

The Hardy Boys Mystery Stories®

**MYSTERY
OF THE
WHALE TATTOO**

BY

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

GROSSET & DUNLAP
Publishers • New York
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MYSTERY OF THE WHALE TATTOO

ONE exciting event follows another when Frank and Joe Hardy are hired to apprehend the pickpocket who have been plaguing Solo's Super Carnival. When their friends Tony Prito and Biff Hooper exhibit a stuffed whale dug up at a construction project, they all but put the carnival out of business.

Other unforeseen problems ensue when the teen-age sleuths become involved in their father's late case. Fenton Hardy is tracking down a priceless ivory idol stolen from a Hong Kong *art collector*. A postcard clue found at the carnival leads Frank and Joe and their buddy Chet *Morton to the historic seaport town* of Mystic in Connecticut, to a seaman's home in New York City, to a stunning discovery in Los Angeles.

In this thrilling mystery the young detectives pit their wits against a gang of thieves whose bizarre identification, a three-part whale tattoo, proves to be a nearly insolvable riddle.



“Frank!” Joe gasped. “We’ll never make it with the statue!”

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CHAPTER I

Hey Rube!

JOE Hardy studied the photograph in his hand and frowned, then burst out laughing.

“What a weirdo!” exclaimed the blond seventeen-year-old boy. “Take a look at him, Frank!”

He gave the snapshot to his dark-haired brother, who was eighteen. Both boys, sons of Fenton Hardy, the famous private detective, had hurried into the living room at the call of their Aunt Gertrude. She had just opened an envelope which contained the snapshot and a letter.

Frank gazed at the man in the picture. His head was topped with a shock of light-colored hair, and his cheeks and chin were hidden beneath a full, flowing beard.

“Sure is a freak,” Frank commented.

“That’s not the way to talk about a relative, especially when he’s coming to visit,” Aunt Gertrude said sternly, trying to hide a smile.

She was a tall, sharp-featured woman who wore metal-rimmed spectacles. Her prim visage was deceptive, though, for beneath her forbidding appearance she was really one of the kindest persons one could ever hope to meet.

“A relative?” Joe burst out. “You’re kidding!”

“I am not! That’s Elmer Hardy, a second cousin to your father and me,” their aunt corrected. “To bad Fenton’s not at home,” she added.

Mr. Hardy was on a tricky undercover assignment in New York City, where as a young man he had achieved an enviable record on the police force. That was before he had come to Bayport to start his own detective agency. Now Frank and Joe were following in their father’s footsteps as astute young sleuths.

The news about Elmer Hardy’s proposed visit stirred their curiosity.

“How come we’ve never heard of him?” Joe asked.

“Well, you see nobody in the family has set eyes on him for thirty years,” Aunt Gertrude explained. “ever since the day he ran away to sea. Elmer always was a bit of a wild one.”

Frank shook his head. “Thirty years is a long time to go without hearing from someone.”



“A relative?” Joe burst out. “You’re kidding!”

“Oh, we’ve exchanged a few letters over the years. Right from the start he’s had a standing invitation to come and visit us, and that’s just what he’s going to do.”

“Great!” Joe said. “I’ll bet he can tell some terrific sea tales.”

Aunt Gertrude consulted Elmer Hardy’s letter. “He’ll be arriving in about two weeks, perhaps sooner if he can manage it.”

“May I keep the picture a while, so I can show it to Chet?” Joe asked.

“Yes,” Aunt Gertrude said. “But mind now, you boys get all that laughing out of your system before Elmer arrives.” She wagged a finger at them to emphasize her point.

“Yes, ma’am!” Frank and Joe grinned.

The telephone rang. Frank picked it up. “Hello?” His eyes widened. “Just a second, Dad.” He put his hand over the mouthpiece. “Joe, Dad’s run into some problems. Get on the extension in his study.”

Frank waited while his brother raced up the stairs to the second floor. It was highly unusual for Mr. Hardy to contact his family while working undercover and both boys were on the alert.

Joe picked up the extension. “Okay, Dad, go ahead.”

