

The Red-Headed League

Characters:

1. Sherlock Holmes
2. Dr. Watson
3. Mr. Jebez Wilson
4. Vincent Spaulding (John Clay)
5. Mr. Duncan Ross (Archie)
6. Peter Jones
7. Mr. Merryweather

Scene 1

Wilson's office (Pawn shop)

Spaulding: I wish to the lord, Mr. Wilson, that I was a red-headed man.

Wilson: Why that?

Spaulding: Why, here's another vacancy on the League of Red-Headed Men. It's worth quite a little fortune to any man who gets it, and I understand that there are more vacancies then there are men, so that the trustees are at there wit's ends what to do with the money. If my hair would only change color, here's a little crib all ready for me to step into.

Wilson: Why, What is it, then?

Spaulding: Have you never heard of the League of Red-Headed Men?

Wilson: Never.

Spaulding: Why, I Wonder at that, for you are eligible yourself for one of the vacancies.

Wilson: And what are they worth?

Spaulding: Oh, merely a couple hundred a year, but the work is slight, and it need not interfere very much with one's other occupations.

Wilson: Tell me all about it.

Spaulding: Well, you can see for yourself that the League has a vacancy, and there is the address where you should apply for particulars. As far as I can make out, the League was founded by an American millionaire, Ezekiah Hopkins, who was very peculiar in his ways. He was himself red-headed, and he had a great sympathy for all red-headed men; so, when he died, it was found that he had left his enormous fortune in the hands of trustees, with instructions to apply the interest to the providing of easy berths to men whose hair is of that color. From all I hear it is splendid pay and very little to do.

Wilson: But, there would be millions of red-headed men who would apply.

Spaulding: Not so many as you might think, You see it is really confined to Londoners, and to grown men. Now, if you cared to apply, Mr. Wilson, you would just walk in; but perhaps it would hardly be worth your while to put yourself out of the way for the sake of a few hundred pounds.

Scene 2

Street (with lots of red-headed people), Wilson and Spaulding push through the crowd to the office of red-headed league. Mr. Duncan Ross sitting in the office.

Spaulding: This is Mr. Jebez Wilson, and he is willing to fill a vacancy in the league.

Duncan Ross: And he is admirably suited for it. He has every requirement.

(Duncan Ross takes a step backward, cocked his head on one side. Duncan Ross plunges forward, Shakes hands with Wilson.)

Duncan Ross: It would be injustice to hesitate, You will, however, I am sure, excuse me for taking an obvious precaution.

Duncan Ross: *(pulls Wilson's hair)* There is water in your eyes, I perceive that all is as it should be. But we have to be careful, for we have twice been deceived by wigs and once by paint.

Duncan Ross: *(Shouts out the window)* The vacancy has been filled.

(Groans of disappointment from Street)

Duncan Ross: My name, is Mr. Duncan Ross, and I am myself one of the pensioners upon the fund left by our noble benefactor. Are you a married man, Mr. Wilson? Have you a family?

Wilson: No, I do not.

Duncan Ross: Dear me! That is very serious indeed! I am sorry to hear you say that. The fund was, of course, for the propagation and spread of the red-heads as well as for their maintenance. It is exceedingly unfortunate that you should be a bachelor.

Duncan Ross: In the case of another, the objection might be fatal, but we must stretch a point in favor of a man with such a head of hair as yours. When shall you be able to enter upon your new duties?

Wilson: Well, it is a little awkward, for I have a business already.

Spaulding: Oh, never mind about that, Mr. Wilson! I should be able to look after that for you.

Wilson: What would be the hours?

Duncan Ross: Ten to two.

Wilson: That would suit me very well. And the pay?

Duncan Ross: Is £4 a week.

Wilson: And the work?

Duncan Ross: Is purely nominal.

Wilson: What do you call purely nominal?

Duncan Ross: Well, you have to be in the office, or at least in the building, the whole time. If you leave, you forfeit your whole position forever. The will is very clear upon that point. You don't comply with the conditions if you budge from the office during that time.

Wilson: It's only four hours a day, and I should not think of leaving,

Duncan Ross: No excuse will avail, neither sickness nor business nor anything else. There you must stay, or you lose your billet.

Wilson: And the work?

Duncan Ross: Is to copy out the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. There is the first volume of it in that press. You must find your own ink, pens, and blotting-paper, but we provide this table and chair. Will you be ready to-morrow?

