

The  
Red-Headed  
League

JABEZ WILSON

A photograph of a window with a sign above it. The sign reads "JABEZ WILSON". The window is divided into three panes. The left pane shows a door and a lamp. The middle pane is dark. The right pane shows a chair and a table.






## CHAPTER ONE

# Mr Jabez Wilson



One Saturday morning I went to visit my friend Sherlock Holmes, but he already had a visitor. His visitor was a large man with a red face, small eyes and bright red hair. 

‘I see you’re busy, Holmes. I’ll come back another time,’ I said.

‘You came at the perfect time, my dear Watson,’ said Holmes warmly.

‘I thought you were busy,’ I said.

‘I am busy, very busy,’ he replied.

‘I’ll wait in the other room.’

‘No!’ said Holmes, and he turned to the visitor. ‘Dr Watson helped me in many of my most successful cases, Mr Wilson. I am sure he can help me with your case, too.’

The large gentleman got up from his chair and said, ‘I’m very pleased to meet you, Dr Watson.’ Then we all sat down.





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'I know you like unusual, difficult cases, Watson, and this case is very unusual. Mr Wilson, please tell your story to Dr Watson.'

Mr Wilson took an old, dirty newspaper out of his pocket and began looking at the advertisements in it. I watched him carefully. From his clothes I saw that he was an ordinary British shopkeeper.

Holmes saw me watching the old man. He smiled and said, 'I see you're trying to be a detective, Watson. Well, it's clear that Mr Wilson was a workman in the past and he also lived in China for some time. Recently, he did a lot of writing.'

Mr Wilson was very surprised. 'How do you know all of these things, Mr Holmes? You are right — in the past I was a workman.'

'Your hands show it, Mr Wilson,' Holmes said. 'Your right hand is bigger than your left. You used your right hand a lot.'

'But how did you know that I wrote a lot recently?'

'I looked at the sleeves of your shirt, Mr Wilson. The material of the right sleeve is much thinner. That shows you were writing at a desk.'

'And how did you know that I lived in China?'

'You have a tattoo of a pink fish on your right hand. That tattoo is only done in China. You see, I like studying tattoos. And there is a Chinese coin on your watch chain.'

Mr Wilson laughed loudly and said, 'At first I thought you were extremely clever, but perhaps it wasn't so difficult after all!'

