

## 4.3 The Red-Headed League

### Part I : Mr Wilson's Story

When I called upon my friend, Mr Sherlock Holmes, he was conversing with a visitor, who was an elderly man with fiery red hair.



Holmes introduced me to the visitor, Mr Jabez Wilson. He was a pawn-broker. Holmes asked him to repeat his story for me. He began by showing us an advertisement in a newspaper. It read as follows –

#### TO THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

There is a vacancy for a member of the League, and the salary is four pounds a week for nominal services. Red-headed men may apply in person on Monday, at eleven o'clock, to Duncan Ross, at the office of the League, 7 Fleet Street.

The advertisement had appeared in newspaper two months ago. Mr Wilson's assistant, Vincent Spaulding, had shown it to him. Mr Wilson liked his assistant Spaulding. He was smart, efficient and worked for only half the normal wages! But, the assistant also had his faults. Every now and then, he left work and went down into the cellar to develop photographs. Photography was his hobby.



Like other Sherlock Holmes stories, this story, too, is told by his friend, Dr Watson.

- League : an association or a formal group of people

#### Things to do :

- ⌘ Find samples of 'classified ads' from an English newspaper. Where will the advertisement given here be seen in the classifieds ?
- ⌘ What do you have to do when you are told to 'apply in person' ?
- ⌘ Find out how photographs were developed in those days.

- pawn - broker : a person who lends money at interest when valuable things are kept with him till the loan is repaid.

Spaulding showed the advertisement to Mr Wilson and explained to him that an American millionaire, Mr Ezekiah Hopkins, had founded the famous Red-headed League, to help all red-heads like himself. Spaulding urged Mr Wilson to apply for the job. So, the two of them went to the address given in the advertisement.

Fleet Street was full of red-headed people. Mr Wilson thought that with so much competition he would not get the job. He wanted to go back, but Spaulding pushed through the crowd and took Mr Wilson to the office.

There was nothing in the office but a couple of chairs and a table. A red-headed man sat behind the table. He was Mr Duncan Ross, a representative of the Red-headed League. He was very pleased to see Mr Wilson, and announced immediately that he was well suited for the job. He shook hands with Mr Wilson, congratulated him, and told all other candidates to go back.

Mr Duncan Ross explained that Mr Wilson would have to be in the office from ten to two. If he left the office, he would lose the job. Spaulding assured Mr Wilson that he would look after Mr Wilson's business in his absence. The pay was fixed at four pounds a week.

“And the work?” said Mr Wilson.

“You have to copy out the Encyclopedia Britannica.”

The pay was very good, and the work was light. Mr Wilson accepted the job and began his work the very next day. Mr Duncan Ross was there in the office to see that Mr Wilson did his work properly and did not leave the office. He told Mr Wilson to start with the letter 'A'. Mr Wilson wrote diligently for four hours without leaving his place. Mr Ross would drop in from time to time to see that all was right with Mr Wilson. At two o'clock, he bade Mr Wilson good-day, and locked the door of the office.

### Think and answer :

- ⌘ Who do you think is smarter – Mr Wilson or his assistant ?
- ⌘ Give reasons for your answer.

### Listen and answer :

- ⌘ Why was Fleet Street full of red-headed people ?
- ⌘ Who was well suited for the job ?
- ⌘ Why did Mr Wilson accept the job ?
- ⌘ Would you like to do such a job ? Why ?
  
- ⌘ Why would anyone want to copy an encyclopedia ? Think of two good reasons.
- ⌘ What would we do today, if we needed copies of text from a big book ?

- dissolved : disbanded. Here, it means the organisation has come to an end.

### Things to do :

- ⌘ What is the difference between a dictionary and an encyclopedia? Find out.
- ⌘ Suggest a few words that may appear under 'A' after Archery in an encyclopedia.

### Discuss :

- ⌘ What would you advise Mr Wilson to do in the given situation?

“This went on day after day, Mr Holmes,” said Mr Wilson, “and on Saturday I got my salary. It was the same next week, and the same the week after. After a few days, Mr Duncan Ross came in only once in a while and after a time, he did not come in at all”.

Mr Wilson continued, “Eight weeks had passed like this, and I had written about Abbots, Archery etc. and hoped that I might get on to ‘B’ soon. And then suddenly the whole business came to an end.”

“To an end?” Holmes asked.

“Yes, Sir. This morning, I went to my work as usual at ten o’clock, but the door was shut and locked with a little note nailed on it. It said –

**The Red-headed League is dissolved.  
Oct 9, 1880.**

I was shocked. I did not know what to do”.

Mr Wilson went on with his story, “I made enquiries at the nearby offices, but none of them knew anything about the League. The rooms had been rented under a false name.

“I went home and asked my assistant Spaulding for advice. But he could not help me in any way. I want to find out about the League, Mr Holmes, who they are and why they played this prank upon me. The whole thing is a mystery. That is why I came to you. I have heard a lot about you”.

Holmes found Mr Wilson’s story very unusual. He asked, “Mr Wilson, this assistant of yours who first called your attention to the advertisement – what is he like?”

