

The Five Orange Pips

When I look back over my records of Sherlock Holmes's cases between the years 1882 and 1890, I find many that were strange and interesting. It is difficult to know which cases to include here. Some have already been reported in the newspapers, and others did not allow my friend to show his very special abilities. There are others which he could not solve or which never completely satisfied him. One of these cases was very unusual in its details. I will tell what I know of the story.

It began on an evening in September 1887, during a very violent autumn storm. All day the wind had screamed and the rain had beaten against the windows. As evening came, the storm grew louder and louder, and the wind cried like a child in the chimney.

Sherlock Holmes walked up and down, checking records of his past cases. I sat at the desk, organising some medical notes. My wife was visiting her aunt, and for a few days I was living in my old rooms in Baker Street.

'Was that the door bell?' I said, looking up at my friend.

'Who would come tonight?'

'If someone needs my help, it must be a serious case,' Holmes agreed.

At that moment, there was a knock at the door. Holmes turned a lamp towards the chair on which the visitor would sit.

'Come in!' he said.

The man was young, perhaps twenty-two years old or less, and well dressed. His wet umbrella and his long shining raincoat showed the wild weather that he had come through. He looked around anxiously in the bright light of the lamp, and I could see

that his face was pale and his eyes were heavy. He was a very worried man.

'I must ask you to forgive me for visiting you so late,' he said, putting on a pair of gold glasses. 'I am sorry, too, that I have brought some of the bad weather into this warm room.'

'You have come from Sussex, I see,' Holmes said.

'Yes, from Horsham.'

'That mud on your shoes is quite typical of the area.'

'I have come for advice.'

'That is easy.'

'And help.'

'That is not always so easy.'

'I have heard of you, Mr Holmes. I heard from Captain Prendergast how you saved him in that business at the Tankerville Club.'

'Ah, of course. They said that he cheated at cards. They were wrong.'

'He said that you could solve anything – that you are never beaten.'

'I have been beaten – three times by men and once by a woman. But it is true that I have generally been successful. Please pull your chair closer to the fire, and tell me some details of your case.'

'It is not an ordinary one.'

'I expected that. People come to me after they have tried everything else. They do not bring me ordinary cases. Now, please give us the facts from the beginning.'

The young man moved his chair and pushed his wet feet out towards the fire.

'My name,' he said, 'is John Openshaw, but this awful business is a family matter. To give you an idea of the facts, I must go back to the beginning.'

'My grandfather had two sons – my uncle Elias and my father Joseph. My father had a small factory in Coventry. He made parts for bicycles, and was successful. After some years he sold the business for quite a lot of money.

'My uncle Elias went to America when he was a young man, and became a planter in Florida. At the time of the war between the northern and southern states, he fought in Jackson's army. When the South was beaten, he returned to Florida and stayed there for three or four years. In about 1869 or 1870, he came back to Europe and bought some land in Sussex, near Horsham. He had made a lot of money in the United States, but he left because black people had been allowed to vote. He did not like that.

'He was an unusual man, often angry and bad-tempered, and he did not seem to like other people. He lived near Horsham for years, but I do not think that he ever went into the town. He had a garden and two or three fields around the house. He took his exercise there, though very often he did not leave his room for several weeks. He drank a lot and smoked very heavily, and he did not want any friends, not even his own brother.

'But he seemed to like me. I first saw him when I was only about twelve. I think that was in the year 1878 – he had been in England for eight or nine years. He asked my father to let me come and live with him, and he was very kind to me in his way. I spoke to other people for him, and at sixteen I was almost completely in charge of the house. I kept all the keys and looked after the money. I could go where I liked and do what I liked.

'There was only one place where I was not allowed to go. That was a locked room at the top of the house. Because I was like any other boy, I looked through the keyhole, but I was only able to see a collection of old boxes.

'One day – in March 1883 – a letter with a foreign stamp lay on the table in front of Uncle Elias's plate. He did not often

receive letters, because his bills were paid in cash and he had no friends.