“I’ll try to make this brief,” Mr. Hardy told his sons. “I want you to find someone for me, if it’s all possible. I’ll give you the background so listen carefully.”

“All right. Shoot!” Joe said.

Fenton Hardy explained that his quest was for a life-sized statue known as the “Ivory Idol,” carved in the shape of a six-armed deity during the Ming dynasty. Ten years ago a gang of merchant sailors had stolen the Ivory Idol from the internationally famous Dudley-Harris collection in Hong Kong.

“There were reliable reports,” Mr. Hardy said, “that the statue arrived in the United States a few months after its theft, but the police failed to turn up the slightest trace of it.”

Frank and Joe jotted down the pertinent bits of information in pocket-sized notebooks, as the father went on, “One month ago R. R. Dunn, the famous New York art collector, received a note saying he could purchase the Ivory Idol for his private collection.”

“Wow! So it turned up!” Joe exclaimed.

“Not quite yet. The price is fifty thousand dollars, and the thieves are asking a ten-thousand-dollar advance to cover their ‘expenses.’ ”

“Who sent the note?” Frank asked.

“It’s signed *Blackright*, nothing more,” Mr. Hardy answered.

The detective went on to say that R. R. Dunn, as an honest collector, had notified Mr. Dudley-Harris immediately. The latter called the police and also engaged the services of Mr. Hardy.

“Any clues so far?” Joe inquired impatiently.

“Yes. An informer contacted the police last night and said that he knew something about Blackright. But the price he asked for his information was too high. Furthermore, he wanted a huge reward. Blackright was apprehended.”

“Quite a wheeler-dealer!” said Frank.

There was a slight pause, then Mr. Hardy continued earnestly. “Now here’s the crux of the matter. That phone call was traced to Bayport.”

“What?” Joe exclaimed.

“Yes. To be precise, from a phone booth in the north quadrant of the fairgrounds. I want you boys to stake out the place.”

“That’s going to be a little rough,” Frank said. “Solo’s Super Carnival came to town yesterday and set up at the fairgrounds. They’re opening tonight. No telling how many people have used that particular phone.”

“Oh? I see,” Mr. Hardy said. “Perhaps the man we want is connected with the carnival.”

Frank and Joe tingled with excitement. They had often helped their father on important cases and had gained some renown with their clever solutions.

The Tower Treasure was their first successful case, and not long ago they had solved the mystery *The Secret Agent on Flight 101*.

“Dad, we’ll go to the fairgrounds right away,” Joe said.

“But wait. I have a word of advice,” Mr. Hardy said seriously. “This may be a dangerous gang with a lot at stake. Take no unnecessary chances.”

“We’ll watch ourselves,” Frank assured his father and they hung up.

Joe came downstairs to join his brother in studying their notes. They were still discussing the mystery half an hour later, when the doorbell rang. Frank rose, but Mrs. Hardy passed the living-room entrance on the way to the front door and motioned for him to sit down.

The boys heard the voice of a man and the name Solo and were out of their chairs in an instant and on the way into the foyer. Solo was a tall man with ruddy cheeks and good-humored eyes.

After Mrs. Hardy introduced her sons, Sid Solo said, “I sure am sorry Mr. Hardy’s out of town. We’ve been plagued with pickpockets in the last six towns we’ve played. Bad for business, keeps the customers away. I thought if I hired Mr. Hardy—well, what with his reputation and all—those pickpockets would skedaddle pretty quick.”

Frank winked at Joe, then said, “Mr. Solo, perhaps my brother and I can help you.”

The carnival man beamed. “Why, I’d consider that a personal favor. I’ve heard of some of your exploits and I’ll lay two-to-one odds that those cheap crooks won’t be any happier with Fenton Hardy’s sons on the job than they would be with your dad.”

Solo hired the boys on the spot, told them he opened daily at three in the afternoon, and then left.

As soon as they had finished supper, Frank and Joe hurried out to their convertible and were on the way to Solo’s Super Carnival. Frank was at the wheel.

