



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure VII -- The Adventure of the Five Orange Pips

First published in:

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Time frame of story (known/surmised):

Late September 1887 (stated)

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

At 221B. Watson's wife was on a visit to her mother's, and so for a few days he was once more in his old quarters with Holmes.

Opening scene:

Holmes sat moodily cross-indexing his records of crime, while Watson was reading a fine sea-story by Clark Russell. A heavy rainstorm with high winds was raging outside. The bell rang unexpectedly, and it was a client, soaking wet, arriving without an appointment.



Client:

John Openshaw, a young man, some two-and-twenty at the outside, well-groomed and trimly clad, with something of refinement and delicacy in his bearing. His face was pale and his eyes heavy, like those of a man who is weighed down with some great anxiety. Client's uncle Elias, who had lived and prospered in America, got a letter with 5 orange seeds (pips) in it, and the letters KKK, and a request for some papers, which he then

burned. He died in an odd drowning incident seven weeks later. Client's father inherited the estate. About a year later, he received a letter with the same pips and initials, and a week afterward, died in a mysterious accident. Client then inherited. Over 2 years passed, and then he also received a letter with pips, and instructions to leave the papers on the sundial. He contacted the police, who listened to the story with a smile, thinking the letters were practical jokes and the deaths accidental. So Openshaw went to see Holmes. After telling his tale, Holmes advised him to be careful. The client, unfortunately, was murdered on his way home.

Villain:

Captain Calhoun, master of the bark, Lone Star, and two mates. Calhoun was an agent of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) a sinister American organization opposed to the outcome of the Civil War, seeking revenge. Its power was used for political purposes, principally for the terrorizing of the negro voters and the murdering and driving from the country those who were opposed to its views. Its outrages were usually preceded by a warning sent to the marked man in some fantastic shape such as the orange pips. Elias Openshaw was involved in the KKK at a high level, but left the organization and went back to England, taking many important and incriminating papers with him.

Motive:

The Klan could not let Openshaw keep possession of the incriminating papers, which involved many prominent Americans. The KKK was not the type of organization that would allow turncoats to survive. Logic Used to Solve: From the timing and seaport origins of the letters, Holmes determined the perpetrator was on a sailing ship, and had sent the pips by mail packet (steamers – much faster). By examination of Lloyd's schedules of ships and their ports of call he deduced the only candidate was the American bark Lone Star.

Policemen:

Police-Constable Cook, of the H Division, responded to a cry for help, but was unable to rescue the client who splashed into the water near Waterloo bridge.

Holmes' fees:

Unlikely any were received. The client was murdered by cunning devils who decoyed him off the artery leading to his destination and threw him into the water, leaving no-one to pay Holmes.

Food:

The morning after the client's visit, Watson had a cup of coffee. After hearing of the client's death, Holmes tore a piece from the loaf and devoured it voraciously, washing it down with a long draught of water.

Drink:

No mention, except for the water.

Vices:

After the client left 221B, Holmes lit his pipe, and leaning back in his chair he watched the blue smoke-rings as they chased each other up to the ceiling.

Other cases mentioned:

The Adventure of the Paradol Chamber, the Amateur Mendicant Society, who held a luxurious club in the lower vault of a furniture warehouse, the loss of the British bark Sophy Anderson, the singular adventures of the Grice Patersons in the island of Uffa, and the Camberwell poisoning case. In the latter, Sherlock Holmes was able, by winding up the dead man's watch, to prove that it had been wound up two hours before, and that therefore the deceased had gone to bed within that time — a deduction which was of the greatest importance in clearing up the case.

Notable Quotables: "Except yourself, I have (no friends)," Holmes said to Watson. "I do not encourage visitors."

"I am the last court of appeal." – Holmes

"As Cuvier (Georges Cuvier, a French zoologist and naturalist) could correctly describe a whole animal by the contemplation of a single bone, so the observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents should be able to accurately state all the other ones, both before and after." – Holmes

"It is not impossible that a man should possess all knowledge which is likely to be useful to him in his work, and this I have endeavoured in my case to do." – Holmes

'I shall be my own police. When I have spun the web they may take the flies, but not before.'" – Holmes

Other interestings:

Uncle Elias had an aversion to the negroes, and disliked the Republican policy of extending the franchise to them. He had been a Colonel in the Confederate Army, but it seemed the excesses of the KKK bothered him to the extent he gave up his life in Florida and returned to England. He may have planned to use his papers for blackmail, or to assure his safety. The plan failed.

If you ever wanted to read a fine sea story by Clark Russell, Google Project Gutenerg. Several public domain novels are available. Do author search, remembering that Clark Russell is really William Clark Russell.

When all was said and done:

The first Openshaw, Elias, destroyed the papers, so the KKK's quest was futile. In the end, the Lone Star departed for Savannah before the culprit(s) could be arrested. Holmes sent some pips by steamer, and wired the police, but the Lone Star didn't make it. It was lost at sea in the very long and severe equinoctial gales that year and not heard from. A piece of flotsam was found later verifying its demise.

McMurdo's Camp