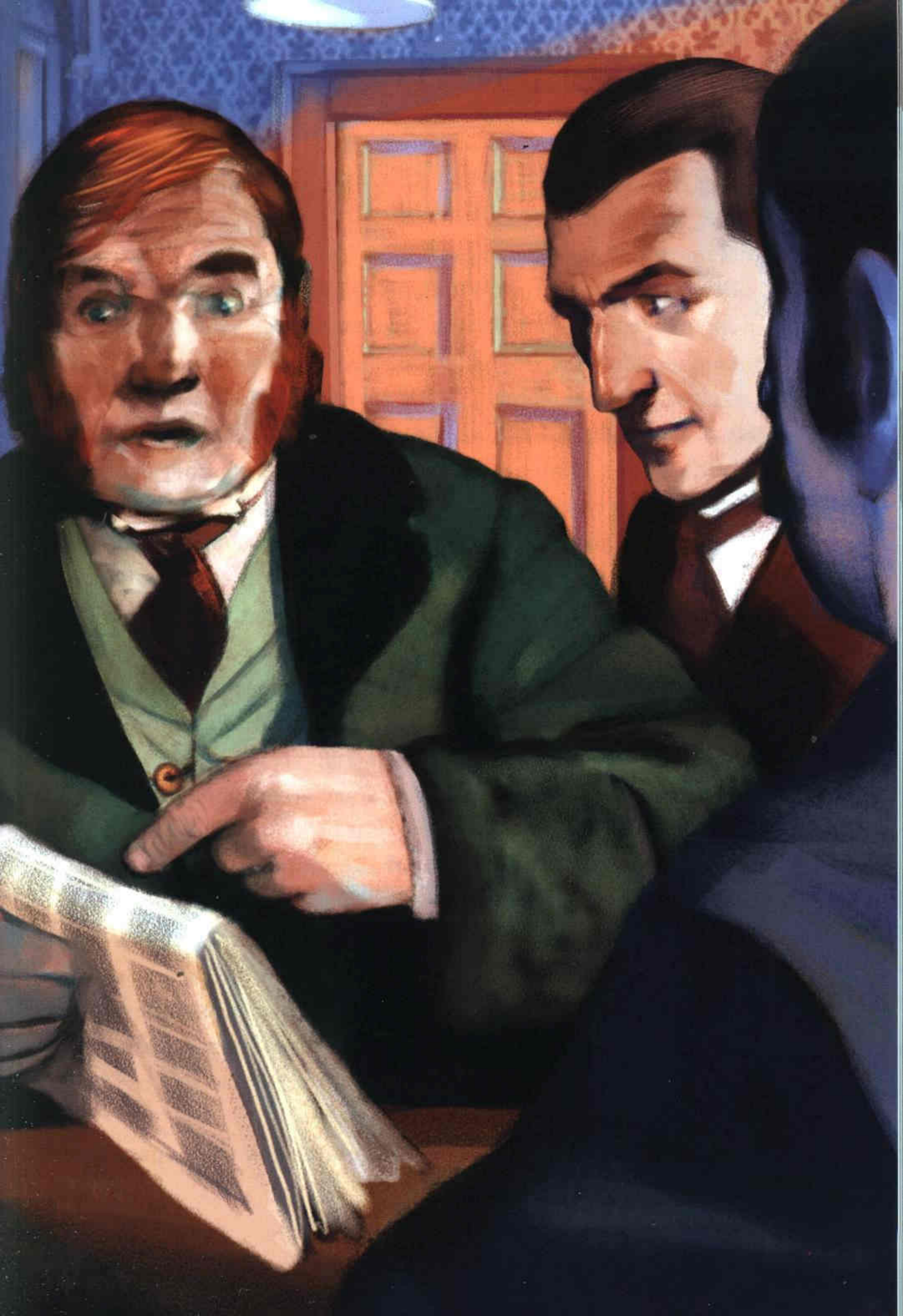
Holmes looked at me and said, 'Sometimes I think that it's better *not* to explain my methods, dear Watson.'

He turned to Mr Wilson and said, 'Did you find the advertisement?'

'Yes, here it is,' he said, pointing to it with his big, red finger. It was an advertisement in the *Morning Chronicle* of two months before.











# The Red-Headed League

## THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE.

Man needed for new job at League.

Pay: four pounds/week. Work: office-based.

Job only open to people with red hair. Come to Red-Headed League offices, 7 Pope's Court, Fleet Street, London at 11 o'clock, Monday morning. DUNCAN ROSS

'What does it mean?' I said, after reading this strange advertisement twice.

Holmes laughed happily. 'It's very unusual, Watson, isn't it? And now, Mr Wilson, please tell us everything about yourself, your home, your work and this Red-Headed League.'

'Well, I have a shop below my house at Saxe-Coburg Square in London. It isn't a very big business and I don't make much money now. I only have one assistant in the shop. Luckily he wants to learn the business, so he accepts half pay.'

'What is your young assistant's name?' asked Holmes.

'His name is Vincent Spaulding, but he's not very young. He's an excellent worker and he can make more money in another shop, but he's happy with me.'

'It's unusual to have an *excellent* assistant,' said Holmes. 'Tell me more about him.'

'Spaulding loves photography and spends a lot of time in the cellar<sup>1</sup> developing his pictures. He's sometimes in there for hours! But he's a very good worker.'

'Are there any servants in your home?'

'There's a young girl. She cooks and cleans the house. She,

1. **cellar** : a room below a building, under the ground.



## Mr Jabez Wilson

Spaulding and I are the only people in the house. My wife is dead and I have no children.

'About two months ago Spaulding came into my office with this newspaper in his hand and said, "I'm sorry my hair isn't red!"