“It’s perfect,” he said as they sped down the highway. “We can kill two birds with one stone—get rid of Mr. Solo’s pickpockets and search for our mystery informer at the same time.”

At the fairgrounds they parked in one of the spacious lots, with scores of other cars. As they walked toward the carnival, the voices of pitch-men could be heard shouting above the noise of a merry-go-round calliope. Delighted shrieks from riders on the roller coaster added to the buoyant feeling of the carnival. Frank and Joe strode briskly to one of the side gates, where there were not many patrons.

The ticket taker was a large, burly youth only a few years older than the Hardys.

Frank smiled. “We’re the Hardys. Mr. Solo is expecting us.”

Joe took a step toward the entrance, but the sullen-faced attendant blocked the way. “You’re the Hardys! So what? You gotta buy a ticket!”

Frank explained their mission as sleuths, but the fellow kept shaking his head. “Get lost!”

Frank grew impatient. “I’ll leave my brother here,” he said. “But I’m going to find Mr. Solo, bring

him back, and get things straightened out.” He started past the booth.

The big ticket taker grabbed Frank roughly around the neck and threw him to the ground. Then he was poised for a kick.

“Watch it, Frank!” Joe yelled and tackled the bully, bringing him to the ground with a thud.

With a curse, the ticket taker lunged to his feet and rained hammerlike blows upon Joe. At the same time, he threw back his head and bellowed, “Hey Rube!”

The traditional carnival trouble call sounded over the fairgrounds.

“Hey Rube!” he *shouted* again.

CHAPTER II

Whale of a Discovery

JOE's assailant paused only a split second, but it was time enough for the Hardy boy to land a roundhouse blow to the solar plexus of his opponent. The burly youth dropped face first, just at the moment when angry shouts filled the air. Joe glanced around to see a group of tough-looking roustabouts bearing down on them.

"Oh, oh, Frank. Here comes trouble."

"We'll try to talk our way out," his brother replied.

"There they are!" cried the leader of the carnival laborers. "They kayoed Knocker Felsen. Let's get 'em, boys!"

Frank and Joe stood shoulder to shoulder, braced to meet the charge. "Wait a minute!" Frank yelled.

"They're not going to listen," Joe said. "We're in for it now."

The carnival men had almost reached the boys, fists poised and eyes flashing, when an authoritative voice shouted, "Hold it! I'm Police Chief Collig, and I'll arrest the first one who throws a punch!"

The carnies hesitated and looked at one another uncertainly. Then, realizing that the chief's threat was not an idle one, they unclenched their fists and began to mill about. The men muttered angrily among themselves and cast sour glances at Frank and Joe.

"Wow!" said Joe when the police chief appeared at their side. "Are we glad to see you!"

"I can understand that," Chief Collig said. "It's a rough bunch. I'd like to know what's going on here."

Frank and Joe told him. By the time they finished their story, Knocker Felsen had regained his feet. Chief Collig vouched for the Hardys, but the carny leader was hard to convince. He looked dubious at Frank and Joe.

"Well, if Mr. Solo hired them," he said finally, "and if you say they really are detectives, then I guess it's all right." He looked embarrassed. "Sorry about the trouble, fellows."

Frank and Joe accepted his apology. Knocker Felsen, however, with one hand pressed to the pit of his stomach, sulked away a few steps, grumbling.

"Let's shake and forget it," Frank said, but Knocker refused the offer and marched back to his ticket booth.

"He's a real sorehead," Joe observed.

Chief Collig nodded. "I'd be a little careful of him."

The Hardys thanked the officer and wandered into the already crowded avenues of the carnival

begin their double duties. Near the merry-go-round Joe spotted a familiar figure.

“Hey, Chet!” he called.

Their best friend swiveled his ample frame around and trotted over to their side. His round, freckled face was attentive as Frank and Joe told him about the call from their father and about Sid Solo.

“How would you like to give us a hand, Chet?” Frank asked.

