

The Hardy Boys Mystery Stories®

**THE CLUE OF
THE BROKEN
BLADE**

BY

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

GROSSET & DUNLAP
Publishers • New York

A member of The Putnam & Grosset Group

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THE CLUE OF THE BROKEN BLADE

FRANK and Joe Hardy become involved in an intriguing mystery which revolves around their fencing master, Ettore Russo. Proof that Russo is the rightful heir to his grandfather's estate hinges on retrieving the guard end of a broken saber lost many years ago in California.

The young investigators' quest is complicated by a bank robbery during which some of the father's important records are stolen. Using Mr. Hardy's recently purchased scientific device, a sound spectrograph, the boys identify the voiceprints of the leader of the masked robbers. A chase ensues that takes Frank, Joe, and their pal Chet Morton to the grape-growing region of California and involves them in a dangerous game of hide-and-seek with the bank robbery gang, who also are searching for the broken saber.

A startling discovery at a movie location leads to the solution of this thrilling, fast-paced mystery.



Frank was pushed directly into the path of the motorcycle

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Published by Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., a member of The Puman & Grosset
Group, New York. Published simultaneously in Canada. S.A.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 73-119043

eISBN : 978-1-101-07635-4

13-Digit: 978-1-101-07635-4

579 1086

<http://us.penguin.com>

CHAPTER I

Foiled

FRANK and Joe Hardy, masked and gloved, confronted each other with crossed foils. Ettore Russo, the slim, erect fencing master, was coaching them. He seemed nervous.

“Frank, you attack. Joe, you parry. On guard. Bend your elbow a little bit more, Frank. Now thrust. Lunge!”

While Frank carried out the instructions, he murmured to himself, “Something’s bothering Russo. He’s not himself today.”

“Look, Frank,” came Russo’s voice. “Thrust first until your arm is fully extended, then lunge. Okay. You can take a break now.”

Dark-haired, eighteen-year-old Frank and his blond brother Joe, who was a year younger, removed their masks and gloves. They were about to join a group of friends when Russo called them aside.

“What’s on your mind, maestro?” Frank asked as they walked up to him.

“I won’t be here for the tournament,” Russo said glumly.

Joe’s eyebrows shot up. “How come?”

“My grandfather’s will is being probated in Switzerland. I’ll have to be there.”

“Your grandfather just died?” Frank asked.

“No, many years ago. It’s my step-grandmother who just died. She was in her eighties.”

Russo smoothed his wiry black hair with his hand and continued, “You see, Granddad married a young girl late in life. In his will he left his fortune in trust, the income going to her during his lifetime. But the capital was to revert to his blood heirs after her death.”

“And now you’ll get an inheritance?” Joe asked.

“Maybe. My grandfather’s will states that upon her death the estate is to be divided according to the terms specified on the sword Adalante.”

“Now what does Adalante mean?” Joe wanted to know.

“Adalante is a championship saber that grandfather owned. Unfortunately it was broken and lost in a duel he had in California in the late eighteen hundreds. The tip end was found and is now in the

possession of a cousin in Tessin, the Italian part of Switzerland. But there is no will etched on it, so must be on the guard end.”

“Do you think your grandfather was playing a joke?” Frank asked. “How could he expect anyone find the other half of the broken blade?”

“He was eccentric all his life,” the maestro said. “Maybe his idea was to test the ingenuity of his grandsons.”

“Could be. Now what happens?”

“My grandfather often told my father that his first grandson would get three-fourths of the estate, the balance to be divided among his other grandchildren. I’m the eldest grandson.”

“That’s terrific!” Joe said.

Russo shrugged. “My father is no longer alive to testify. And my cousin Fabrizio Dente, based on his claim by his mother, who is still living, declares that he is the sole heir.”

Frank shook his head. “It certainly leaves you in a fix. Unless you find the other end of the saber, of course.”

Russo sighed. “Did you ever look for a needle in a haystack? All I can do is go to Switzerland and fight my cousin in court. That means I’ll have to close the school.”

The Hardys’ friends, Biff Hooper, a blond six-footer, and olive-skinned Tony Prito, joined them.

“Close the school?” Biff said. “That means we can’t take part in the tournament!”

Russo nodded sadly. “I’ve no one to replace me.”

“We could keep the school open for you,” Biff offered. “We can’t give lessons, but we can supervise training a few evenings a week!”

Frank grinned. “That’s a good suggestion. We’ll mind the store for you, maestro!”

Russo looked rather relieved. “Maybe it would work,” he said. “I don’t know when I’ll be back, and if I close down too long, I might lose most of my students.”