'I asked him why and he said, "Well, with red hair I can get an easy job and make a lot of money. Look at this advertisement! The Red-Headed League is a club for men with red hair and it's offering a job to men with red hair. You should apply for the job — you have bright red hair!"

'I asked him, "What's the pay?"

'He said, "Four pounds a week, and you can easily continue working here."

'Well, Mr Holmes, two hundred pounds a year is very useful to me. So I asked Spaulding for more information. He showed me the advertisement and said, "I've heard that the club's money came from a rich American, Ezekiah Hopkins. He was a strange man with red hair. He died and left all of his money to the Red-Headed League. The money is used to give easy jobs to men with red hair."

"But thousands of men have red hair!" I said. "I can never get the job."

"No, Mr Wilson," said Spaulding. "The Red-Headed League gives jobs only to people from London. Ezekiah Hopkins was born in London and he loved this city. Also, only men with *bright* red hair can get these jobs. The club doesn't accept men with dark red hair or light red hair. You can get the job easily!"

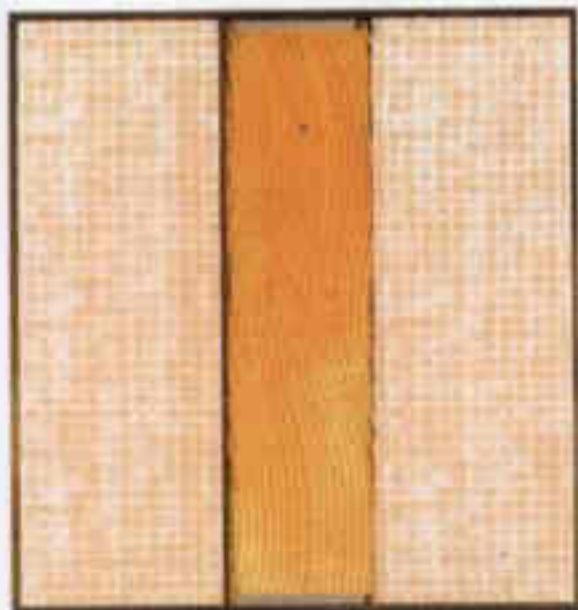


A



## CHAPTER TWO

# An unusual job



decided to ask Spaulding to come with me to the Red-Headed League's offices,' said Mr Wilson. 'I closed the shop for the day and we went to Fleet Street. Spaulding was happy to have a holiday.

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'Fleet Street was full of red-haired men, and Pope's Court looked like a basket of oranges. But few men had bright red hair like mine. Spaulding pushed through all the people and we got to the office. There was little furniture — two uncomfortable chairs, a kitchen table and a bookcase. A small man with bright red hair sat at the table and spoke to lots of red-headed men. He said "No" to all of them, and then he talked to me. He was friendly and closed the door of the office behind us.

"This is Mr Jabez Wilson," said my assistant, "and he would like the job in the League."

"His hair looks fine," the man said, "but is it real? We must be careful!"



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'He suddenly took my hair in his hands and pulled it. I cried out because he hurt me. "You have real tears in your eyes – this means your hair is real. Congratulations – the job is yours!"

'He shook my hand <sup>1</sup> warmly and said, "My name is Duncan Ross and I am the Secretary <sup>2</sup> of the League. When can you begin?"

"Well, I have a business already," I said.

"Oh, don't worry about that, Mr Wilson!" said my assistant. "I can look after the shop for you."

"What are the working hours?" I asked Mr Ross.

"From ten o'clock in the morning until two o'clock in the afternoon."

'You see, Mr Holmes, I do most of my work in the evening. I could easily work for Mr Ross in the morning. And I knew Spaulding could look after the business in the morning.

"Those hours are fine," I said happily. "What must I do?"

"Your job is to copy the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. You must bring your own pen, ink and paper. And you must never leave the office until two o'clock. Can you start tomorrow?"

"Certainly!" I answered.