Chet Morton considered the offer silently. The husky boy was fond of fun and strongly opposed to hard work. He had no great taste for danger and usually backed away from it. But when Frank and Joe were in a tight spot, Chet always pitched in to help.

Finally he replied with a big smile, “Sure. This is the kind of detective work I like—observation and investigation. Everything from a distance.”

The three laughed and sauntered down the carnival’s midway, their eyes searching for suspicious characters. As they walked, Chet told them of his latest hobby—scrimshaw. He was constantly discovering new hobbies and sports, plunging enthusiastically into each one. But after a few weeks his interest would wane.

Now it was scrimshaw—the art of polishing whale teeth and walrus tusks, then carving a picture or a design into the ivory. Frank and Joe were somewhat familiar with this art. They owned a walrus-tusk cribbage board, decorated by an Alaskan Eskimo.

“Scrimshaw really is the greatest,” Chet bubbled. “Why, did you know that old-time sailors would spend as long as six months carving one single sperm whale tooth? And it’s no wonder! Those fellows spent an average of three years on each whaling trip.”

Chet explained how the ivory was softened by a soaking in brine, how its roughness was removed with a rasp, and later how it was polished with pumice and finally rubbed to a gloss with the palm of the hand.

“But, Chet,” said Frank, “are you sure you have the patience?”

His friend was not listening. “The carving itself,” he went on, “was done with sail needles and jackknives. Once the design had been etched on, they used India ink to stain the lines. Of course today some people use power tools, but that’s not for me. No sir! I’ll do it by hand.”

“We’ve got a new hobby, too,” Joe said. “Collecting lost relatives.”

“What do you mean?” Chet asked, stopping beneath the platform on which Boko the Clown was doing a unicycle routine.

“Look at this!” Joe showed him the picture of Elmer Hardy and told of the impending visit. Chet chuckled over Elmer’s picture and expressed the hope that the old seaman could teach him a few more things about scrimshaw.

Suddenly a hoarse cough sounded above the boys’ heads. They looked up to Boko peering down at the photograph of Elmer Hardy.

“Excuse me, fellows,” Boko said. “I just finished my act and I’m on my way off the platform.”

The boys stepped aside. Boko leaped to the ground and disappeared around the corner of the canopy facade.

“I think,” Frank said, “that this would be as good a time as any to start asking some questions.”

Joe and Chet agreed, and Frank led the way around the corner in the direction Boko had taken. They found the clown drinking coffee in a small private resting place for the performers. He had taken off his dunce cap, but was still wearing his baggy polka-dot suit, his floppy shoes, and his red-and-white grease paint.

With him was Rembrandt the Tattooed Man. Rembrandt, wearing only bathing trunks, was covered from head to foot with multicolored tattoos of every imaginable kind. Included was a scene depicting whalers closing in on a huge sperm whale whose giant, blunt head rose far above the waves. This artistic gem covered Rembrandt’s entire chest.

The boys introduced themselves. Rembrandt and Boko were friendly enough until Frank deftly turned the conversation to a criminal named Blackright and an unknown man who wanted to see information about Blackright. Then Boko and Rembrandt grew distant. Their answers became curt.

Finally Boko said, “Look, you guys. We never heard of nobody named Blackright. We don’t know nothin’ about it. Now, why don’t you leave us alone so we can take it easy a while? We got to go back on stage in a few minutes.”

On the midway again, Joe shook his head. “It’s possible,” he said, “that they’re telling the truth.”

Frank looked dubious. “Carnival performers work hard and they need their coffee breaks,” he said. “But their change of attitude was a bit too sudden for my taste.”

Chet agreed with Frank, and the boys decided that Boko and Rembrandt definitely warranted further attention. Earlier, Chet had promised to meet his sister Iola and her friend Callie at the Venus Rocker Express. That was fine with the Hardys. Joe regarded vivacious, dark-haired Iola Morton as his regular date. Slender, blond, lithe-some Callie Shaw was Frank’s favorite partner.

“Hi, Joe!” Iola cried gaily when the boys reached the roller coaster. “Are you and Frank going to take us up?” She cast a sidelong glance at her brother. “Chet wasn’t at all happy with the idea.”

