

Chapter one

The Story of Uncle Elias

In September 1887 my wife was visiting some of her family, so I was staying with my old friend Sherlock Holmes in Baker Street. It was a windy, stormy evening, and the rain was falling heavily outside. Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

I looked at my friend in surprise. 'Who can this be?' I asked.

'If he comes on business in this weather, it's important,' said Sherlock Holmes. 'Come in!' he called.

A young man came in. He looked wet, tired and worried. 'I've come to ask for help,' he said. 'I've heard of you, Mr Holmes. People say you know everything. I don't know what to do.'

'Well, sit down,' said Holmes, 'and tell me about yourself.'

The young man sat down, and put his wet feet near the fire. 'My name is John Openshaw. My father, Joseph, had a brother, my uncle Elias, who went to live in America when he was young. He made a lot of money there. He didn't like the black Americans, so during the Civil War he fought against the men from the North, and with those from the South. But when the South lost the war, and there was equality for black people, Uncle Elias left America. So in 1869 he came back to England and went to live in a large house in the country. He was a strange, unhappy man.

'He did not want any friends,' John Openshaw went on, 'and he often drank a lot. But he liked me, and when I was twelve, I moved to Uncle Elias's house. He was very kind to me. I could go anywhere in the house. But there was one small room at the top of the house which was always locked. Nobody could go into this room.

'One day Uncle Elias got a letter from Pondicherry in India. "I don't know anyone in Pondicherry!" he said, but when he opened the envelope, five little orange pips fell on to his plate. I began to laugh but stopped when I saw my uncle's white face.

"K.K.K.!" he cried. "Oh my God, my God, they've found me!"

"What do you mean, uncle?" I asked.

"Death!" he cried, and ran upstairs.

I looked at the envelope, which had three Ks on the back. There was no letter. Who sent it? And why was my uncle so afraid?

'Uncle Elias went immediately to the secret room and took out a box which also had three Ks on it. He burnt all the papers in the box, and said to me, "John, I know that I'm going to die soon. My brother, your father, will have all my money and my house after my death, and you will have it all when he dies. I hope you can enjoy it, but if not, give it to your worst enemy. I'm afraid that my money brings death with it."

I didn't understand what he meant, and nothing happened for a few weeks, so I did not feel so worried. But my uncle was very afraid. He stayed in his room most of the time, and drank more than before. He always locked all the doors carefully. Then one night he drank very heavily and ran wildly out of the house, and in the morning we found him dead in a river. The police said he killed himself, but I knew he was afraid to die, so I didn't think that was true.'

Holmes stopped the young man for a minute. 'Tell me,' he said. 'When did your uncle get the letter from India, and when did he die?'

'The letter arrived on 10th March 1883, and he died seven weeks later,' answered John Openshaw.

'Thank you. Please go on,' said Holmes.

'After my uncle's death, my father moved into the house. Of course I asked him to look carefully at the locked room, but we didn't find anything important.'

Chapter two

More Pips

'Everything went well until a year later,' said John Openshaw. 'But one morning my father opened a letter to find five orange pips inside it. "What does this mean, John?" he asked. His face was white.

"Look!" I said. "There's K.K.K. on the envelope. Those letters were on Uncle Elias's envelope too!" We were both shaking and afraid.

"Yes, and this time it says 'Put the papers in the garden'."

"Which papers? The papers in Uncle Elias's box? He burnt them!" I said.

"And where has this letter come from?" my father said. He looked at the envelope. "Dundee, Scotland. Well, I don't know anything about pips or papers. I'm not going to do anything."

"Father, you must tell the police," I said. I remembered my uncle's letter from India, and I was very worried.

"No, they'll laugh at me. Let's just forget about it," he replied.

Three days later my poor father went to visit an old friend who lived some miles away. But he never came back. The police said that he was walking home in the dark when he fell down a hill. He was badly hurt, and he died soon after. They decided it was an accident, but I didn't agree. I thought it was murder, and I could not forget the five orange pips and the strange letters to my uncle and my father.

'But I've tried to forget, and I've lived alone in that house for nearly three years now. Then yesterday I got this.'

The young man showed us an envelope with K.K.K. on the back, and five small orange pips. 'You see?' he said. 'It comes from East London, and it says "Put the papers in the garden". Those are the words that were in the letter to my father.'

'So what did you do next?' asked Holmes.

'Nothing,' answered Openshaw. He put his head in his hands. 'I don't know what to do. I'm afraid.'