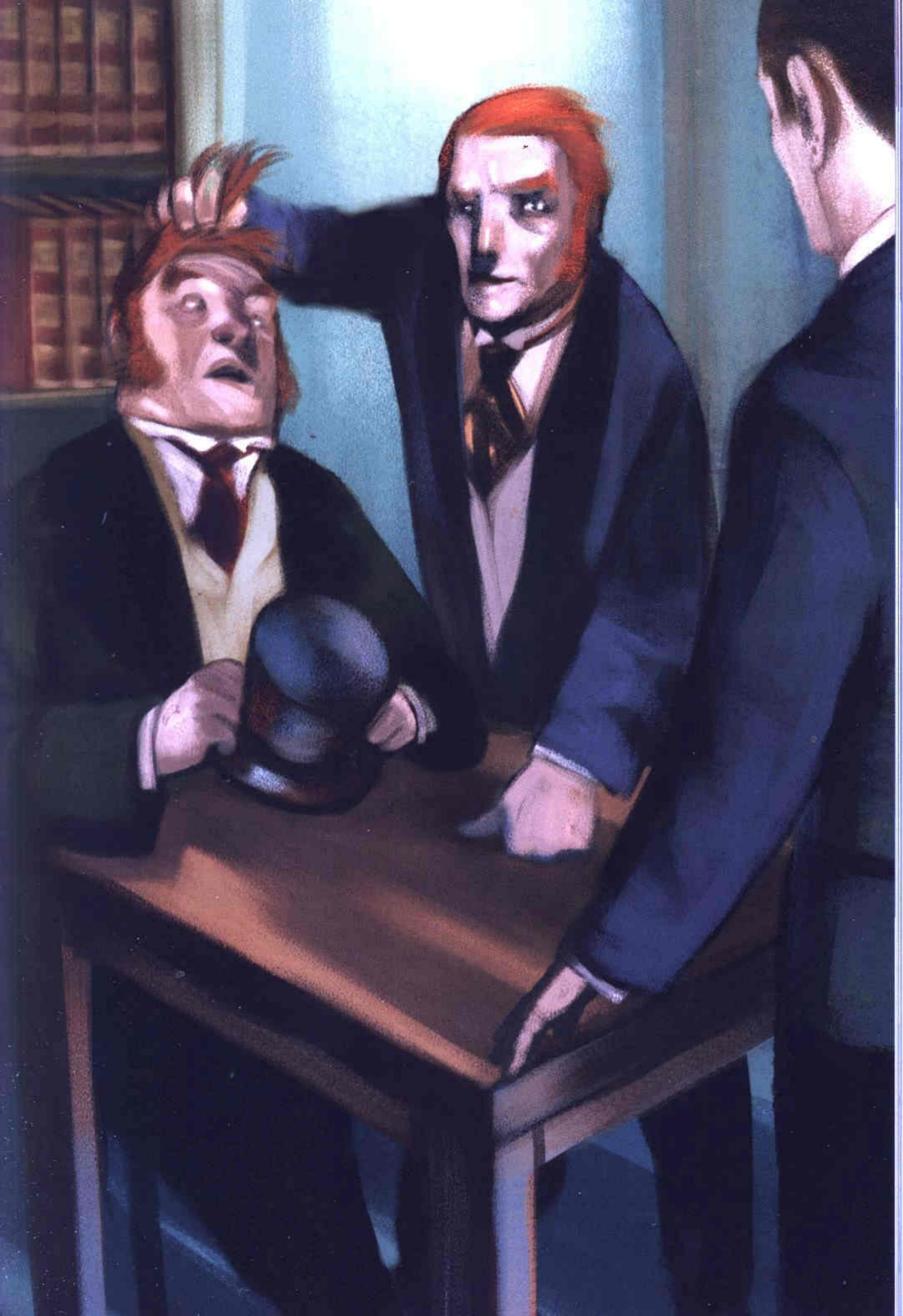
'The next morning I bought some paper and started working at Pope's Court. Mr Ross showed me the beginning of the letter "A" in the encyclopaedia and then he left. Every day I finished work at two o'clock. Each week Mr Ross gave me four pounds in gold. This continued for about eight weeks and I nearly finished copying the letter "A". Then, suddenly, everything ended.'