Phil Cohen and rotund Chet Morton, the Hardys’ best pals, had joined the group and Chet spoke up. “Stop worrying, maestro. I’ll pitch in, too. But I want a handicap from now on!”

Russo looked puzzled. “Why?”

“Well,” Chet explained, “I’ve got a lot more surface to touch!”

Everyone laughed, and Biff needled Chet about his giant-sized appetite.

“We’ll work the extra weight off you!” Russo promised. “Come on. You and Tony have a practice bout.”

The two donned their wire-mesh masks and suede single gloves worn on the weapon hand. They took positions on the salle strip which was quite close to regulation size, six feet wide and forty feet long.

The maestro acted as bout director, taking his place about eight feet from the strip and halfway between Chet and Tony.

“Biff and Frank, start out by watching Chet,” he said. “Phil and Joe, watch Tony.”

Frank and Joe had studied the rules for fencing with foils, which were slightly different from those for épée and saber. In foil, the first to score a total of five touches was the winner. Touches were counted only if they were on the trunk of the body. Those on arms, legs, and head were off target. The latter incurred no penalty, but did not score, either.

If a contestant was hit, the judges would raise an arm and call out *hit or touch*.

The boys made a few lunges, bent the blades to the floor to test their flexibility, then saluted each other by raising the blades vertically in front of their masks.

“Ready?” the director said.

Tony and Chet assumed their guard positions, right foot forward, knees slightly bent, sword arms bent into a V, foils crossed and touching. Both boys answered, “Yes.”

“Fence!” the director commanded.

Chet advanced, making a feint as he did. Tony retreated one pace, guessed that Chet’s move was feint rather than a real attack, thrust and lunged instead of parrying.

Biff and Frank raised their right arms and said, “Touch!”

“Halt!” the director ordered and called one against Chet.

The next two touches were off target, one off Chet’s right shoulder, the other on Tony’s left arm. Although they were not counted as penalties, the director halted the action each time, just as he did for good touches.

At the command “Fence!” Chet immediately moved to attack. Tony retreated, the blades clashing. A lunge was met by parry, and parry by counterparry.

Chet scored the next two good touches, then Tony made three in a row. Chet took three more to win.

“Bout!” the director said. “Chet, you don’t need a handicap!” He turned to Tony. “You failed to anchor your left foot when you made that last advance lunge. Next time hold it flat on the floor and you’ll keep your balance if you’re parried.”

“Yes, sir,” Tony said ruefully, “I’ll remember.”

The fencing lessons were one hour for each group. Frank and Joe got home in plenty of time for dinner. As they turned into the driveway, they saw a truck backed up to the stairway leading to the laboratory over the garage. Two men were unloading a large crate.

The boys got out of the car and went over to them. The wooden crate was about two feet square and more than two feet high. It was marked “Fragile.”

“What’s that?” Frank asked the men.

“Mr. Hardy ordered it,” one of them replied. “He told us to put it in the lab.”



Tony thrust and lunged

Frank and Joe looked at each other. Their father had been out of town for two weeks. As a famous private investigator Fenton Hardy had many enemies, and this would not be the first time someone had used a ruse to get into their expensive lab and damage it.

Joe asked, "What's in that crate?"

The man who had spoken shrugged. He and his colleague dragged the crate off the truck and began

to carry it up the stairs. It looked as though it weighed well over a hundred pounds.

“Wait a minute!” Joe said, following them.

Frank ran after Joe. The men continued on, paying no attention to them. Then, halfway up, one of them missed a step.

The heavy crate teetered dangerously toward Joe!

CHAPTER II

Curious Strangers

JOE grabbed the man about the waist to steady him. At the same time Frank reached past his brother to catch a corner of the crate and keep it from falling. After a heart-stopping moment, the man recovered his footing.

From below a voice called up, "Careful there. That equipment's quite expensive!"

They all looked down. A taxicab was backing out of the driveway and Fenton Hardy, a suitcase in one hand and a small package in the other, stood at the bottom of the stairway.

Frank ran down. In a tone of relief he said, "Are we glad to see you, Dad! We didn't know if these deliverymen were on the level or not."

"They're only carrying out my instructions," Mr. Hardy replied. "I'll be back as soon as I take my suitcase inside. Meantime you can uncrate my new acquisition. But be careful. It's delicate."

By the time Fenton Hardy returned to the lab, the deliverymen had left in their truck and the boys had uncrated the object.

"This is a complicated piece of equipment," Joe remarked as they set it gently on the floor.