'Nothing?' cried Holmes. 'Young man, you must do something fast. You're in danger!'

'Well,' I've talked to the police,' said Openshaw unhappily. 'But they laughed at me. They think that there's nothing to worry about.'

'How stupid they are!' cried Holmes. 'And why didn't you come to me immediately? Your enemies have had almost two days to make a plan. Haven't you found anything which will help us?'

'Well, I found this in the locked room,' said John Openshaw. He showed us a small, half-burnt piece of paper. 'It was with my uncle's papers. It's his writing. Look, it says:

March 7th 1869 Sent the pips to three people, Brown, Robinson and Williams.

March 9th Brown left.

March 10th Williams left.

March 12th Visited Robinson and finished business with him.

'Thank you,' said Sherlock Holmes. 'And now you must hurry home. Put this paper into your uncle's box, put in a letter which says that your uncle burnt all the other papers, and put the box outside in the garden. I hope your enemies will be happy with that, and then you won't be in danger any more. How are you going home?'

'By train from Waterloo station,' replied Openshaw.

'There'll be a lot of people in the streets, so I think that you'll be all right. But be careful.'

'Thank you, Mr Holmes,' said Openshaw. 'I'll do everything you say.' He went out into the dark night, the wind and the rain.

Chapter three

K.K.K.

Sherlock Holmes sat silently, and watched the fire. Then he said to me, 'John Openshaw is in real danger. Why did his Uncle Elias have to leave America? Because he had enemies. When he came back to England he was afraid. That's why he lived a lonely life and locked all his doors so carefully. Now where did those letters come from? Did you see?'

'The first from Pondicherry in India, the second from Dundee in Scotland and the third from East London,' I answered. 'Does that tell you anything?' asked Holmes.

'They're all sea ports. The writer was on a ship when he wrote the letters,' I replied. I was pleased with my answer.

'Very good, Watson,' said Holmes. 'Somebody sent some pips from India, and arrived seven weeks later to kill Uncle Elias. Then he sent some pips from Scotland and arrived three days later to kill John's father. Do you see why I'm worried now? He has sent pips to John from London John's enemy is in London already!'

'Good God, Holmes!' I cried. 'Who is this man?'

'More than one man, I think. They belong to the Ku Klux Klan. That explains the "K.K.K.". Haven't you ever heard of it? It's a very secret group of Americans from the South. They wanted to stop equality for black people and to kill anyone who didn't agree with them. The police couldn't stop them. But in 1869 Uncle Elias, who belonged to this secret group, suddenly left America with all their papers, and so the group could not go on. Of course the group wanted to get the papers back. You remember the half-burnt paper? That was Uncle Elias's American diary. While he was working for the K.K.K., he sent the pips to frighten those three men. Two left the country, but one didn't, so the K.K.K. "finished business with him", or killed him. The K.K.K. always worked like that.'

'Well, I hope they won't kill young Openshaw,' I said.

Chapter four

The Last Deaths

But they did. The next morning we read in the newspaper that John Openshaw was dead. A policeman found him in the river near Waterloo station. The police said it was an accident, but Holmes was very angry about it.

'He came to me for help and those men murdered him! I'm going to find them, if it's the last thing I do!' he said to me, and he hurried out of the house.

In the evening, when he came back to Baker Street, he was tired, but pleased. 'Watson!' he said, 'I know the names of Openshaw's enemies! And now I'm going to send them a surprise! This will frighten them!' He took five pips from an orange and put them in an envelope. On it he wrote: 'S.H. for J.C.'

'I'm sending the pips, not from the K.K.K., but from me, Sherlock Holmes, to Captain James Calhoun. His ship is called the Star. He and his men are sailing back to Georgia, USA, now.'

'How did you find him, Holmes?' I asked.

'Ship's papers,' he said. 'I've looked at hundreds of them today. Only one ship, the Star, was in the three ports at the right times, and this morning the Star left London to sail back to Georgia. I found out that the captain and two of his men, all Americans, weren't on the ship last night, so I'm sure they killed poor John Openshaw. When they arrive in America, they'll get the pips and then the police will catch them!'

Sherlock Holmes is a very clever detective, but he can do nothing about the weather. The winter storms at sea that year were worse than ever, and so the Star never arrived in Georgia, and nobody saw the captain or his men again. The murderers of John Openshaw did not get the pips, but, in the end, death came to them.

- THE END -

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