Wilson: Certainly

Duncan Ross: Then, good-bye, Mr. Jabez Wilson, and let me congratulate you once more on the important position which you have been fortunate enough to gain.

Scene 3

Wilson Enters office of red-headed league, with ink, pen, and paper. Wilson starts writing Duncan Ross leaves. (Need Dialog)

Scene 4

Wilson goes to work to find a sign on the door saying the THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE IS DISSOLVED. October 9, 1890. Wilson is staggered. Knocks on doors around his office. (Write Dialog asking about the Red Headed League)

Scene 5

Wilson goes to Sherlock Holmes.

Wilson is telling Holmes about his problem when Watson enters. With an apology Watson begins to withdraw when Holmes pulls Watson back into the room and closed the door behind Watson.

Holmes: You could not possibly have come at a better time, my dear Watson

Watson: I was afraid that you were engaged.

Holmes: So I am. Very much so.

Watson: Then I can wait in the next room.

Holmes: Not at all. This gentleman, Mr. Wilson, has been my partner and helper in many of my most successful cases, and I have no doubt that he will be of the utmost use to me in yours also.

(Wilson makes a bob of greeting)

Watson: Your cases have indeed been of the greatest interest to me.

Holmes: As far as I have heard, it is impossible for me to say whether the present case is an instance of crime or not, but the course of events is certainly among the most singular that I have ever listened to. Perhaps, Mr. Wilson, you would have the great kindness to recommence your narrative.

(Wilson Pulls a dirty wrinkled news paper from the inside pocket of his greatcoat)

Holmes: Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labor, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else.

(Wilson starts up in his chair, with his forefinger upon the paper, but his eyes upon Holmes)

Wilson: How, in the name of good-fortune, did you know all that, Mr. Holmes? How did you know, for example, that I did manual labor. It's as true as gospel, for I began as a ship's carpenter.

Holmes: Your hands, my dear sir. Your right hand is quite a size larger than your left. You have worked with it, and the muscles are more developed.

Wilson: Well, the Freemasonry, then?

Holmes: I won't insult your intelligence by telling you how I read that, especially as, rather against the strict rules of your order, you use an arc-and-compass breastpin.

Wilson: Ah, of course, I forgot that. But the writing?

Holmes: What else can be indicated by that right cuff so very shiny for five inches, and the left one with the smooth patch near the elbow where you rest it upon the desk?

Wilson: Well, but China?

Holmes: The fish that you have tattooed immediately above your right wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small study of tattoo marks and have even contributed to the literature of the subject. That trick of staining the fishes' scales of a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. When, in addition, I see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch-chain, the matter becomes even more simple.

Wilson: Well, I never! I thought at first that you had done something clever, but I see that there was nothing in it after all.

Holmes: Can you not find the advertisement, Mr. Wilson?

Wilson: Yes, I have got it now. Here it is. This is what began it all. You just read it for yourself, sir.

(Wilson hands the paper to Watson)

Watson: TO THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE: On account of 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 for purely nominal services. All red-headed men who are sound in body and mind and 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." What on earth does this mean?

Watson: It is *The Morning Chronicle* of April 27, 1890. Just two months ago.

Holmes: Very good. Now, Mr. Wilson?

Wilson: Well, it is just as I have been telling you, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I have a small pawnbroker's business at Coburg Square, near the City. It's not a very large affair, and of late years it has not done more than just give me a living. I used to be able to keep two assistants, but now I only keep one; and I would have a job to pay him but that he is willing to come for half wages so as to learn the business.

Holmes: What is the name of this obliging youth?

Wilson: His name is Vincent Spaulding, and he's not such a youth, either. It's hard to say his age. I should not wish a smarter assistant, Mr. Holmes; and I know very well that he could better himself and earn twice what I am able to give him. But, after all, if he is satisfied, why should I put ideas in his head?

Holmes: Why, indeed? You seem most fortunate in having an employee who comes under the full market price. It is not a common experience among employers in this age. I don't know that your assistant is not as remarkable as your advertisement.

Wilson: Oh, he has his faults, too, Never was such a fellow for photography. Snapping away with a camera when he ought to be improving his mind, and then diving down into the cellar like a rabbit into its hole to develop his pictures. That is his main fault, but on the whole he's a good worker. There's no vice in him.