1. **shook my hand** :



2. **Secretary** : most senior and important member.









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'Ended?' asked Holmes.

'Yes, it happened this morning. I went to work at ten o'clock but the door was locked.<sup>1</sup> There was a notice on the door that said:

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE  
DOES NOT EXIST ANY MORE  
9 October, 1890

Sherlock Holmes and I started laughing.

'I can't see anything funny!' said Mr Wilson angrily. 'If you think this is funny, I'll leave!'

'No, no!' cried Holmes. 'Your case is very unusual, but there is something a bit funny about it. Please, Mr Wilson, continue.'

'I asked the people in the building but no one knew about Mr Duncan Ross or the Red-Headed League. I was angry and confused.'

'What did you do then?' asked Holmes.

'I went home to Saxe-Coburg Square and told Spaulding. He was surprised and did not know what to say. So I decided to come to you, Mr Holmes, because I don't want to lose four pounds a week!'

'This is possibly a very serious case,' said Holmes.

'Of course it's a serious case, I'm losing four pounds a week!'

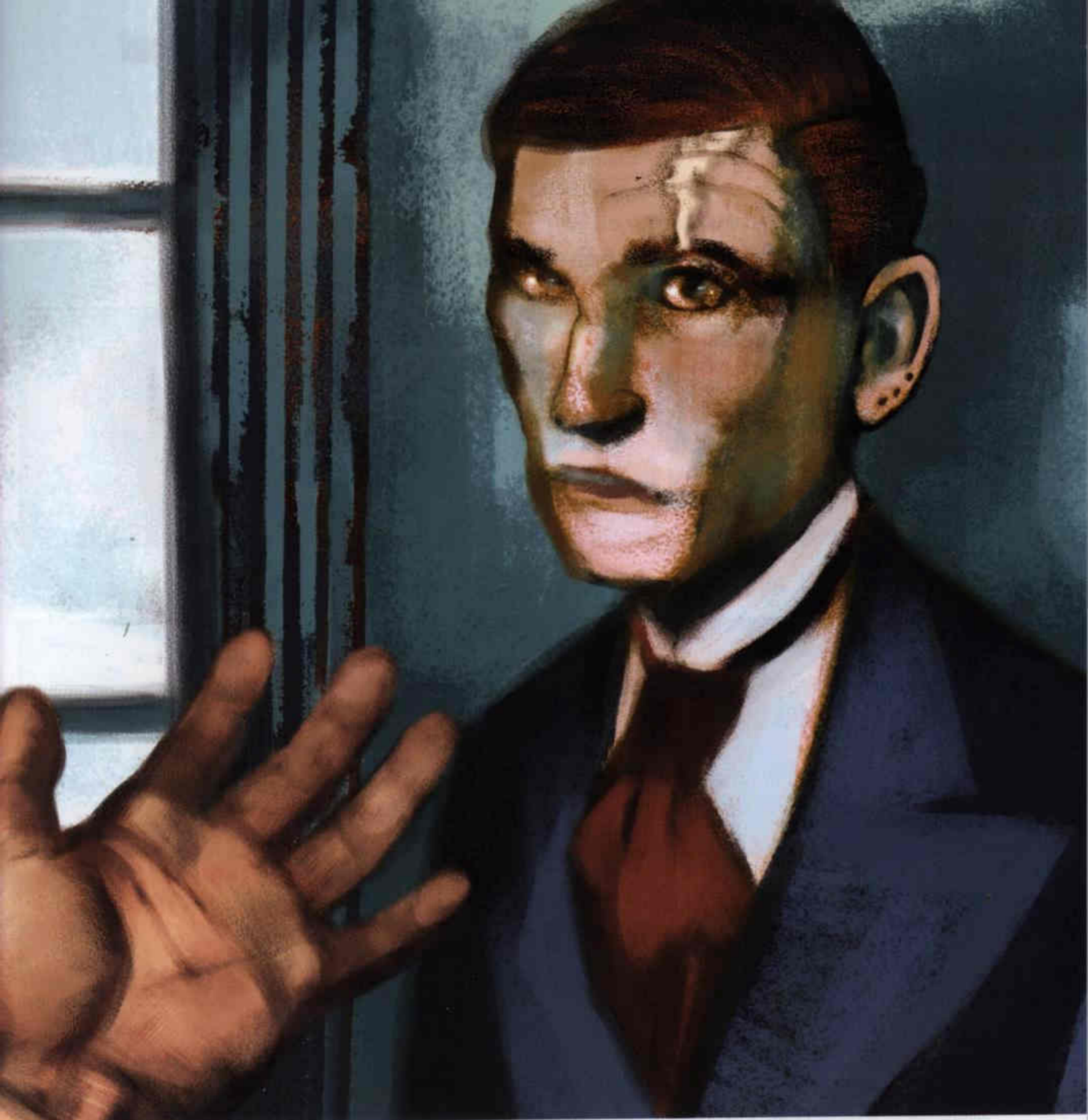
'You can't be too angry, Mr Wilson, the League paid you thirty-two pounds for eight weeks' work. And you learnt many things about the letter "A" in the encyclopaedia. Now, I'd like to ask you some questions. When did Vincent Spaulding start working for you?'

