is a friend so in tune to your needs.

Take the following passage . . .

"Holmes drove in silence, with his head sunk upon his breast, and the air of a man who is lost in thought, while I sat beside him, curious to learn what this new quest might be which seemed to tax his powers so sorely, and yet afraid to break in on the current of his thoughts".

Watson's qualities are not unnoticed.

"You have a grand gift of silence, Watson," said Sherlock. "It makes you quite invaluable as a companion".

What about Mary?

Watson's choice of a life partner never once doubted his loyalty to her or to Holmes.

Her unflinching love and trust in her husband allowed him free rein in his exploits with Holmes.

So we have Watson, a man of healing and Mary, a woman to whom folks in grief came to as birds to a lighthouse.

They seem to be a perfect match.

That leaves only one more character in the story, Holmes.

In this story Holmes doesn't perform any parlor tricks.

He doesn't expose anyone's profession or method of travel.

And he doesn't give any grand explanation at the end of the story.

His first appearance is in disguise, so he too is not what he appears to be.

He says, "I suppose Watson, you think I have added opium smoking to my cocaine injections and all the other little weaknesses on which you have favored me".

But we know Holmes is on a case and needs no chemical diversion.

Remember Watson's description of Holmes in STUD.

"Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him;

but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting room hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night".

For all intent and purposes, this describes bipolar illness or manic depression.

To most people this would be a disability but Holmes uses his manic phase, if it is a true manic phase, to accomplish his art of detection.

When not involved in a stimulating case he used cocaine to stimulate his psyche and eliminate the depressive phase.

He is kind of the reverse of drug users.

When someone is kicking the habit they need to replace their drug time with something productive.

When Holmes is not involved in a case he replaces work with drugs.

We also know that Holmes eventually is cured of his drug habit, probably by Watson, and he stops using cocaine.

So with no parlor tricks or end of case explanation, how did Holmes solve the case?

After staking out the opium den he realized that the answer wasn't there.

He returned to the source of his data, seven miles from the scene of the crime.

A piercing exchange with Mrs. St. Clair finally gave him enough data to work with; but if your husband is alive and able to write letters, why should he remain away from you?"

"I cannot imagine. It is unthinkable."

"And on Monday he made no remarks before leaving you?"

"No."

"And you were surprised to see him in Swandam Lane?"

"Very much so."

"Was the window open?" "Yes."

"Then he might have called to you?"

"He might."

"He only, as I understand, gave an inarticulate cry?"

"Yes."

"A call for help, you thought?"

"Yes. He waved his hands."

"But it might have been a cry of surprise. Astonishment at the unexpected sight of you might cause him to throw up his hands?"

"It is possible."

"And you thought he was pulled back?"

"He disappeared so suddenly."

"He might have leaped back. You did not see anyone else in the room?"

"No, but this horrible man confessed to having been there, and the lascar was at the foot of the stairs."

"Quite so. Your husband, as far as you could see, had his ordinary clothes on?"

"But without his collar or tie. I distinctly saw his bare throat."

"Had he ever spoken of Swandam Lane?" "Never."

"Had he ever showed any signs of having taken opium?"

"Never."

"Thank you, Mrs. St. Clair. Those are the principal points about which I wished to be absolutely clear. We shall now have a little supper and then retire".

How many times have you heard Holmes say it is a mistake to theorize with insufficient data?

The author has given you all the information you need to solve the case.

Holmes solved it by sitting on five pillows and smoking an ounce of shag.

He then used his talents to eliminate everything he could and whatever remains no matter how impossible must be the truth.

So who is successfully disabled?

The Whitney's appear to be successful but, in reality, are miserable.

The St. Clairs appear to be successful but in reality are living a lie.

The Watson's truly are happy and successful.

So who is successfully disabled; that hard working manic-depressive, Sherlock Holmes.

