

The Red-Headed League
A Play Based on a Story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Adaptation by:
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Characters:

Dr. John H. Watson: Holmes' friend.

Jabez Wilson: The owner of a pawnshop.

Sherlock Holmes:

Vincent Spaulding: Billings' assistant, also known as Clay.

Duncan Ross: An official of the Red Headed League.

Peter Jones: Inspector from Scotland Yard.

Mr. Merryweather: The director of the London Bank.

Act 1

Sherlock Holmes sitting room, 221b Baker Street.

Watson: I called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes at 221b Baker Street, when I found him engaged with a person having fiery red hair.

Holmes: Watson, come in.

Watson: I don't want to intrude.

Holmes: No, no, please. This is Mr. Jabez Wilson who comes with a very interesting problem. Mr. Wilson, Dr. Watson has accompanied me on many investigations and you can speak freely in front of him as you do to me. Will you tell your story again for Dr. Watson?

Wilson: Certainly. [opening a newspaper].

Watson: [Observing Mr. Wilson's features with a pensive glance].

Holmes: You can tell no doubt that our client has been in China and has done quite a bit of writing lately.

Wilson: [Startled]. Why, how in....

Holmes: You have a tattoo of a pink fish scales on your right wrist that indicate a process particular to China and that Chinese coin dangling from your key chain provides further evidence.

Wilson: But the writing?

Holmes: Why, your right cuff is very shiny compared to your left one, and the left one has a smooth patch near the elbow where you rest it upon the desk.

Wilson: I see now. At first I thought you did something clever. But now....

Holmes: [interrupting] Yes, Yes, I know it is all so simple once it is explained.

Watson: I see Mr. Wilson you have a copy of *The Morning Chronicle*.

Holmes: Please Mr. Wilson read the advertisement.

Wilson: This appeared two months ago on April 27, 1890. It reads:

TO THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE:

At the bequest of the late Ezekiah Hopkins, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, U. S. A., there is now another vacancy open which entitles a member of the League to a salary of £4 a week. All red-headed men above the age of twenty-one years, are eligible. Apply in person on Monday, at eleven o'clock, to Duncan Ross, at the offices of the League, 7 Pope's Court, Fleet Street.

Watson: What on earth does it mean?

Wilson: Let me explain. I own a pawnshop on Coburg Square. On the day this advertisement appeared a man by the name of Vincent Spaulding came seeking employment. Although I don't have much money, he was willing to work at wages that I could afford. It was he who called my attention to this advertisement. He told me he wished that he had bright red hair like I did, and suggested that I might apply for this position. Well, I didn't know what to think.

Holmes: Please continue.

Wilson: Well, after a couple of days I was aware that Spaulding was a good worker. Although he spent time in the cellar area of the shop when we were not busy it didn't bother me. He told me that he was an amateur photographer and that he needed a place that was dark to develop his photographs. Well, on Monday of that day, he approached me again saying that I should not pass the opportunity to go and see about the vacancy. After some thought, I agreed. He accompanied me to the office of Mr. Duncan Ross. Upon seeing me he became very excited and dismissed the line of men who were waiting to be interviewed and told me I had the job.

Watson: What was the job?

Wilson: That's just it. I was to be in the office between the hours of 10:00 in the morning and 2:00 in the afternoon each day, and not leave for any reason. Mr. Spaulding said that he could attend to the business for this short period. Well, I asked what I was to do,

knowing full well that I could use an extra four pounds a week. Mr. Ross told me that I was to copy the word appearing in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Watson: To copy the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*?

Wilson: I know it sounded like a menial charge, but I accepted. Four pounds a week for doing such a task seemed a bit puzzling but if those were the terms of the Red-Headed League then I would fulfill them. Well, eight weeks passed and I went to the office like every other work day and found this note attached to the door. [giving the notice to Sherlock Holmes]

Holmes: [reading from the notice]
THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE
IS DISSOLVED. October 9, 1890.

What did you do next?