"From India!" he said, as he picked it up. "Pondicherry postmark! What can this be?" He opened the letter and out fell five little seeds – orange pips. I began to laugh at this, but my laugh died at the sight of his face. His lip had fallen, his eyes stared and his skin turned pale. He held the letter in a shaking hand. "K.K.K.!" he cried, and then: "My God, my God! My past has found me."

"What is it, uncle?" I cried.

"Death!" he said. Then he got up from the table and left the room, leaving me puzzled and very afraid. I picked up the envelope. Inside, in red ink, the letter "K" was written three times. There was nothing else except the five dried pips. What could the reason be for his great terror? I left the breakfast table and met him coming downstairs. He had a large key in one hand and a small box, like a cash box, in the other.

"They can do what they like, but I will win in the end," he said angrily. "Tell Mary" – she was his servant – "that I shall want a fire in my room today, and send for Fordham, my lawyer."

'I did as he ordered. When the lawyer arrived, I asked him to come up to the room. The fire was burning brightly and all around it there were black pieces of burnt paper. The small box stood open and empty beside it. As I looked at the box I noticed, with surprise, that there were three Ks printed on it.

"I want you, John," my uncle said, "to witness my will. I am leaving my house and my land, with all its advantages and disadvantages, to my brother, your father. When he dies it will, no doubt, come to you. If you can enjoy my money in peace, that is good! If you cannot, leave everything to your worst enemy. I do not know what is going to happen. Please sign the paper where Mr Fordham shows you."

'I signed the will and the lawyer took it away with him. This

strange event puzzled me. I could not escape from a feeling of fear, though this grew less strong as the weeks passed and nothing happened to affect our lives.

'But I could see a change in my uncle. He drank more than before, and he spent most of the time in his room, with the door locked on the inside. Sometimes he got drunk and ran around the garden with a gun in his hand, shouting that he was afraid of nobody. Then he rushed back into the house, locking the door behind him.

'Well, one night he ran out of the house like this, but he never came back. When we went to search for him, we found him face downwards in a small lake at the bottom of the garden. There was no sign of a fight, and the water was only two feet deep.

'He was dead, and the police believed that he had killed himself. He had behaved strangely for months. But I did not believe this. I knew how much he was afraid of death. Time passed, however, and my father now owned the house, the land, and fourteen thousand pounds in the bank.'

'One moment,' Holmes said. 'Your story is one of the strangest I have ever heard. When did your uncle receive the letter, and when did he die?'

'The letter arrived on 10th March, 1883. His death was seven weeks later, on the night of May 2nd.'

'Thank you. Please continue.'

'When my father first came to the house, I asked him to examine the room which had always been kept locked. We found the small box there, but it was empty except for one piece of paper. It had the letters K.K.K. on it, and the words "Letters, receipts and list of members".'

'These were probably the papers that my uncle destroyed. There was nothing else important in the room – only papers and notebooks connected with my uncle's life in America. Some of these showed that he had been a good soldier during the war.

Others, from after this time, were about politics. They showed that he had been strongly against the politicians who had been sent down from the North.

'Well, my father came to live at Horsham in 1884, and all went well until January of 1885. On the fourth day after New Year, I heard a shout of surprise from my father. He was sitting at the breakfast table with an open envelope in one hand and five dried orange pips in the other. He had always laughed at my story about Uncle Elias, but now he looked very puzzled and frightened.

'"What does this mean, John?" he whispered.

'"It is the K.K.K.," I said. I was frightened too.

'He looked inside the envelope. "Yes, here are the same letters. But what is written above them?"'

'"Put the papers on the stone seat," I read, looking over his shoulder.

'"What papers? What stone seat?" he asked.

'"The stone seat in the garden? But the papers have been destroyed."

'"This is rubbish," he said, beginning to sound braver. "This sort of thing does not happen in this country. Where does this letter come from?"'

