



## The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

### Adventure XXIII – The Adventure of the Resident Patient

This weekend our attention turns to RESI, one of the more lurid tales in the canon. The story is notable for its thinly-disguised homosexual rape scene, and for its crude commentary on obesity.

The rape: When the police piece together the scene in Blessington’s room, they immediately call attention to the bed, declaring that it “has been well slept in,” with a “deep impression.” The bed, in fact, is one of two crime scenes in the room, the other being the makeshift gallows where Blessington died. Holmes studied the room and its contents, then further defined what occurred, making several euphemistic

references to homosexual rape. (It was, after all, the Victorian Era, and the text would not explicitly state what happened.) There was, for example, “the unknown man in the rear.” Similarly, there were “scratches on this ward, where the pressure was applied.” Though the room was fairly soundproof, and stifling a scream was not necessary, we’re told that the assailants “gagged” Blessington — another veiled reference. Watson was so disturbed by the evidence that even he “ejaculated” a comment. In his fine book, *In Bed With Sherlock Holmes*, our own Chris Redmond points out that Blessington’s attackers were



imprisoned for a period of years; though not all prisoners engage in homosexuality, Chris notes that it’s hardly unheard of for some prisoners to do so. I agree with Chris’s conclusion that it’s possible there was a past sexual “bond” among these men. That likely is the “shameful secret” Holmes refers to near the end of the

story. What happened to Blessington on that particular night was not sex, however, it was rape. Like other rapes, this one was intended to assert power over the victim. It was meant to terrorize, punish and humiliate Blessington prior to his murder.

Fat Men: Watson's description of Blessington's physique is crude at best. "He was very fat," Watson declares, "but had apparently at some time been much fatter so that the skin hung about his face in loose pouches." The post-mortem focuses on fatness, too, with its "impression of flabbiness...exaggerated and intensified until he was scarce human." Even the dead man's feet aren't spared: "his swollen ankles and ungainly feet protruded..." Blessington had, in fact, ceased to be a real human being, his body was merely a "wretched object." Watson's not-so-subtle criticism of overweight or obese men is evident elsewhere in the canon. It's a pattern of crudeness, bordering on ridicule. Recall, for example, his description of Mycroft in GREE: "absolutely corpulent...massive...broad, fat hand like the flipper of a seal." He termed the form of Huxtable, in PRIO, "a ponderous piece of wreckage." And so on. Certainly, a physician should express concern for the health-threatening complications of obesity, but Watson's editorial comments are sniping and mean-spirited. Watson demonstrates all the tact of the reformed smoker who fans second-hand smoke back into the face of the person who exhaled it. Can it be that the good doctor is a former fat man himself? Is his tone self-righteous? His descriptions of overweight men go beyond mere illustration. The words he chooses seem deliberately unkind.

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**July 18, 1997**