“Aw, lay off!” Chet replied. “You know what that does to my stomach.”

It was agreed that Frank and Joe would take the girls on the ride and that Chet would maintain the lookout for pickpockets while they were gone. The two couples hurried to the ticket booth, climbed into a red-and-green car, and started up a long incline. There was a breathless moment’s hesitation at the peak; then a dizzying plunge down the steep drop that made the girls scream as the wind whipped their hair about. Iola and Callie clutched Frank and Joe for protection and hung on tightly until the coaster came to a stop.

The four young people emerged with bright eyes and happy expressions.

“Oh, oh,” Frank said. “Look over by the shooting gallery, just behind Chet.”

Their buddy was shadowing a seedy-looking man, watching his every move. Behind the stout sleazebag was a clean-cut fellow in slacks and a sports jacket, whose appearance would have aroused no one’s suspicion. As they watched, however, this man’s hand removed a wallet from the back pocket of the short, balding onlooker beside him. The victim felt the touch and whirled around. Panicky, the thief slipped the stolen wallet into Chet’s pocket!

“Let’s go!” Frank said. He and Joe rushed to the scene. The irate patron had seized the pickpocket.

who in turn had denied his guilt and accused Chet. Poor Chet was bewildered and confused, especially when a quick search revealed the missing wallet in his possession.

“But listen,” he said, befuddled, “I—I—” A crowd formed and the pickpocket tried to slip away. Frank and Joe grabbed him.

“All right, folks,” Frank said. “Please go about your business. We’re security detectives for Mr. Solo.”

The pickpocket protested his innocence and said that “the fat kid” had stolen the wallet.

“For your information,” Frank told him, “not only is Chet Morton a good friend of ours, but he’s our assistant!”

Frank and Joe each took one of the pickpocket’s arms and they escorted him with firmness to Mr. Solo’s private office. The victim came along to make the identification. Police Chief Collig was called, and after he had heard the story, one of his patrolmen ran the pickpocket out of town with a warning that if he showed up again he would be put behind bars.

Solo walked Frank and Joe back to the spot where they had left Chet with Callie and Iola. The carnival man was in high spirits and heaped praise and congratulations upon the Hardys.

“I knew I’d get results with you two on the job,” he said, clapping them on the shoulders.

Knocker Felsen was standing nearby. Upon hearing the praise he sneered, turned his back, and walked away to show his contempt.

The rest of the evening passed uneventfully. When the crowds thinned out and the carnival began to shut down, the Hardys said good night to Chet.

“So long, fellows,” he replied. “I’m going to stash away a couple of pizzas Mr. Solo promised me.”

Frank and Joe drove Callie and Iola home, then returned to their own house. Their mother was waiting for them with a twinkle in her eyes and a clipping from the evening newspaper in her hand.

“What have you got there, Mom?” Joe asked the slender, pretty woman.

“I think you might call it a whale of a story,” Mrs. Hardy replied brightly. “Look!”

Her sons studied the clipping together. It read:

Earth-moving machines working at the site of the new Bayport shopping center this morning dug up a stuffed Blue Whale. The Blue Whale, largest of all sea-dwelling mammals, grows nearly *one hundred* feet long. The Bayport whale is not that big, however. It had evidently been buried a long time.

“I’m all for *digging up buried treasure*,” Joe said. “Matter of fact, we have several times. But no whales, no sir!”

“How do you suppose a whale ever got to Bayport?” Mrs. Hardy asked.

“Maybe during the ice age,” replied Frank.

“But it was stuffed,” his mother said.

“From overeating,” Joe jested. Suddenly he exclaimed, “Hey! Mr. Prito has the contract for the shopping-center project, doesn’t he?”

“He sure does,” Frank said with a yawn. “Let’s give Tony a call in the morning and ask him how he feels to be captain of the good whaling ship *Bulldozer*.”

The next day after breakfast Frank was dialing Tony’s number when the doorbell rang. Joe hastened through the living room to answer it.