'"From Dundee," I answered, looking at the postmark.

'"A stupid joke," he said. "Why should they write to me about stone seats and papers?"'

'"I think you should speak to the police," I said.

'"They will laugh at me. No, I can't do that."

'"Then let me speak to them."

'"No, let's not do anything."

'I could not change his mind, but I was very worried about the letter.

'Three days later, my father decided to visit a friend who lived a few miles away. I was happy about this, because I thought that

he was in less danger when he was away from home. But I was wrong. On the second day, I received a message. My father had fallen into a deep hole in the ground. He was still breathing when I got to him, but he could not speak. He died soon after that.

'He did not know the country, and there was no fence around the hole, so the police decided that his death was an accident.

'I, too, could find nothing that suggested murder. There were no signs of a fight, no footprints. Nothing had been stolen from his pockets and no strangers had been seen in the area. But, of course, I still believed that someone had killed him.

'In this strange way I became the owner of the house and the land. I did not sell it and move away because I believe that the problems are connected with something in my uncle's life. The danger would, I think, be as great in another house.

'My poor father was killed in January 1885, and two years and eight months have passed since then. I have lived happily at Horsham, but yesterday morning it all started again.'

'The young man took an envelope from his pocket. Turning to the table, he shook out five dried orange pips.

'This is the envelope,' he continued. 'The postmark is London — the East End. Inside are the same words that were in my father's envelope — "K.K.K.", and then, "Put the papers on the stone seat."'

'What have you done?' asked Holmes.

'Nothing.'

'Nothing?'

'I feel completely helpless.' He let his face fall into his thin, white hands. 'I seem to be in great danger, and nothing can save me from it. But I have seen the police.'

'Ah?'

'They listened to my story with a smile. I think they believe that the letters were jokes, and the deaths of my uncle and father

were just accidents. However, they have given me a policeman, who can stay in the house with me.'

'Has he come with you tonight?'

'No. He was ordered to stay in the house.'

'Stupid!' Holmes said. 'So why did you come to me? And why did you not come immediately?'

'I only spoke to Captain Prendergast about my problem today, and he told me to come and see you.'

'It is two days since you received the letter, and too much time has passed already. Have you anything else that could help us?'

'There is one thing,' said John Openshaw. He put his hand in his pocket and took out a piece of light blue paper. 'After my uncle burned his papers, I found this on the floor of his room. Perhaps he dropped it when he took the others to the fire. I think it is a page from a private diary. The writing is certainly my uncle's.'

Holmes moved the lamp, and we both bent over the sheet of paper. The irregular edge showed that it had been torn from a book. It had 'March 1869' at the top, and underneath this was written:

4th Hudson came.
5th Sent the pips to McCauley, Paramore and John Swain of St Augustine.
9th Paramore left.
10th John Swain left.
12th Visited Paramore. All well.

'Thank you,' said Holmes, giving the paper back to our visitor. 'And now you must not lose another moment. You must go home immediately, and act.'

'What shall I do?'

'You must put this piece of paper into the box which you have described. You must also put in a note to say that all the other papers were burned by your uncle. After that, you must put the box out on the stone seat, as they said. Do you understand?'

'Completely.'

'First, we must take away the danger that you are in. Second, we must solve the mystery, and punish the guilty ones.'

'Thank you,' said the young man, standing up and putting on his coat. 'You have given me new hope. I shall certainly do as you advise.'

'Don't waste any time. And take care of yourself. How will you go home?'

'By train from Waterloo Station.'

'It is not yet nine. The streets are still crowded, so I think that you may be safe. Remember to guard yourself well.'

'I am carrying a gun.'

'That is good. Tomorrow I shall start work on your case.'

'I shall see you at Horsham, then?'

'No. Your secret lies in London. I shall look for it here.'

'Then I shall come in a day, or in two days, with news of the box and the papers.'

He shook hands with us and left. Outside, the wind still screamed, and the rain was beating against the windows.