Four dials were on the front panel. Three were labeled *Monitor Level*, *Scan Playback Level*, and *Recording Level*. The fourth could be turned to any of three stops, which were marked *Mark Amp*, *Scan Plbk*, and *Rec Amp*. There were also four plug-in holes—*Scan Output*, *Line In*, *External Speaker*, and *Microphone Input*.

Joe wondered whether it was a special radio or a secret decoder.

"Neither," said Frank. "Look here." He pointed to a small, round speaker, a meter with a needle and pointer, a pair of tape-recording spools, three rows of push buttons, and a drumlike contraption with heavy white paper rolled onto it.

Mr. Hardy came in, still carrying the small package.

"What is it, Dad?" Joe asked. "Some new outer-space device?"

His father set down the package and gave the machine a fond pat. "It's a sound spectrograph," he said. "The latest gadget to combat the world of crime."

"What does it do?" Frank wanted to know.

“It converts voices into picture patterns,” Mr. Hardy explained, “and records them on that roll paper in the form of graphs. It is based on the fact that no two persons have identical vocal cavities. That is what gives each person’s voice its distinctive tone.”

Joe said, “Couldn’t a criminal beat it just by disguising his voice?”

Mr. Hardy shook his head. “The spectrograph can’t be fooled. Experiments have been conducted with the best voice imitators in show business, and the device always instantly identifies them.”

“What do you intend to use it for?” Frank asked.

Mr. Hardy opened the package. It contained several reels of sound tape. “I have collected recordings of the voices of top criminals in the country, and plan to make spectrograms of all of them and keep them on file. Just like fingerprint files are kept.”

“Don’t the various police departments have records like this?” Frank asked.

“Some do, with great success. In cases of kidnapping, for instance, the kidnapper’s voice can be taped when he phones a ransom demand, and then be checked against the file.”

“Say, that’s great!” Joe exclaimed. “Will you show us how to use it?”

“I insist,” Mr. Hardy said with a smile. The detective had tutored his sons in anti-crime technology ever since they had shown an interest in the subject. Fenton Hardy, his skills honed to a fine edge at the New York Police Department, had gained renown as a super sleuth. He left the force to set up a private practice, and when Frank and Joe grew old enough, they assisted him. Their first case was known as *The Tower Treasure*, and their latest success was called the *Mystery of the Flying Express*.

Both boys were eager to learn more about the sound spectrograph.

“Let’s start right away!” Joe said.

“Take it easy,” Mr. Hardy replied. “It’s quite complicated. The manufacturer conducts a two-week training course in New Jersey. I’ll phone to Somerville in the morning and arrange for you to attend.”

Frank and Joe were enthusiastic.

“Incidentally,” their father added, “by the time you come back from Voiceprint School, your mother and I won’t be here.”

“New case?” Frank asked.

“No. Just a plain old vacation. Don’t you think we deserve one?”

Frank grinned. “Where are you going, Dad?”

“Grand Canyon. Aunt Gertrude will be here, however; so the house won’t be empty when you return.”

“Oh, don’t worry about us, Dad. And have a good time,” Joe said.

The Voiceprint Identification Course, as it was officially called, began the following Monday. The boys arrived in Somerville on Sunday evening and registered at a motel next to the school.

When they reported to their first class at the Voiceprint Laboratories early the next morning, they learned that the course involved seventy hours of classroom lectures and laboratory work, plus twenty hours of homework.

“Looks as if we won’t have much spare time,” Joe said during lunch.

Frank nodded. “My head’s spinning already with all the new info. They really cram it into your skull!”

The boys spent the next few days either in class or in the lab, and did not relax until evening when they had dinner in the motel’s restaurant.

On Thursday night they called their father. He told them that he had completed the voiceprint records and stored them with the tapes in the Bayport Bank and Trust Company for safekeeping.

“That was a good idea,” Frank said. “Especially since you won’t be home for a while.” He told his father of their progress, wished him a good trip, and hung up.

“Okay, let’s get some chow,” Joe suggested.

They had just settled themselves for dinner in the dining room, when two men entered and took a table next to their booth. One was tall, thin, and had a sad face, the other was burly with a swarthy complexion.

At the same time the boys heard someone slide into the booth next to theirs on the other side of the dividing partition.

After the waitress had taken their orders, the burly man smiled at Frank and said, “Evening, boys.”

They politely returned the greeting.

“We’ve noticed you in here before,” the man continued. “Are you staying at the motel?”

“Yes, sir,” Joe said. “We’re taking the Voiceprint Identification Course next door.”