'About three months ago.'

'What is he like?'

1. **locked** : closed with a key.





‘He’s small but not thin, and he moves quickly. He’s about thirty years old and has a white mark just above his eyes.’

Holmes was suddenly excited.

‘A white mark!’ he cried. ‘And does he have little holes in his ears for earrings?’

‘Yes, he does.’

‘Hmmm,’ said Holmes, sitting back in his chair. ‘Well, Mr Wilson, I want to think about this case. Today is Saturday — on Monday I’ll have an answer.’



## CHAPTER THREE

# Mr Wilson's shop



Well, Watson,' said Holmes when our visitor left, 'what do you think of this strange case?'

'I don't know, Holmes. It's very mysterious and confusing.'

'Yes, I agree,' replied Holmes. 'I must work hard on this case.'

'What are you going to do?'

'I'm going to smoke my pipe. Please don't speak to me for fifty minutes.' Holmes sat down in his chair, closed his eyes and started smoking his old black pipe.


'Holmes is probably sleeping,' I thought. But then he suddenly jumped up and put his pipe down on the table.

'There is a concert of classical music at St James's Hall this afternoon,' Holmes said. 'Let's go and listen!'

'Yes, I'm free today,' I replied.







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‘Good! Put on your hat and come. I want to have some lunch first.’

We went to see Saxe-Coburg Square — it was quite poor and ugly. There was some grass in the middle of the square and old houses around it. One of them had a shop window and shop door, as well as a house door. Outside the shop we saw a sign with the





## Mr Wilson's shop

name JABEZ WILSON painted in big white letters. This was Mr Wilson's shop.

Holmes stopped and looked at the shop for a moment. Then he stood in front of the shop, and hit the large stones of the street with his walking stick.<sup>1</sup> Finally he knocked on the shop door.

1. walking stick :





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A young man opened the door immediately.

'Can you tell me the way to the Strand?'<sup>1</sup> asked Holmes.

'Third right, fourth left,' answered the assistant quickly.

'A very clever man!' said Holmes, as we walked away.

'Do you know him?' I asked.

'No, but I looked at the knees of his trousers.'

'And what did you see?'

'What I expected to see.'

'And why did you hit the stones of the street?'

'My dear doctor, this is a time for looking, not for talking. Let's go and look at the street behind the square.'

We left the square and we were soon in one of the noisiest streets in London. We saw a bakery, a newspaper shop, a restaurant and an office of the City and Suburban Bank.

'We did our work well, Watson,' said Holmes. 'Now let's have some lunch, and then go to the concert.' Holmes was a very good musician and he loved concerts.

After the concert he said, 'Do you want to go home now, Watson?'

'Yes, I do, Holmes.'

'I have many things to do,' he said. 'This case at Saxe-Coburg Square is serious. Someone is planning a serious crime, but I think we can stop it. Let's meet tonight.'

'At what time?'

'At ten o'clock.'