“Frank,” he called from the hall, “hang up. Tony and Biff are here.”

The Hardys’ school friends walked in, grinning. Tony Prito, a good-looking youth with black wavy hair and olive skin, was followed by Biff Hooper. Biff was tall, broad-shouldered, and the most rugged lineman on the Bayport High football team, of which Frank and Joe were star performers.

Tony raised his hands, signifying silence, before either Joe or Frank could get a word out. He took the pose of an orator.

“My friends,” he said somberly, “you are looking at two very high-class entrepreneurs.” He pointed to Biff, then to himself. “We have just purchased one legitimate whale—for a very fair sum, I might add—and we are going to show it to the good citizens of Bayport for fifty cents a look.”

Tony jumped into the air and clicked his heels. “Yahoo! We’re in business!” he exulted.

CHAPTER III

A Staunch Refusal

TONY stopped cavorting and talked seriously. “We bought the whale from the man who owns the property. He said there was nothing in the world he could do with a whale, and so he gave us a good price.”

Biff chimed in, “The old blimp’s in swell condition. It was protected with oilskins. We put in a good day’s work scrubbing it down. Looks as good as new now.”

“My father’s letting us use that vacant lot he owns with a work shack on it,” Tony said. “We spent all last evening putting up a big tarpaulin around our pet. Built a ticket booth, too.”

He looked ruefully at the blisters on his hand. “We thought you Hardys might give us a hand and that all four of us could go into this thing together—be partners and share the profits.”

“We’d like to, Tony,” Frank said with a tinge of regret. “It sounds like a lot of fun. But we have a couple of jobs to do. We’re trying to find someone who’s connected with a case Dad’s working on and at the same time we’ve been hired by Sid Solo to spot pickpockets at the carnival.”

Tony was disappointed. “Well, maybe later. We’d sure like to have you with us.”

Biff glanced at his watch. “Come on, Tony. We have a long day ahead of us.”

As they moved toward the door, Aunt Gertrude entered the room. “Wouldn’t you know it?” she said. “Every time I take a tray of fresh-baked cookies from the oven, our boys’ friends show up!”

Biff grinned. “I see your aunt was up before breakfast.” He turned to Tony. “On second thought, partner, it’s not *that* late.”

The boys followed Aunt Gertrude into the kitchen. “Where’s Chet Morton?” she inquired. “He usually leads the charge when there’s something edible around.”

“The last time we saw him,” Joe said, “he was polishing off pizzas at the carnival.”

Aunt Gertrude stood proudly by while the boys finished their snack. Then Biff and Tony left, amid the best wishes from their pals.

That afternoon Frank and Joe arrived at the carnival to find Sid Solo pacing around, very much upset. “Just look around you,” he said with a wave of his hand.

The Hardys had been walking through the grounds of Solo’s Super Carnival for nearly an hour, and were well aware of the problem. The midways had been overflowing with patrons the night before. Wave after wave of them had surged from tent to tent—from side show to side show. But today there was only a trickle of customers. The few who had come were wandering aimlessly about, looking bored and spending little money.

“I don’t understand it,” Frank said. “Last night you’d have had a hard time keeping ‘em away with artillery.”

“It’s those two fellows—Tony Prito and Biff Hooper!” Solo fumed.

“What have they to do with it?” Joe asked.

“It’s that stupid whale of theirs. People figure they can always see a carnival, but a whale’s a once in a lifetime thing. Prito and Hooper are stealing all my customers!”

Solo smacked a fist into his hand. “Well, I’m not going to sit around and watch my show go bankrupt. Come on! We’re going to pay a call on those guys. I’ll buy their silly whale, and that’ll be the end of that!”

As they walked to Solo’s station wagon, Frank and Joe explained that Biff and Tony were their friends, and really had not intended to take any business away from the carnival.

Grim-faced, Solo did not reply. He beckoned to Knocker Felsen, who was lounging in the shade of a tent, chewing on a long stalk of grass.

