

Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes Adventure IV -- The Red-Headed League

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Watson is not living at Baker Street.

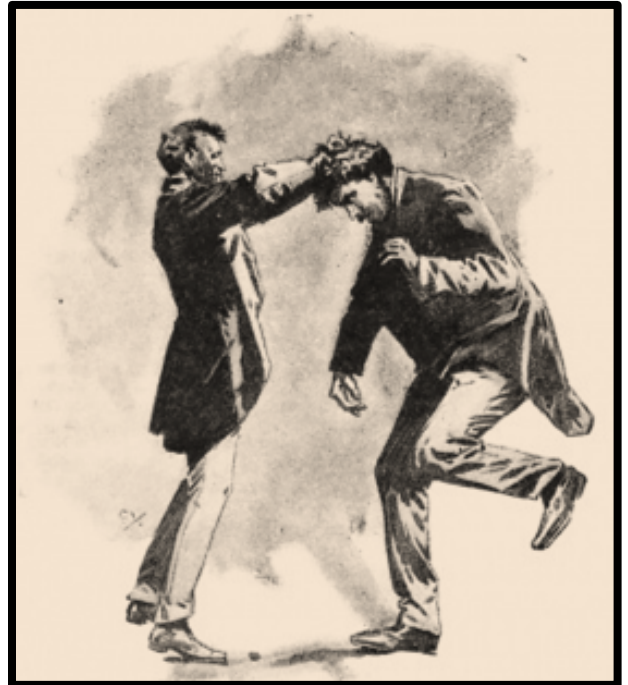
Wilson's pawn brokerage is struggling. Clay offers to work with him at half wages in order to learn the business. He alerts Wilson to an opening in the Red-headed league which is a fictional society, created by Clay and Ross, supposedly to provide assistance to red haired men. Ross also has red hair.

Wilson is hired by Ross to sit in a specific office for 4 hours a day and copy the Encyclopedia Britannica.

The real reason for founding the league is to get Wilson away from the pawn shop for 4 hours a day in order that the criminals may dig a tunnel from its basement into the basement of a bank located next door, where 30,000 gold French Napoleons are being stored.

When the tunnel is completed and Wilson's absence from the shop is no longer required, the fake league is dissolved and he is deprived of his extra income.

He contacts Holmes because he wants the money which the League paid him. Holmes solves the mystery and catches the criminals as they emerge from their tunnel into the bank vault.



SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

Mr. Jabez Wilson, a red-headed pawnbroker near The City, is informed by his new employee Vincent Spaulding that The Red-Headed League is proposing an easy and well-paid job only for red haired persons. Mr. Wilson applies and get the job.

He is asked to copy the Encyclopaedia Britannica 4 hours a day in a small office at Pope's Court. After two months, suddenly he office is closed, the Red-Headed League is dissolved and his providential job stops with no news from the managers. He decides then to consult Sherlock Holmes.

After some investigations, the detective discovers that the League was a pretext intended to take Mr. Wilson away from his shop, so Spaulding (aka the criminal John Clay) could dig a tunnel from the shop to the bank on the other side of the street.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Jabez Wilson, a pawnbroker, consults Holmes about a job, gained only because of his red hair, which took him away from his shop for long periods each day; the job for to simply copy the Encyclopædia Britannica. After eight weeks, he was suddenly informed that the job ended. After some investigation at Wilson's shop, Holmes contacts a police inspector and the manager of a nearby bank. With Watson, they hide in the bank vault and catch two thieves who had dug a tunnel from the shop while Wilson was at the decoy copying job.

Jabez Wilson, a London pawnbroker, comes to consult Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson on a Saturday. While studying this prospective client, both Holmes and Watson notice his red hair, which has a distinct flame-like hue. Wilson tells them that some weeks before, his young assistant, Vincent Spaulding, urged him to respond to a newspaper advertisement by "The Red-Headed League" offering highly-paid work to only red-headed male applicants. The next morning, Wilson had waited in a long line of fellow red-headed men, was interviewed, and was the only applicant hired because none of the others had hair colour to match his.

Wilson was grateful to secure the position, as his pawnshop was struggling. He was required to occupy an office from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. every day and copy out the Encyclopaedia Britannica, for which he was paid £4 per week (equivalent to £468 in 2021[2]). The work was useless clerical labour, performed in nominal compliance with the will of an American millionaire who wanted to provide for the welfare of red-headed men

like himself.

After eight weeks, Wilson reported to the office only to find a note on the door stating that the Red-Headed League had been dissolved. He spoke with the landlord, who stated that he had never heard of either the organisation or of Duncan Ross, the person who had hired Wilson for the position. The landlord did remember a tenant with scarlet hair, who had given his name as William Morris and presented a business card for an artificial kneecap company, but no one there knew of either Ross or Morris. He decided to bring his problem to Holmes immediately afterward.

Holmes and Watson laugh at Wilson's frustration over losing the job; Holmes points out that Wilson has earned a considerable sum of money, but promises to solve the case quickly. Wilson provides a description of Spaulding, after which Holmes and Watson visit the pawnshop. Holmes strikes the pavement in front with his walking stick and focuses on the knees of Spaulding's trousers when he answers the door. Concluding that a crime is about to be committed at a bank near the shop, Holmes gathers Watson, Inspector Jones of Scotland Yard, and bank chairman Mr. Merryweather that night.

As the four hide in the darkened bank vault, Merryweather reveals that it holds a shipment of gold coins borrowed from a French bank; Holmes suspects a wanted criminal named John Clay of planning to steal them. After more than an hour's wait, Clay and his red-headed accomplice Archie break upward through the vault floor – inadvertently found to be hollow by Merryweather earlier. Clay is quickly captured while Archie escapes, but Holmes leaves the latter man to be caught by the additional police officers Jones has stationed around Wilson's shop.

Back at Baker Street, Holmes explains his reasoning to Watson. Archie and Spaulding, whom Holmes had recognised as Clay from Wilson's description, concocted the Red-Headed League as a way to keep Wilson occupied during the day so that Clay could tunnel into the bank vault from the cellar of the shop. Holmes had noticed that Clay's trouser knees were worn and dirty from digging, and striking the pavement had informed him that the cellar extended behind the shop and toward the bank. Archie had posed as Morris to rent the office, then as Ross to hire Wilson, and closed the office once the tunnel was completed.