



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure VII – The Adventure of the Five Orange Pips

Brace yourselves, Oh Ye True Believers! Our next Adventure can only be classified as one in which Sherlock Holmes was unsuccessful. Why?

Because he didn't solve the puzzle John Openshaw presented to him? No, Holmes had the answer in the palm of his hand before Mr. Openshaw went back out into the wild, rainy night. It is this which makes the outcome of FIVE even more unpalatable, for Holmes not only neglected to take precautions to safeguard his client's life, he ultimately was not able to bring Openshaw's murderers before the bar of justice.

The Five Orange Pips is an Adventure which leaves many questions unanswered. To be sure, Holmes knew what was afoot once he heard John Openshaw's strange narrative. His closing advice to young Openshaw was on target, if inadequate given the danger that threatened. Nonetheless, there remain questions that beg to be discussed.

John Openshaw describes his uncle Elias as being "...fierce and quick-tempered...and of a most retiring disposition. During all the years that he lived at Horsham, I doubt if ever he set foot in the town." He later said of his uncle, "...he would see no society and did not want any friends, even his own brother." How, then, did Elias know of a lawyer named Fordham when he wanted a will drawn up? Would Fordham have been a barrister or a solicitor?



One of the more difficult ways for a person to commit suicide is by drowning himself. Elias Openshaw had a revolver with him when he went out on his drunken forays; why did he not shoot himself if suicide was his intention? Was a verdict of “suicide” indicated under the circumstances described, or would a finding of “accidental death” have been more likely and appropriate?

How did Elias come into possession of the all-important papers? They appear to have been nothing less than the clandestine acts of the murderous Ku Klux Klan, based on the one surviving sample of the contents of the brass box. How would the destruction of such records “checkmate” his enemies? And his estate of £14,000 was a considerable amount of money in those days, roughly equal to \$70,000 in 1893 and worth close to \$1,400,000 in 1990. Although Elias Openshaw owned a Florida plantation, he no doubt got less than top money for it, if he got anything at all, when he rather abruptly moved back to England. How did he accumulate so sizeable a fortune in a wrecked economy?

In describing the residue of his uncle’s estate, John Openshaw said that some of the papers found in the locked lumber-room “...were of a date during the reconstruction of the Southern states, and were mostly concerned with politics, for he had evidently taken a strong part in opposing the carpet-bag politicians who had been sent down from the North.” It was always my impression that the vast majority of the voters in the Confederate states had been disenfranchised by a vengeful Congress, and that Northern opportunists came to the South to run for office and thus take advantage of the helpless people. Was it the case that “carpet-baggers” were deliberately sent to the South for that purpose and, if so, by whom?

Odds and Ends: We can imagine what an Amateur Mendicant Society might be (with Hugh Boone as a prominent member), but what might be a Paradol Chamber? Ken and Barbie in a room? Also, the message from the KKK was always the same: “Put the papers on the sundial.” But although Elias Openshaw could have been expected to know which papers were wanted, how could the KKK expect either of the remaining Openshaws to know which of all the many papers in the lumber-room were the ones desired?

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