“Come along, Knocker!” Solo ordered. Felsen, looking pleased at the prospect of trouble, jumped into the front seat with Solo. The ride was short, and when they approached the lot on which the whale was located, a long queue was waiting to buy tickets.

Biff and Tony were in the shack which they were using as an office. They stepped out to greet the Hardys and the carnival duo.

Solo made his offer. Biff and Tony talked quietly for a moment, then Tony said:

“I’m sorry, Mr. Solo, but we can make more money by showing the whale ourselves.”

“You’re ruining me!” Solo cried.

“Mr. Solo,” Biff said, “in a day or two, most of the people in Bayport will have seen our whale and they’ll go swarming right back to your show.”

“Maybe,” the carnival owner replied. “But I can’t afford three days like this.”

Frank took Joe off to the side and whispered, “We’re in a bad position. If we side with Mr. Solo, Biff and Tony will be angry. If we side against the carnival, then Mr. Solo will blow up. I have a plan that might make everybody happy. Back me up, okay?”

Joe nodded.

“Excuse me,” Frank said. The argument between Solo, Biff, and Tony quieted. “Mr. Solo, why don’t you pay Biff and Tony half of your original offer, take the whale and show it in your carnival, but pay a percentage to Biff and Tony on each ticket sold? That way people will come to the carnival, but the boys will still be making money.”

“That sounds great,” Joe said.

Solo scratched his head. “I don’t know...”

“Don’t do it, boss,” Felsen urged. “Don’t let these jerks hold you up.”

Biff’s temper flared. “Nuts to you. We’ll keep the whale!”

Felsen bunched his big knuckles and lumbered forward. "You punk!" He flailed at Biff, landing a couple of clumsy but hard-hitting punches.

Biff quickly dropped into a boxer's defense position. Spotting an opening, he shot out his right fist. It hit Felsen squarely on the jaw. Glassy-eyed, he stumbled back and fell to the ground. Frank and Joe pinned him down before he could rise and attack again.

"Knocker!" Solo roared. "How many times have I told you not to go off half-cocked like that? You've ruined any chance we had of making a deal." He reached down, grabbed the big youth by the arm, and yanked him to his feet.

The telephone rang in the shack. Tony answered it while Biff kept a wary eye on Felsen. "Frank and Joe," Tony said. "It's for either one of you."

Joe took the call and spoke low, so as not to be overheard. Outside, Frank tried to smooth things over. Tony went so far as to tell Solo that he and Biff would think about his offer and that maybe they could discuss it again in a couple of days.

Solo and Felsen left, Knocker glowering over his shoulder at the boys. Solo said he would wait for the station wagon until Frank and Joe were ready to return to the carnival.

Joe finished his conversation and hung up. "It was Dad," he told Frank. Their father had finally phoned home. Mrs. Hardy had directed him to call the carnival, where an aide to Solo had told him where his boss and the Hardys had gone.

"The informer called again last night," Joe went on, "and from the same booth! The police station won't pay the price he's asking for the information, but Mr. Dudley-Harris will, through Dad. We have to find out who made those calls, and soon!"

The young sleuths told Biff and Tony they were sorry for the trouble that had erupted. Their friends agreed it certainly was not the Hardys' fault. Sid Solo drove back to the carnival in silence, with Knocker Felsen brooding in the front seat and gingerly massaging his bruised jaw.

Back at the fairgrounds, there was not much for the Hardys to do, since pickpockets work only in crowds. The informer had never called during the day, and Frank decided that there was no reason for him to change his pattern. They worked out a plan whereby, as soon as darkness fell, one of them would maintain a vigil over the phone booth from a position of concealment within a carnival truck parked nearby.

They spelled each other, Frank taking a one-hour shift while Joe wandered through the carnival, and then reversing their roles for the next hour. It was nearly closing time and they had spotted nothing.

Frank was dejected. Maybe the informer had been frightened away! His spirits brightened considerably, however, when Joe came rushing up.

His brother had two facts to report. First, a slightly built youth with sandy hair had lurked in the shadows for more than half an hour near the telephone booth. He finally left. Five minutes later Boko the Clown appeared, entered the booth, and made a call. Joe had not been able to hear much of the conversation, but he did know that Boko had been arguing with someone about money!