Holmes: He is still with you, I presume?

Wilson: Yes, sir.

Wilson: On Monday morning about 8 weeks ago, Spaulding came to work with this very paper in his hand and says "I wish to the Lord, Mr. Wilson, that I was a red-headed man." and shows me the advertisement. My assistant seemed very eager for me to apply and offered to watch the shop while I was away at my job. So we closed up for the day and went to apply for the job. When I saw how many were waiting, I would have given it up in despair; but Spaulding would not hear of it.

Wilson: In the office I was introduced to Mr Duncan Ross, and after several minutes of conversation he then yelled out the window to all the waiting red headed men that the vacancy had been filled and closed the shutters. He told me to come back the next morning for work, and then showed me the door. I was surprised, but delighted at the additional £4 a week. I went to his office the next morning and set to work copying the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Mr Ross popped in occasionally to make sure I was still at work. At 2 he returned and locked up his office. Eight weeks passed away like this, and I had written about Abbots and Archery and Armour and Architecture and Attica, and hoped with diligence that I might get on to the B's before very long. And then suddenly the whole business came to an end.

Watson: To an end?

Wilson: Yes, sir. I went to my work this morning as usual at ten o'clock, but the door was shut and locked, with a little square of cardboard hammered on to the middle of the panel with a tack. Here it is,

and you can read for yourself. (*Wilson holds up THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE IS DISSOLVED sign*)

(*Holmes and Watson examine it and then burst out laughing*)

Wilson: I cannot see that there is anything very funny. If you can do nothing better than laugh at me, I can go elsewhere.

Holmes: No, no! (*shoves Wilson back into the chair from which he has half risen*). I really wouldn't miss your case for the world. It is most refreshingly unusual. But there is, if you will excuse my saying so, something just a little funny about it. Pray what steps did you take when you found the card upon the door?

Wilson: I called around at the offices next to Mr Ross's, but nobody knew of a Mr. Duncan Ross or of the Red Headed League. I did not wish to lose such a place without a struggle, so, as I had heard that you were good enough to give advice to poor folk who were in need of it, I came right away to you.

Holmes: And you did very wisely, your case is an exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it. From what you have told me I think that it is possible that graver issues hang from it than might at first sight appear.

Wilson: Grave enough! Why, I have lost four pound a week.

Holmes: Now, for one or two questions, Mr. Wilson. This assistant of yours who first called your attention to the advertisement—how long had he been with you?

Wilson: About a month then.

Holmes: How did he come?

Wilson: In answer to an advertisement.

Holmes: Was he the only applicant?

Wilson: No, I had a dozen.

Holmes: Why did you pick him?

Wilson: Because he was handy and would come cheap.

Holmes: At half wages, in fact.

Wilson: Yes.

Holmes: What is he like, this Vincent Spaulding?

Wilson: Small, stout-built, very quick in his ways, no hair on his face, though he's not short of thirty. Has a white splash of acid upon his forehead.

(*Holmes sits up in his chair with excitement.*)

Holmes: I thought as much. Have you ever observed that his ears are pierced for earrings?

Wilson: Yes, sir. He told me that a gypsy had done it for him when he was a lad.

(Holmes sinks back in deep thought)

Holmes: And has your business been attended to in your absence?

Wilson: Nothing to complain of, sir.

Holmes: That will do, Mr. Wilson. I shall be happy to give you an opinion upon the subject in the course of a day or two. To-day is Saturday, and I hope that by Monday we may come to a conclusion.

(Wilson leaves)

Holmes: Well, Watson, what do you make of it all?

Watson: I make nothing of it, It is a most mysterious business.

(Holmes and Watson leave)

Scene 6

Holmes and Watson are walking down the street, and stop in front of Jebez Wilson's Pawnbroker's Shop. Holmes walk slowly up the street, and then down again to the corner, still looking keenly at the houses. Holmes returns to the pawnbroker's, and thumps vigorously upon the pavement with his stick. Holmes knocks on the do, it was instantly opened by a bright-looking, clean-shaven young fellow, who asked him to step in.

Spaulding: Good day, Sir. Step in, please.

Holmes: Thank you, but I only wished to ask you how you would go from here to the Strand.

Spaulding: Third right, fourth left.