“Small, stout, with no hair on his face. He has a white splash of acid on his forehead.”

“I thought as much,” said Mr Holmes. “Is he still with you?”

“Oh, yes, sir.”

“That will do, Mr Wilson. I can give you my opinion on this subject in a day or two. Today is Saturday, and by Monday we may come to a conclusion.”

## ENGLISH WORKSHOP

1. Find and write the descriptions of different people given in this story.
2. **Present Mr Wilson's story as it would be shown in a comic strip.**  
Write what picture you will show in each frame along with the dialogues.  
Write the dialogue with the help of the story. Examples :

<div style="background-color: #f8d7da; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">Mr Wilson's shop</div> <div style="background-color: #d1ecf1; padding: 10px; margin-top: 5px;">                 Spaulding to Wilson: Will you take me as your assistant? I'll work for half the wages.             </div> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">Frame 1</p>	<div style="background-color: #f8d7da; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">Mr Wilson's shop</div> <div style="background-color: #d1ecf1; padding: 10px; margin-top: 5px;">                 Spaulding : Sir, there's no work here. I'll go down to the cellar to develop my photos.             </div> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">Frame 2</p>	<div style="background-color: #f8d7da; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">Mr Wilson's shop</div> <div style="background-color: #d1ecf1; padding: 10px; margin-top: 5px;">                 Spaulding to Wilson: Sir, look at this ad. It is for red-headed people.             </div> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">Frame 3</p>
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3. Form groups of five. Discuss how you can complete the rest of the story without referring to Part II of the story.
4. Language Study : **Modal auxiliary** : You have read about **main verbs** and **auxiliary verbs** in Std VI. You know that auxiliary verbs are helping verbs. **Modal auxiliary** verbs or **modal verbs** are also helping verbs. They are used with main verbs to show changes/modifications in the meaning of the main verb. They show possibility, ability, permission, intention, etc.

The modal auxiliaries are :

- can, may, shall, will
- could, might, should, would
- must, ought to, used to, need, dare ...

Remember the following :

- We do not use 'to' before a modal.
- We do not add '-ed' or '-ing' to a modal.
- We can form questions and negative sentences using modals without using the auxiliaries be, have, or do.

Examples :

- |                   |                   |                      |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| • They can swim.  | • May I come in ? | • We shall sing.     |
| • Can he swim?    | • You may go.     | • She ought to play. |
| • He cannot swim. | • You must go.    | • They might come.   |
- Frame simple sentences –statements, questions, requests, orders, permissions, etc. using the modals listed above.



## Part II : What happened next –

### Dr Watson's Account

“Well, Watson, what do you think of it all?” asked Mr Holmes, after Mr Wilson had left.

“I make nothing of it,” I answered frankly. Holmes sat silently for some time, and then invited me to go out with him. We went to the square where Mr Wilson had his shop. Holmes observed the area carefully. There were many shops and offices in the square, and a bank just behind Mr Wilson's shop. Holmes spent some time outside the shop and thumped upon the pavement two or three times. Finally, he knocked on Mr Wilson's door. A young man opened the door. Mr Holmes asked him the way to the Strand. The Assistant answered the question, and quickly closed the door.

I said, “I am sure that you enquired your way only in order to see him.”

“Not him,” Holmes said, “but the knees of his trousers.”

“And what did you see?”

“What I expected to see. This matter of Wilson's is serious. A crime is being planned. But I hope that we can stop it. The offices and banks will be closed for the weekend. Now I've to go and make some arrangements, but I shall want your help tonight. Come to Baker Street at 10.00 and bring your revolver.”

I arrived at Holmes' residence in time. There were two other men with him – Mr Jones of Scotland Yard and Mr Merryweather, a banker. Holmes announced, “Tonight we are going to hunt one of the smartest criminals in London !”

We left together in a carriage and reached the road we had visited in the morning. Holmes told us to follow Mr Merryweather who led us through an

#### Listen and answer :

- ⌘ Tell the name of the young man who opened the door to Mr Holmes.
- ⌘ What did Holmes want to see ?
- ⌘ Guess where Mr Merryweather took the others.

- Strand : a famous place in London.
- cellar : a room used for storage under a building

iron gate. We followed him down a narrow passage. After going down some stone steps, he led us down a dark, earth-smelling passage and into a huge cellar, full of big boxes. We all sat on the boxes.

“We are in the cellar of the City branch of one of the main banks in London. Mr Merryweather is the chairman of the bank, and he will tell you why a criminal should take an interest in this cellar at present,” said Holmes. Mr Merryweather explained that the bank had borrowed a huge quantity of gold from the Bank of France and the boxes in the cellar were full of gold.

Holmes expected the criminals to act that very night. We had to wait there in total darkness without making any noise to take the criminals by surprise.

“They have but one escape route,” whispered Holmes. “That is back through Mr Wilson’s house. I hope that some men are waiting at Mr Wilson’s door, Mr Jones?”

“I have an inspector and two officers waiting at his door.”

“Then we have stopped all the holes. Now we must be silent and wait.”