'I'll be at Baker Street at ten.'

'Good! There will possibly be danger tonight so bring your gun.' He waved his hand and walked off.

1. **the Strand** : a famous street in central London.



## Mr Wilson's shop

I was quite confused about this case but Holmes, of course, was not. I saw and I heard exactly the same things as Holmes saw and heard, but he seemed to understand everything – and I understood nothing. I thought about it for a long time but everything was still a mystery to me.

When I arrived at ten o'clock, there were two carriages<sup>1</sup> outside the door at Baker Street. Two visitors were there too: a policeman called Peter Jones, and a tall, thin man with a sad face and dark clothes.

'Watson, I think you know Mr Jones? Let me introduce you to Mr Merryweather, the director of the City and Suburban Bank. He is going to be part of our adventure tonight.'

'I hope you're right, Mr Holmes,' said Mr Merryweather, 'because I didn't go to my usual card game with my friends this evening. And I have *never* missed my card game in thirty-seven years!

'I think this will be an exciting night, Mr Merryweather,' said Holmes. 'You are going to save thirty thousand pounds. And you, Jones, are going to catch a terrible criminal.'

'John Clay, the murderer and bank robber!'<sup>2</sup> exclaimed Jones. 'He's young but he's the cleverest and most dangerous criminal in England. His grandfather was a king's brother, and he is an Oxford University man.'

'It's time to go now,' said Holmes looking at his watch. 'Mr Merryweather, please go with Mr Jones in the first carriage, and Watson and I will follow you in the second one.'

1. carriages :



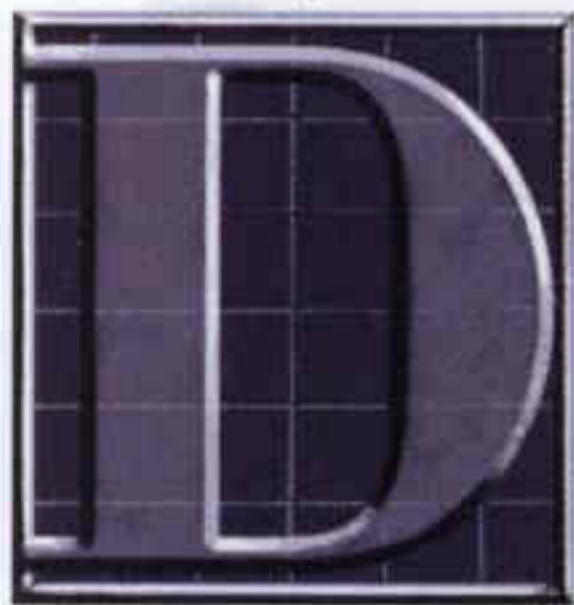
2. bank robber : a person who steals money from banks.





## CHAPTER FOUR

# The cellar



during the journey, Holmes spoke very little but he sang some of the music from the concert that afternoon. Finally the two carriages arrived at the City and Suburban Bank in the main street near Saxe-Coburg Square. Mr Merryweather took his keys and opened a side door of the bank. We went through many doors and dark corridors. Then he took a lamp and we went to a big cellar. There was a strong smell of earth and there were a lot of big boxes on the cellar floor.



‘The ceiling looks strong,’ said Holmes, holding up the lamp.

‘The floor is strong too,’ said Merryweather, hitting it with his stick. ‘Oh dear, it sounds empty!’

‘Please speak quietly!’ said Holmes. ‘The thieves must not hear us! Please sit down on one of those boxes and don’t say or do anything.’





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Mr Merryweather sat down silently. Holmes put the lamp on the floor and took out a magnifying glass from his pocket. He carefully looked at the cracks between the large stones of the floor.

'We probably have one more hour,' said Holmes. 'The thieves can't do anything until Mr Wilson is in bed. Then they'll work very quickly. Well, Watson, I'm sure you understand that we're in the cellar of one of London's biggest banks. Mr Merryweather is the director of the bank and he'll explain the situation to you.'

