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**Sherlock Holmes**



## **The Mystery of the Red-Headed League** by Arthur Conan Doyle

### **Part 1: Jabez Wilson's Story**

One Saturday morning in October, I returned home from an early walk to find my friend Sherlock Holmes talking with a man who had the brightest flaming-red hair that I have ever seen.

"Watson, I'm glad you're here," said Holmes. "I would like you to meet Mr. Jabez Wilson, who has come to me with a most bizarre mystery."

Holmes turned to his guest. "Mr. Wilson, would you show Dr. Watson the advertisement in that newspaper."

I took the newspaper from Mr. Wilson and read out-loud the advertisement.

***"The Red-Headed League has a vacancy. Light work. Salary four pounds per week. Applicants must be over twenty-one and must have..."*** I paused and read it to myself again first before repeating it out loud. ***"...and must have red hair!"***

I looked at Holmes. "How extraordinary!" I said.

"Indeed it is," agreed Holmes. "Mr. Wilson, I'd like you tell your story again from the beginning. Please, explain to the doctor about your other business."

"Well, Dr. Watson," Jabez Wilson began, "it's like this. I have a small pawn-broker business here in London. It doesn't bring me much money each month, and so, when I saw this advertisement for a job offering four whole pounds for a few hours light work, I naturally wanted to know more. As you see, I have a fine head of red hair and am obviously over twenty-one, so I thought to myself, why not?"

"But how do you manage to run your own business if you are working a few hours each day at this job?" I asked.

"Well," said Mr. Wilson, "I have a live-in employee, Vincent Spaulding. He came knocking on my door one day saying he was new to the area and wanted to learn the trade. As he had nowhere to live, he said he would work for half-wages if I would let him use the spare room. So, of course, I did just that."

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"When did this man Spaulding start work for you?" I asked.

"About three months ago," said Mr. Jabez Wilson. "And very good timing it was too; just a month later this new job came up. Were it not for Spaulding at my shop, I would not have been able to take this job and earn that extra four pounds a week!"

"Remarkable timing, indeed!" said Holmes. "Tell Dr. Watson about Spaulding's most interesting hobby."

"Photography," said Mr. Jabez Wilson, turning to me. "Spaulding asked if he might make use of my cellar, as he has a hobby as a photographer and needs a dark place to develop his films."

"And you agreed?" I asked.

"Well, I could see no harm in it," said Mr. Wilson.

"Now, explain what happened eight weeks ago," urged Holmes.

Mr. Wilson turned to me again. "Well it was quite lucky for me that my employee reads the newspaper ads, or I would never have known of the Red-Headed League. You see, one day he came to me with this very newspaper and told me how he wished he had red hair like I have."

"So it was Vincent Spaulding that drew your attention to the job listing?" I asked.

"Indeed so," Mr. Wilson said. "Spaulding seemed to know a little about it. He told me this was not the first time the Red-Headed League had advertised. He explained to me that an eccentric American millionaire, himself red-haired, had left a vast sum of money in trust to be used solely to provide employment for men with red hair."

"Extraordinary!" I exclaimed, leaning forward. "Quite extraordinary! So did you apply for the job, Mr. Wilson?" I asked.

"Not only did I apply, but I got the job," said Mr. Wilson. "Not that I expected to. When I arrived at the interview, there was a long queue of red-

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headed men, many of whom had hair just as fiery as mine. I thought I had no chance. But luck was with me, and when I finally got to the office and was interviewed they offered me the job straight away."

I stared at Mr. Jabez Wilson in amazement. "What luck that you should be chosen so quickly when so many others were available."

"Luck, indeed," agreed Holmes, nodding gravely. "Luck, indeed."

"So what work did they want you to do?" I asked.

Holmes sat up. "This," he said, "is what I am keen to learn too, for this was as far as Mr. Wilson had got explaining the matter to me when you arrived, Watson. Pray, do go on, Mr. Wilson. What was it the Red Headed-League wanted you to do?"

"This is where it gets very strange," said Mr. Wilson. "They said the hours would be ten in the morning until two in the afternoon. Just four hours a day. For four pounds a week! For that much money I would happily have undertaken work much more challenging than what they had in mind for me."

"Which was what?" I asked impatiently.

"It's bizarre, Dr. Watson. Quite bizarre," Mr. Wilson said. "They wanted me to copy pages out of a book, word for word"

"Just that?" asked Holmes.

"Just that," said Mr. Jabez Wilson.

"Where did you do this work?" asked Holmes. "Did you bring it home with you?"

"Oh, no, I worked right there in the office. In fact, I was told that if I left the office at any time during my work hours then I would lose the job and the pay. But this was not a problem for me. I worked each day for the full four hours, and received my four pounds every week."

"Just for copying pages out of a book?" I asked.

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"Yes, that was all," said Mr. Wilson.

"But what possible benefit did this Red-Headed League get from this?" I asked. "Why would anyone pay you anything, let alone four whole pounds a week, for copying out a book?"

Mr. Jabez Wilson shrugged. "Well, whatever reason they had seems no longer to be important, for today it all stopped."

"Stopped?" Holmes sat forward in his chair. "Now this is interesting. Do go on."

"Well, that's why I'm here, Mr. Holmes," said Mr. Jabez Wilson. "I arrived at the office this morning only to find the place locked. There was a notice pinned to the door saying the Red-Headed League was closed."

"This is a serious matter," Holmes said solemnly. "What troubles me is what these people were really up to."

Mr. Wilson stared at Holmes. "Really up to?" he asked.

"Well it must be obvious to us all that this Red-Headed League was some deliberate invention," said Holmes, "and there was never any red-headed American millionaire leaving money to fellow red-headed men."

"Yes, so it seems," said Jabez Wilson. "But why on earth would anyone play such a bizarre joke on me? And to pay me four pounds a week for almost eight weeks to do so... It makes no sense whatsoever. Can you figure it out, Mr. Holmes?"

"I hope to have it figured out before the weekend is over," said Holmes. "But let me ask you one more question. While you were at the office copying, was your employee Vincent Spaulding looking after your pawn shop unsupervised?"

"Well, yes," said Mr. Wilson, "but he has stolen nothing from me. Of that I am sure. You don't think Spaulding was in on the joke, do you, Mr. Holmes?"

"Mr. Wilson, I assure you that Watson and I will have this mystery cleared up soon", said Holmes. "Don't say anything to Mr. Spaulding quite yet."

*To be continued. . .*