Wilson: I went to see the manager of the building and asked what had happened to Mr. Ross and the Red-Headed League. He responded that he was not familiar with a Mr. Ross or the League and became upset with me. Instead, he told me that a Mr. William Morse, a solicitor, had rented the room until yesterday and had moved. I asked about a forwarding address and when told, I went directly and found it to be a vacant lot.

Holmes: Mr. Wilson. I will give your problem some thought and let you know what I find.

Wilson: Thank you Mr. Holmes and good-bye Dr. Watson.

Holmes: Well, what do you think of this situation Watson?

Watson: I find it confounding. It doesn't seem to make any sense.

Holmes: I believe there may be more to this than meets the eye. It is quite a three pipe problem.

Act 2

Scene one. Jabez Wilson's pawnshop.

Holmes: Ah, here we are Watson at Mr. Wilson's pawnshop.

Spaulding: May I help you sir?

Holmes: We are just looking, thank you.

Watson: Can you tell me about this piece? [shows Spaulding an item].

Spaulding: It is a relic of the sixteenth century used to make baskets.

Holmes: Come Watson. We'll miss our appointment.

[Holmes and Watson leave the pawnshop]

Holmes: Lend me your stick. [he taps the floor several times].

Watson: What do you make of Mr. Spaulding?

Holmes: I noticed his appearance.

Watson: He didn't seem to be wearing clothing out of the ordinary.

Holmes: Did you notice his trousers? The knees of his trousers?

Watson: I don't understand. But why did you tap the pavement?

Holmes: Not now Watson. Let's take a look around this area. Ah, the tobacconist shop, the newspaper stand, the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank, and there is the carriage depot. Come Watson, we have time to lunch and then hear Saraste play the violin at St. James's Hall.

Scene two. The City and Suburban Bank vault.

Holmes: You know Inspector Peter Jones from Scotland Yard, and let me introduce Mr. Merryweather, director of the bank.

Watson: It is a pleasure seeing you again Inspector Jones and also meeting you Mr. Merryweather.

Mr. Merryweather: I don't understand why Inspector Jones asked me to come to the bank. We do have a tidy sum in our vault. We also are holding a good amount of French gold. Although we have had some warnings that it may be a target to steal, I can assure you that it is safe.

Inspector Jones: As I explained earlier to Mr. Merryweather, that you have asked us to meet you here because you seem to have some suspicions.

Mr. Merryweather: You don't seriously believe that our bank can be penetrated?

Holmes: In good time Mr. Merryweather. Let us keep our voices to a whisper. Now Inspector take a place behind that partition, and Mr. Merryweather if you will stand over there. Watson, keep the lantern covered and your revolver at the ready.

[a few moments pass]

Inspector Jones: [whispering] I hear a noise.

Spaulding: [breaking through the wall] Come on! It's all clear.

Holmes: [grabs him]

Spaulding: [yelling] Go back! Quick!

Holmes: It's no use John Clay. There are three constables waiting for him at the door.

Inspector Jones: Let's go Mr. Clay. We've been looking for you for a long time.

Mr. Merryweather: Mr. Holmes, I don't know how to thank you.

Holmes: It was nothing.

[Jones, Merryweather, and Clay exit]

Holmes: That trick of John Clay pretending to be Vincent Spaulding and guiding Mr. Wilson to his accomplice Mr. Jones was smartly done. No doubt that Mr. Wilson was swayed by the four pounds a week pay. He didn't think about "why" he was asked to maintain such strict adherence to an office for four hours a day copying the Encyclopaedia. He should have been more aware as to why Mr. Clay, a notorious criminal, also known as Spaulding, would be willing to work at half wages. While he was busy at the office copying words, these two men were digging a tunnel from his pawnshop basement to the bank. When I met Spaulding at the shop, I immediately noticed some dirt on the knees of his trousers. When Mr. Wilson showed us the notice that the Red-Headed League had been dissolved, it was clear that, this being Saturday, that the men planned to rob the bank and make their get-a-way before anyone could discover the break-in on Monday.

Watson: Well-done Holmes.