'You see, Dr Watson, it's our French gold,' the director said very quietly. 'Inside these big boxes there are thirty thousand pounds in gold coins! That is why the worst criminals are interested in this cellar.'

'Gentlemen, now we must wait in the dark,' said Holmes, turning off the lamp. Suddenly everything was black.

'They will soon be here,' he continued, 'so we must hide behind the boxes. When they come we must be ready to act quickly. These are dangerous men. If they shoot at us, Watson, you must shoot at them.'

I put my gun on top of a box and I was ready to shoot.

'There is only one way for them to escape,' Holmes continued, 'through Wilson's house and into Saxe-Coburg Square. Did you do what I asked, Jones?'

'Yes, Mr Holmes. Three policemen are waiting outside Mr Wilson's house,' said Jones.

'Very good! Now we must be silent and wait,' said Holmes.

We waited for an hour and a quarter but in the dark it seemed much longer. My legs and arms were tired. Suddenly I saw some light through the cracks in the floor. Someone pushed up a big









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stone and a white hand appeared. The light became brighter and a face appeared. It was Mr Wilson's assistant. The young man looked around and then climbed up into the cellar. He helped another man to climb out of the hole. Both men were small and the other man had bright red hair.





## The cellar

Holmes ran forward and caught Mr Wilson's assistant.

'Jump down the hole again, Archie!' cried the assistant.

The other man climbed down quickly. Mr Wilson's assistant had a gun in his hand, but Holmes hit it to the floor with his stick.







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'You don't have a chance, John Clay,' said Holmes.

'I know, but my friend escaped.'

'There are three policemen waiting for your friend outside Mr Wilson's house,' said Holmes smiling.

'Oh, really!' John Clay answered calmly. 'You did everything perfectly. Well done, Mr Holmes.'

'Well done to you!' Holmes answered. 'Your idea of the Red-Headed League was new and unusual!'

'Give me your hands,' said Jones to Clay. 'I am going to put handcuffs on you now.'

'Don't touch me with your dirty hands!' cried Clay. 'I am the grandson of a king's brother. You must say "sir" and "please" to me.'

'All right, *sir*,' said Jones, smiling. '*Please* come upstairs with me, *sir*. We can call a carriage, *sir*, and take you to the police station.'

'That's better,' said Clay. He smiled to the three of us and walked away quietly with Jones.

'I don't know how to thank you, Mr Holmes!' said Mr Merryweather. 'This was certainly an exciting night. You stopped one of the biggest bank robberies in history.'

'This was a very interesting case, and I enjoyed it,' said Holmes.

In the early hours of the morning, Holmes and I returned to Baker Street.

'You see, Watson,' Holmes said, drinking his cup of tea, 'the reason for the Red-Headed League was very simple: Clay and his



friend Duncan Ross wanted to get Mr Wilson away from his shop for several hours every day.'

'But how did you know that they were planning a bank robbery?' I asked.

'Well, Watson, I thought of the assistant's hobby: photography. We knew that the young man spent a lot of time in the cellar developing his pictures. Mr Wilson described Vincent Spaulding to me, and I knew immediately that he was John Clay, the famous bank robber. Clay was doing something in Mr Wilson's cellar — he was in the cellar for several hours a day for many weeks. And what was he doing? He was digging a tunnel to another building.

'You were surprised when I hit the stones in Saxe-Coburg Square with my stick. Well, I wanted to know if the tunnel was in front of the house or behind it.

'Then I rang the bell. I didn't go into the shop, because I only wanted to see Spaulding's trousers. The knees of his trousers were dirty with brown earth.

'When I discovered that the City and Suburban Bank was behind Mr Wilson's house, I suddenly understood everything!'

'But how did you know that the robbery was tonight?' I asked him.

'My dear Watson, they closed the League office because they weren't interested in Mr Wilson's work any more. So I knew the tunnel was finished and they had to use it soon. Saturday night was the best time for them because no one could discover the robbery until Monday morning. So I *knew* the robbery was tonight.'

'You solved this mysterious case beautifully, Holmes,' I said.

'Thank you, Watson. Well, at least this case wasn't boring!'