(Holmes and Watson continue walking down the Street)

Holmes: Smart fellow, that, He is, in my judgment, the fourth smartest man in London, and for daring I am not sure that he has not a claim to be third. I have known something of him before.

Watson: Evidently, Mr. Wilson's assistant counts for a good deal in this mystery of the Red-headed League. I am sure that you inquired your way merely in order that you might see him.

Holmes: Not him.

Watson: What then?

Holmes: The knees of his trousers.

Watson: And what did you see?

Holmes: What I expected to see.

Watson: Why did you beat the pavement?

Holmes: My dear doctor, this is a time for observation, not for talk. We are spies in an enemy's country.

Holmes: You want to go home, no doubt, Doctor.

Watson: Yes, it would be as well.

Holmes: And I have some business to do which will take some hours. This business at Coburg Square is serious.

Watson: Why serious?

Holmes: A considerable crime is in contemplation. I have every reason to believe that we shall be in time to stop it. But to-day being Saturday rather complicates matters. I shall want your help to-night.

Watson: At what time?

Holmes: Ten will be early enough.

Watson: I shall be at Baker Street at ten.

Holmes: Very well. And, I say, Doctor, there may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket.

(Holmes and Watson walk off in different Directions)

Scene 7

Holmes, Peter Jones, and Mr. Merryweather are in standing in Holmes's apartment.

(Watson enters)

Holmes: Ha! Our party is complete. Watson, I think you know Mr. Jones, of Scotland Yard? Let me introduce you to Mr. Merryweather, the director of the Coburg Branch of the City and Suburban Bank.

Jones: We're hunting in couples again, Doctor, you see, Our friend here is a wonderful man for starting a chase. All he wants is an old dog to help him to do the running down.

Merryweather: *(Gloomily)* I hope a wild goose may not prove to be the end of our chase.

Jones: You may place considerable confidence in Mr. Holmes, sir. He has his own little methods, which are, if he won't mind my saying so, just a little too theoretical and fantastic, but he has the makings of a detective in him.

Merryweather: Oh, if you say so, Mr. Jones, it is all right. Still, I confess that I miss my bridge game. It is the first Saturday night for seven-and-twenty years that I have not had a game of bridge.

Holmes: I think you will find, that you will play for a higher stake to-night than you have ever done yet, and that the play will be more exciting. For you, Mr. Merryweather, the stake will be some £30,000; and for you, Jones, it will be the man upon whom you wish to lay your hands.

Jones: John Clay, the murderer, thief, smasher, and forger. He's a young man, Mr. Merryweather, but he is at the head of his profession, and I would rather have my bracelets on him than on any criminal in London. He's a remarkable man, is young John Clay. His grandfather was a royal duke, and he himself has been to Eton and Oxford. His brain is as cunning as his fingers, and though we meet signs of him at every turn, we never know where to find the man himself. He'll crack a crib in Scotland one week, and be raising money to build an orphanage in Cornwall the next. I've been on his track for years and have never set eyes on him yet.

Holmes: I hope that I may have the pleasure of introducing you to-night. I've had one or two little turns also with Mr. John Clay, and I agree with you that he is at the head of his profession. It is past ten, however, and quite time that we started.

(All walk off stage, then back on to bank)

(Merryweather guides Holmes, Watson, and Jones down to the vault of the bank)

Holmes: You are not very vulnerable from above.

Merryweather: Nor from below.

(Merryweather strikes his stick upon the floor)

Merryweather: Why, dear me, it sounds quite hollow!

Holmes: I must really ask you to be a little more quiet! You have already imperilled the whole success of our expedition. Might I beg that you would have the goodness to sit down upon one of those boxes, and not to interfere?

(Merryweather perches himself on a crate, Holmes falls to his knees and examines the cracks in the floor with his magnifying lens, then springs to his feet)

Holmes: We have at least an hour before us, for they can hardly take any steps until the good pawnbroker is safely in bed. Then they will not lose a minute, for the sooner they do their work the longer time they will have for their escape. There are reasons why the more daring criminals of London should take a considerable interest in this cellar at present.

Merryweather: It is our French gold. We have had several warnings that an attempt might be made upon it.

Watson: Your French gold?

Merryweather: Yes. We had occasion some months ago to strengthen our resources and borrowed for that purpose 30,000 napoleons from the Bank of France. It has become known that we have never had occasion to unpack the money, and that it is still lying in our cellar. The crate upon which I sit contains 2,000 napoleons packed between layers of lead foil. Our reserve of bullion is much larger at present than is usually kept in a single branch office, and the directors have had misgivings upon the subject.