Sherlock Holmes sat in silence, with his head down and his eyes on the fire. Then he lit his pipe and looked up.

'I think, Watson,' he said, 'that this is the most puzzling of our cases.'

'Well, yes,' I said.

'This John Openshaw seems to be in great danger.'

'But have you,' I asked, 'any definite ideas about those dangers? Who is this K.K.K., and why is he destroying this unhappy family?'

'I have always said that a man should only keep in his brain

what he needs to know from day to day. When something unusual comes along, like the meaning of K.K.K., he can always go to his library.'

He got out of his chair and crossed to the shelf where he kept his books on America. He found the one he wanted. He sat down again, placed it on his knee, but didn't open it.

'Now,' he said, 'first, we can guess that Elias Openshaw had a very strong reason for leaving America. Men of his age do not change their way of life, or willingly leave the warm weather of Florida for the lonely life of an English town. He wanted to be alone in England, which suggests that he was frightened of someone or something. So then we need to think about the three letters. Do you remember the postmarks?'

'The first was from Pondicherry, the second from Dundee, and the third from London.'

'From East London. What does that tell you?'

'They are all sea ports. Probably the writer was on a ship.'

'Excellent. And in the case of Pondicherry, Elias was killed seven weeks after receiving the letter. The Dundee letter arrived only three or four days before a death. Dundee, of course, is nearer. I think the men came on a sailing ship, and they always sent their warning ahead of them. It probably arrived before them because it came on a steamship, as letters usually do.'

'It is possible.'

'More than that,' said Holmes. 'It is probably what happened. And now you see the danger that John Openshaw is in. This letter comes from London and therefore we cannot expect any delay.'

'Good God!' I cried. 'What can it mean, this endless killing?'

'Elias Openshaw's papers are of great importance to the persons in the sailing ship. I say "persons" because it would be difficult for a single man to kill two men and make both deaths look like accidents.'

'These men want their papers back, and they will kill whoever has them. So K.K.K. is not the name of a person, but of a society.'

'But of what society?'

'Have you never—' said Sherlock Holmes, bending forward and talking in a low voice — 'have you never heard of the Ku Klux Klan?'

'No, I have not.'

Holmes turned the pages of the book on his knee. 'Here it is,' he said after a moment. "'Ku Klux Klan. This terrible secret society was started by some soldiers in the southern states after the end of the war, and it quickly spread to different parts of the country, especially Tennessee, Louisiana, the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida.'

"'Is power was used for political purposes, mainly to frighten black voters. It murdered people who were against its views. When a murder was planned, a warning was usually sent — leaves from a certain tree in some parts, apple seeds or orange pips in others. The man could then change his ways, or leave the country. If he took no notice of the warning, he was killed.'

"'The society was very well organized, so few of its members were ever brought to court. For some years the Ku Klux Klan was very strong. The United States Government, and the better type of people in the South, could do nothing about it. Then, in the year 1869, it stopped operating, though there have been some examples of the same sort of crime since that date.'

'You see,' said Holmes, putting down the book, 'the sudden end of the society's power came at the same time as Openshaw disappeared from America with their papers. It is not surprising that he and his family have been hunted ever since then. The list of names may include some of the most important men in the South. There may be many men who will not sleep easily at night until they get it back.'

'Then the page which we have seen—'

'It said, if I remember correctly, "sent the pips to A, B and C" — so the society's warning was sent to them. Then it says that A and B "left" the country, and finally C was visited, and probably killed.'

'Young Openshaw must do what I have told him. It is his only chance. But we can do nothing more tonight, so I shall play my violin. Let us try to forget for half an hour this terrible weather, and the even more terrible ways of men.'

The next morning, the sun was shining a little through the veil of fog which always hangs over the great city. Sherlock Holmes was already at breakfast when I came down.

'Please excuse me,' he said. 'I did not wait, because I have, I think, a very busy day in front of me.'

'What will you do?' I asked.