"Let's go," Frank said. "It's time to ask Boko a few pointed questions."

They found the clown in his dressing room, still wearing his costume and makeup. At first he w

angry and told the boys it was none of their business. But when Frank sternly reminded him of the seriousness of the case and of the severe punishment that would be meted out to the guilty parties, Boko changed his attitude.

“Look, fellows,” he said plaintively. “I don’t know anything about any ivory statue or some joke named Blackright. I got angry, ‘cause—well, it’s a personal matter. I was arguin’ with my wife about some bills.” The clown looked down at his feet. “That’s not the kind of thing you like to tell other people.”

Frank and Joe told Boko they were sorry to have bothered him, and left. No further leads developed the remainder of the night. When the carnival closed, the Hardys went to Sid Solo’s office. The owner was gloomily going over the figures of the day’s gate receipts. Frank and Joe sat in chairs, relaxing.

“I was so sure he was our man,” Joe said unhappily.

“Mr. Solo,” said Frank, “does Boko argue with his wife about money very often?”

Without looking up, Solo said, “Boko? Ha, how could he? He’s never been married.”

“What!” the boys exclaimed in unison. They sprang to their feet and were out of the door in an instant, leaving Solo looking perplexed.

“Something fishy going on here,” Frank stated, pausing to look around.

“I’ll say!” Joe agreed. “This could be a big break in the case, Frank.”

The Hardys separated, deciding they would have a better chance of finding Boko that way, and agreed to meet back at Solo’s office in half an hour.

Frank questioned several carnival employees, but with no success. When the half hour was up he returned to Solo’s office, hoping that Joe had had better luck.

Joe was not there. Fifteen minutes passed, then another fifteen. Frank grew nervous.

An hour after the appointed time Frank was forced to admit a disturbing fact—Joe had disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

Wheel of Danger

FRANK searched through the carnival frantically, his emotions in turmoil. If anything had happened to Joe ... He set his jaw grimly and went on.

Sid Solo had enlisted half a dozen of his men to help Frank. They spread out through all parts of the darkened carnival, calling Joe's name, probing into pitch-dark tents and under trucks and wagons with flashlights.

None of the people Frank questioned had seen Joe. Nor, for that matter, had anyone seen Boko the Clown.

Frank stopped to catch his breath and leaned against the side of a booth. His anger and frustration had knotted the muscles in his shoulders. He forced himself to relax, knowing that a man who loses control of his emotions weakens his own cause.

There was a long, low-pitched creaking sound above him. Frank looked up and saw that the *carnival's* giant Ferris wheel was moving—ever so slightly. Then his eyes widened and his mouth dropped open with shock.

In the pale light of the full moon he could see a figure standing high above the ground in the uppermost car. It was Joe! He was blindfolded and his hands were tied behind his back. He was trying to feel his way out of the car.

“Joe! Sit down!” Frank screamed. “You're on top of the Ferris wheel. Don't try to get out or you'll be killed!”

Joe heeded his brother's warning and Frank sighed with relief.

“Frank!” Solo called from the distance. “Is that you? Have you found Joe?”

“We're at the Ferris wheel, Mr. Solo,” Frank answered. “Come quick! We need you.”

A few moments later Sid Solo burst upon the scene. “What's wrong, Frank?” he queried anxiously.

“Up there. Somebody bound and blindfolded Joe and put him on the wheel.”

“Oh, no!” Solo said, horrified. He cupped his hands to his mouth and called up to Joe. “Sit tight, son. I'll have you down safely in just a minute.”

He opened the plate covering the engine controls at the base of the Ferris wheel and fired the gas engine. Then he grasped the upright stick that dictated the motion of the wheel and gently eased it forward. Moments later Joe's car reached the ground. Frank pulled the blindfold from his brother's eyes and cut the bonds on his wrists with a penknife.

“Thanks,” Joe said gratefully. “That was a close one.”

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