We waited silently for more than an hour. It was pitch dark in the cellar. Then suddenly, a point of bright light appeared in the floor of the cellar, then a line, and a gash seemed to open, and a hand appeared. A broad stone turned over upon its side, and left a square hole. A boyish face emerged. The man looked about and came out of the hole. He had a companion with him, a man with very red hair. The pair was none other than Spaulding the assistant alias the criminal Clay and the red-headed Mr Duncan Ross! As soon as they climbed out of the hole, Sherlock Holmes sprang out and seized Clay by the collar.

- take the criminals by surprise : catch the criminals without giving them a warning

**Think, discuss and guess the answer :**

- ⌘ How did Mr Merryweather come to know about the crime ?
- ⌘ Why did Mr Holmes think the criminals would act that night ?

- stopped all the holes : closed all the routes by which the criminal may escape / run away

- foiled : laid waste, prevented
- object : purpose, reason

### Listen and answer :

- ⌘ How did the criminals enter the cellar?
- ⌘ Who were the two criminals?
- ⌘ Who tried to get away? Do you think he was able to escape? Why?

### Things to do :

- ⌘ Explain the trick of the 'Red-headed League'. How was it related to Mr Wilson's hair?



The other dived down the hole and disappeared. Clay took out a revolver. But Holmes hit him on his wrist, and the revolver fell on the floor.

“It’s no use, John Clay,” said Holmes, “we have caught you.”

“So I see. But my friend has escaped.”

Holmes replied, “He cannot escape. There are three men waiting for him at the other end!”

Then Holmes handed over Mr Clay to the policemen.

Mr Merryweather said, “Really, Mr Holmes, I do not know how to thank you. You have foiled one of the most cunning attempts at bank robbery. The bank is grateful to you.”

“You see, Watson,” Holmes said, after we reached his home, “it was obvious from the first that the only possible object of the strange advertisement and the peculiar job was to get Mr Wilson away from his shop for some hours every day. The Red-headed League was a clever idea. In Mr Wilson’s absence, Clay and his red-headed companion wanted to dig an underground tunnel from Mr Wilson’s house to the bank. Then, they would be able to enter the bank and steal the gold without breaking open the doors of the bank. Using the tunnel, they entered the cellar. They planned to steal the gold, and go back to Mr Wilson’s house, again through the tunnel, and then get away.

“But how could you guess what their motive was?”

“When I heard that the assistant worked for half the wages, I became suspicious. Using Mr Wilson’s description of his assistant, I made enquiries. I found that he was the criminal Clay. Why was he working in Mr Wilson’s shop? And his habit of going into the cellar every now and then! I inferred that he must be digging a tunnel to some other building. When we visited the shop, I beat upon the pavement with my stick to find out whether the cellar stretched out in front or behind. It was not in front. I saw the bank on the other side of the house and guessed what the criminals had in mind. When Clay answered the bell, the knees of his trousers were wrinkled and stained! It confirmed my suspicion that he was digging. You know the rest of the story.

“You reasoned it out beautifully!” I exclaimed in admiration.

– Adapted from ‘The Red-headed League’  
by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

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#### **Listen and answer :**

- ⌘ Why did Holmes become suspicious ?
- ⌘ How did Holmes find out that the assistant was a criminal ?
- ⌘ How did Holmes guess that he was digging a tunnel ?



## ENGLISH WORKSHOP

### 1. Put the following events in proper order.

- Holmes and others go to the bank.
- Clay digs a tunnel.
- Ross closes the office of the 'Red-headed League'.
- Holmes catches the criminal Clay.
- Clay and Ross enter the cellar to steal the gold.
- The bank received a lot of gold from the Bank of France.
- Holmes visits the area around Mr Wilson's shop.

### 2. From the passage, find adverbs that end with '-ly'. Find the adjective in each of the adverb.

### 3. Discuss the following elements of a detective or mystery story.

- a mystery
- strange happenings
- a smart detective who investigates the happenings
- a crime/possibility of a crime
- preventing the crime and catching the criminal.
- characteristics of the victim
- characteristics of the criminal
- characteristics of the detective

Use the elements to **prepare outlines** of detective stories using your imagination. Write a story using any one of the outlines.

### 4. Use the following outline to develop a story as a group activity. Then write the story individually.

Family returns home late at night ..... hear conversation between thieves from inside the locked house ..... family gets ready to counter ..... attack ..... father opens the door ..... all enter ..... no one is seen ..... but TV is on ..... detective serial midway.

### 5. Language Study : **Synonyms, antonyms, homonyms** : **Synonyms** are the words from the same language that have the same or more or less the same meaning.

Examples : • good – nice – pretty • shut – closed – sealed  
• intelligent – bright

**Antonyms** are words from the same language that have opposite meanings.

Examples : • strong – weak • right – wrong • hard – soft • up – down

**Homonyms** are words that are spelt and pronounced in the same way but have different meaning.

Examples : • round (adjective) – round (noun) • walk (noun) – walk (verb)

- Start a collection of synonyms, antonyms and homonyms. Collect at least 50 each. Keep adding to your selection.

