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Short Story

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

“The Red-Headed League”

Core Classics

2001

pp. 45-86

Sherlock Holmes and his sidekick Watson face one of their most interesting cases in this short story titled, “The Red-Headed League.” Holmes has to stop two crooks from robbing a London bank before the bad guys can get away with a fortune in gold. A man named Wilson sets the investigation in motion when he tells Holmes the weird story of the Red-Headed League. In the end, Holmes, with the help of Watson, the bank manager, and an officer from Scotland Yard, arrests the crooks as the exit from the tunnel they dug into the bank. Holmes celebrates catching one of his most-challenging adversaries.

Mystery stories, like other stories, include themes. In “The Red-Headed League,” one of the main themes is trickery, and another is the idea that crime doesn’t pay. One definition of trickery is fooling someone by lying, cheating, or misleading him or her into thinking something is real or true when it is not. This form of trickery occurs numerous times in this story. For example, Spaulding misleads Wilson into thinking that he is

developing film in the basement when he is really digging a tunnel to the bank. The other theme that can be found in this story is that crime doesn't pay. People like to know that the bad guys will get caught and punished. That's why the character of Holmes was so popular. This story is no different. Though Clay is an intelligent and resourceful crook who has eluded justice for many years, Holmes does catch him and the gold remains safely in the bank. The themes of trickery and crime doesn't pay are important elements of this short story.

I liked this short story because it was intriguing and exciting, and I especially enjoyed how Holmes used his own ability to trick the crooks in order to catch them. However, I connected most with the character of Wilson. I too have been the victim of trickery; I've had people pretend to be my friend, but they did not really want to be. They wanted something I had or that I could do for them. These experiences hurt my feelings and made me angry, so I felt sympathy for Wilson, who was a good guy that simply wanted to make some extra money so he could take care of his family. He went to work every day for Spaulding, worked hard, and all the while imagined that he would continue to make more money. Of course, Spaulding and his partner took advantage of Wilson in order to execute their plan to rob the bank. While I enjoyed many elements of this story, I connected the most with the character of Wilson.