Holmes: Which were very well justified, and now it is time that we arranged our little plans. I expect that within an hour matters will come to a head. In the meantime Mr. Merryweather, we must put the screen over that dark lantern.

Merryweather: And sit in the dark?

Holmes: I am afraid so. I see that the enemy's preparations have gone so far that we cannot risk the presence of a light. And, first of all, we must choose our positions. These are daring men, and though we shall take them at a disadvantage, they may do us some harm unless we are careful.

(All crouches behind cases, Holmes covers the lantern)

Holmes: They have but one retreat, that is back through the house into Saxe-Coburg Square. I hope that you have done what I asked you, Jones?

Jones: I have an inspector and two officers waiting at the front door.

Holmes: Then we have stopped all the holes. And now we must be silent and wait.

(Hole opens in the floor/wall and Spaulding climbs out.)

Spaulding: It's all clear. Hand up the chisel and bags.

(Holmes uncovers the light and seizes Spaulding by the collar)

Spaulding: Great Scott! Jump, Archie, Jump!

(Archie dives back down tunnel)

Holmes: It's no use, John Clay, you have no chance at all.

Spaulding: So I see, I fancy that my pal is all right, though I see you have got his coat-tails.

Holmes: There are three men waiting for him at the door.

Spaulding: Oh, indeed! You seem to have done the thing very completely. I must compliment you.

Holmes: And I you. Your red-headed idea was very new and effective.

Jones: You'll see your pal again presently, He's quicker at climbing down holes than I am. Just hold out while I fix the derbies.

Spaulding: I beg that you will not touch me with your filthy hands, you may not be aware that I have royal blood in my veins. Have the goodness, also, when you address me always to say 'sir' and 'please'

Jones: All right, Well, would you please, sir, march upstairs, where we can get a cab to carry your Highness to the police-station?

Spaulding: That is better.

(Spaulding walks off with Jones, followed by Holmes, Watson, and Merryweather)

Merryweather: Really, Mr. Holmes, I do not know how the bank can thank you or repay you. There is no doubt that you have detected and defeated in the most complete manner one of the most determined attempts at bank robbery that have ever come within my experience.

Holmes: I have had one or two little scores of my own to settle with Mr. John Clay. I have been at some small expense over this matter, which I shall expect the bank to refund, but beyond that I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in many ways unique, and by hearing the very remarkable narrative of the Red-headed League.

Scene 8

(Holmes and Watson sitting in Holmes Room)

Holmes: You see, Watson, it was perfectly obvious from the first that the only possible object of this rather fantastic business of the advertisement of the League, and the copying of the *Encyclopaedia*, must be to get this not over-bright pawnbroker out of the way for a number of hours every day. From the time that I heard of the assistant having come for half wages, it was obvious to me that he had some strong motive for securing the situation.

Watson: But how could you guess what the motive was?

Holmes: I thought of the assistant's fondness for photography, and his trick of vanishing into the cellar. The cellar! There was the end of this tangled clue. He was doing something in the cellar—something which took many hours a day for months on end. What could it be, once more? I could think of nothing save that he was running a tunnel to some other building.

Watson: (Says Something)

Holmes: I surprised you by beating upon the pavement with my stick. I was ascertaining whether the cellar stretched out in front or behind. It was not in front. Then I rang the bell, and, as I hoped, the assistant answered it. We have had some skirmishes, but we had never set eyes upon each other before. I hardly looked at his face. His knees were what I wished to see. You must yourself have remarked how worn, wrinkled, and stained they were. They spoke of those hours of burrowing. The only remaining point was what they were burrowing for. I walked round the corner, saw the City and Suburban Bank abutted on our friend's premises, and felt that I had solved my problem.

Watson: And how could you tell that they would make their attempt to-night?

Holmes: Well, when they closed their League offices that was a sign that they cared no longer about Mr. Jabez Wilson's presence—in other words, that they had completed their tunnel. But it was essential that they should use it soon, as it might be discovered, or the bullion might be removed. Saturday would suit them better than any other day, as it would give them two days for their escape. For all these reasons I expected them to come to-night.

Watson: You reasoned it out beautifully, it is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true.