



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes Adventure VII -- The Adventure of the Five Orange Pips

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

About 1850, Elias Openshaw migrated to America and became a planter in Florida. He fought in the American Civil War with Jackson and Hood (for the Confederacy). After the war, he became deeply involved in the Ku Klux Klan but repented his activities. He returned to England in 1869 and brought back Clan records which implicated some very prominent Southerners. It is assumed that he planned to use these papers to blackmail clan members (if they did not cease their nefarious practices?).

Although he lived as a recluse, he was found by the clansmen who sent him five orange pips as a warning signal that he would be murdered if the papers were not returned. Instead of returning the papers, he burned them. He was murdered anyway.

Joseph inherited Elias' estate. He also got the orange pip warning and a demand to return the papers, which were of course nonexistent. He ignored the warning and was also killed.

John inherited the estate and received the pips. He went to the police who laughed at him. His father and uncles deaths had been cleverly disguised to look like accidents. He was referred to Holmes.

Holmes instructed John to put the empty chest on the sundial, along with a single sheet which had escaped the fire and a note saying all other papers had been burned. However, John was murdered on his way home by being thrown off Waterloo Bridge.

Holmes was furious with himself. "That he should come to me for help and that I should send him away to his death." By examining the time lags between the arrival of the pips and the murders, he deduced



the men were traveling by sailing ship. He then pored over Lloyd's records and found that only the Lonestar of Savannah fit the bill. That very day the Lonestar had left to return to America. Holmes wired the Savannah police that Captain Calhoun and his mates were wanted in London for murder and sent five orange pips to Calhoun. "They will be waiting for him when he arrives."

However, the Lonestar was lost at sea, presumably with all hands.

SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

A young man, John Openshaw asked Sherlock Holmes for help. He told the story of his uncle which after participating to the Civil War in the Confederates army went to settle in England. One day, he received a letter with five orange pips and only signature the initials K.K.K.. He died soon after.

A few times later, John's father died all the same after a similar letter. Two years has passed since, and now John received the dreadful letter with instructions to deliver some documents. Holmes advise him to obey. Unfortunately, John is killed on his way home. Sherlock Holmes promised to avenge his later client.

He succeeds at identifying the Ku Klux Klan members but too late, they all fled by sea. He later learnt that the criminals perished on sea with the boat.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

John Openshaw tells Holmes that in 1883 his uncle died two months after receiving a letter inscribed "K.K.K." with five orange pips enclosed, and that in 1885 his father died soon after receiving a similar letter; now Openshaw himself has received such a letter. Holmes tells him to do as the letter asks and leave a diary page, which Holmes deduces is connected to the Ku Klux Klan, on the garden sundial. Openshaw is killed before he can do so, but Holmes discovers the killers have been travelling on a sailing ship, and sends the captain a letter with five orange pips. The ship is lost at sea.

A young gentleman named John Openshaw visits Holmes one night with a strange story. His uncle Elias had emigrated to the United States as a young man, establishing himself as a planter in Florida and joining the Confederate States Army, in which he rose to the rank of colonel. In 1869 or 1870, he returned to England and purchased an estate near Horsham in Sussex, adopting a reclusive lifestyle. He later allowed John to live on the estate and gave him full access to the property, except for one storage room that was always kept locked.

On 10 March 1883, Elias received a letter postmarked Pondicherry, bearing the inscription "K.K.K." and containing only five orange pips (seeds).

The arrival of this letter badly unnerved Elias, and he sent John to bring a lawyer to the estate. By the time John returned, Elias had retrieved a box marked "K.K.K." from the locked room and burned its contents. Elias made a will naming his brother Joseph (John's father) as his heir, with the intent that John should eventually inherit the estate from him. Elias's already-reclusive behaviour became even more bizarre; he would either lock himself in his room and drink heavily, or rush about the grounds in a frenzy while carrying a pistol. On 2 May 1883, seven weeks after receiving the letter, he was found dead in a garden pool. The death was ruled a suicide, but John did not believe that Elias could have killed himself.

Joseph took possession of the estate and examined the room, finding scattered records of Elias's time in the United States. On 4 January 1885, he received a letter postmarked Dundee, identical to the one received by Elias and containing instructions to put "the papers" on the sundial in the garden. John realised that the papers being demanded must have been the ones burned by Elias. Despite John's urging, Joseph decided not to involve the police. Three days later, he was found dead at the bottom of a chalk pit; the death was ruled an accident, but again John had his doubts.

John has now received a letter postmarked London that orders him to put the papers on the sundial, but the local police are convinced that the letters are merely practical jokes. The only clue he can provide is a page from Elias's diary, dated March 1869 and detailing that pips were sent to three men; two were later "cleared" and one was "visited." Holmes suggests that John put the page in the box that had contained the other papers, along with a note detailing their destruction, and leave the box on the sundial.

After John departs, Holmes deduces that Elias had returned to England and gone into hiding because something in the United States had prompted him to flee for his life, and that the letters were sent from a sailing ship based on their postmarks and the time lapse between the first two mailings and the recipients' deaths. He recognises "K.K.K." as the Ku Klux Klan, an anti-Reconstruction domestic terrorist group in the South that was active until its sudden collapse in 1869 – triggered, Holmes theorises, by Elias's return to England with vital records that the other members have since been trying to recover. Opponents of the Klan would receive a warning, and would be killed unless they either fled or renounced their opposition.

The next morning's newspaper carries an article on the discovery of John's body in the River Thames, apparently the result of an accidental drowning after falling off the Waterloo Bridge. Now convinced that all three Openshaw men were murdered, Holmes spends the day checking the records of sailing ships and finds only one that could have been in Pondicherry, Dundee, and London when the letters were mailed – an

American barque, the Lone Star. He puts five orange pips into an envelope with the note "S.H. for J.O.", addresses it to the captain, and mails it to the vessel's home port of Savannah, Georgia. He also sends a telegram to the Savannah police, informing them that the captain and mates – the only American crewmen – are wanted in England for murder.

Holmes' desire for vengeance ultimately goes unfulfilled, as the Lone Star is destroyed in a severe gale. No trace is ever found except for a broken sternpost marked "L.S.", seen floating on the waves of the Atlantic Ocean.