'I may have to go down to Horsham.'

'But you will not go there first?'

'No, I shall begin here in London. Just ring the bell for some coffee.'

As I waited, I lifted the unopened newspaper from the table and looked at the front page.

'Holmes!' I cried. 'You are too late!'

'Ah,' he said, putting down his cup. 'I was afraid so. How was it done?' He spoke calmly, but I could see that he felt deeply about it.

'Here is the story: "Between nine and ten last night, a policeman heard a cry for help near Waterloo Bridge. He then heard the sound of something falling into the water. A number of people tried to help, but the night was very dark and stormy. It was impossible to do anything.'

"'After some time the river police managed to pull the body out of the water. An envelope was found in his pocket. This told the police that the young man's name was John Openshaw, and that his house was near Horsham. There were no signs of



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violence on his body. It is possible that, on his way to Waterloo station, he walked into the river by mistake in the dark.

“We suggest building some fences along the sides of the river near Waterloo Bridge.”

We sat in silence for some minutes. Holmes was more affected than I had ever seen him.

‘This really hurts me, Watson,’ he said at last. ‘It has become a personal matter now, and I shall put my hand on the men who did this. That young man came to me for help, and I sent him away to his death!’

He jumped from his chair, and walked up and down the room. His face, normally pale, was very red.

‘They must be very clever,’ he said. ‘How did they make him go down there? The riverside is not on the way to the station. Well, Watson, we shall see who will win in the end. I am going out now!’

‘To the police?’

‘No. After I catch them, the police can have them.’

All day I was busy with medical matters, and I did not return to Baker Street until late in the evening. Sherlock Holmes had not come back yet. It was nearly ten o’clock before he entered, looking pale and tired. He walked to the side table, pulled a piece from the loaf of bread, and ate it hungrily.

‘You are hungry,’ I said.

‘Very. I have had nothing to eat since breakfast. I had no time.’

‘And have you been successful?’

‘Very.’

‘You know who the men are?’

‘Yes, young Openshaw’s death will be paid for. And I think we shall send them a warning that they will recognize.’

‘What do you mean?’

He took an orange from the cupboard, and squeezed out the pips onto the table. He took five of them and pushed them into

an envelope. On the inside he wrote, 'S.H. for J.O.' Then he closed it and addressed it to 'Captain James Calhoun, Sailing Ship *Lone Star*, Savannah, Georgia, USA.'

'That will be there before him. He can read it when he arrives,' he said, laughing. 'It may give him a sleepless night.'

'And who is this Captain Calhoun?'

'The leader of these men. I shall get the others too, but he is the first.'

'How did you find him?'

'I have spent the whole day,' Holmes said, 'at the port of London. I have studied the lists of all the ships which were at Pondicherry in January and February 1883. There were thirty-six large ships. Of these, the *Lone Star* caught my attention, because it was an American ship.'

'What then?'

'I studied the records for Dundee, and I found that the *Lone Star* was there in January 1885. I knew that I had the right ship. I then checked the ships which are at the moment in the port of London.'

'Yes?'

'The *Lone Star* arrived here last week. I went to have a look at her, but she sailed early this morning.'

'What will you do, then?'

'Oh, I have my hand on him. Captain Calhoun and the two other officers are the only three Americans on the ship. The others are Finns and Germans. I also know that all three of them were away from the ship last night. I learnt that from one of the workers in the port. I expect the mail boat to carry this letter to Savannah before their sailing ship arrives. I will also send a message to the Savannah police that these three gentlemen are wanted here for murder.'

The murderers of John Openshaw, however, never received

the orange pips. They did not know that another, much cleverer person, was hunting for them.

The autumn storms that year were very bad. For a long time we waited for news of the *Lone Star* of Savannah, but none reached us. We did at last hear that a broken piece of wood from a boat was found on the water, far out in the Atlantic. The letters L.S. were cut into it, and that is all we know about the end of the *Lone Star*.