“Oh?” the man said. “I thought that was only for people in police work. Aren’t you a little young for that?”

“Well, our Dad...” Joe started to reply when Frank kicked him under the table.

To Joe’s relief the waitress interrupted the conversation by bringing the food. They all ate in silence for a few minutes.

Then the burly man said, “I’ll bet those machines are quite expensive.”

“Nearly fifteen thousand dollars,” Frank said.

The thin man asked, “Can anyone buy them?”

Frank and Joe looked at each other. Were they being pumped? Had the two men followed them into the restaurant on purpose?

Even though he was suspicious, Frank decided there would be no harm in answering the thin man’s question. He said, “The machines are sold chiefly to law-enforcement agencies and government offices. But a few have been purchased by private individuals. People who apply for machines are thoroughly investigated, however. If they are found to have any criminal connections, they’re turned down.”

The strangers asked no more questions. They finished eating before the Hardys, gave them polite good-bys, and left.

Frank said, "I think they were fishing for information, don't you?"

"Yes," Joe said. "But I wonder why. Do you think they are some kind of criminals?"

"I'm pretty sure of it. Did you see how they looked at each other when I told them anyone who wanted to buy a spectrograph was investigated? In the morning we had better warn the people at the Voiceprint Lab to take extra precautions against burglary."

"But why would criminals want a sound spectrograph?" Joe asked.

Frank shrugged. "I don't know. Anyway, it's a good thing you didn't spill the beans about Dad's project."

"Right," Joe said. "First time I've ever been thankful for a kick in the ankle."

They discussed Mr. Hardy's catalog system. "I'm glad he put it in the Bayport Bank and Trust Company," Frank said.

Just then they heard the sound of someone leaving the booth on the other side of the partition. Suddenly realizing that whoever had been there had heard their conversation, the boys rose and peered over the top.

They could only see the man's back as he went out the door. He was broad-shouldered and thin-hipped, and wore a dark-blue suit. A black Homburg was perched on the back of his head.

As the Hardys sank back into their seats, Frank said, "I hope he wasn't a crook, too. We sure gave him an earful."

The boys were in bed by ten that night, but at three o'clock in the morning Joe suddenly sat up. He shook Frank and whispered, "Hey! I think I just heard a truck pull in behind the lab next door!"

Frank got up at once and put his trousers on over his pajamas. In less than a minute both boys were dressed and out of the motel room. Silently they moved toward the back of the Voiceprint Laboratories.

As they reached the corner of the building, they saw the outline of a truck. Even though it was a moonless night they could make out the figure of a man sneaking into the back entrance.

"Come on," Joe whispered. "Let's get him."

"Not yet."

"Why?"

"We don't know how many are inside. If there's a half dozen of them, they'll clobber us."

"Then I'll go for the police."

Frank put a hand on his brother's arm. "Look, they're coming out."

One man emerged slowly, walking out backwards and straining under a heavy load. Then a second figure came into sight. Between them they hefted a large crate.

"Hurry," one of them said hoarsely. "The wood's cutting into my fingers!"

"Shut up," came the reply. "What about me? My back's breaking!"

Frank whispered, "On your mark, Joel"

CHAPTER III

The Legacy

THE men set the crate down, apparently to rest before lifting it onto the truck. As they stooped to pick it up again, Frank signaled Joe and the two moved forward.

“What are you doing here?” Frank called out.

The men dropped the crate and whirled. One swung a fist at Frank. The other leaped toward Joe.

Ducking, Frank drove a left, then a right into his attacker’s stomach. The man doubled over with a gasp and his hat fell to the ground.

Meantime Joe and the other man were standing toe to toe, trading blows. In the darkness they could not see each other’s faces. The man grunted when Joe landed a hard blow on his chest. But then he caught Joe in the middle of the forehead and knocked him down.

Frank was ready to finish off his man when he saw Joe fall. He turned to attack Joe’s opponent whereupon his adversary hit him from behind with a rabbit punch, driving Frank to his hands and knees.

“Let’s get out of here!” the thug shouted.

Though dazed, Frank was aware of both truck doors being slammed shut. Then his head cleared and he looked up just as the vehicle started to pull away. The driver switched on his lights. They illuminated the rear license plate—New Jersey, FHB-548. Frank memorized it.

As he scrambled to his feet, Joe also got up. “Are you all right?” his brother asked.

“Okay,” Frank mumbled. “How about you?”

“I’ll live,” Joe said, fingering a growing lump on his forehead.

Frank went over to look at the crate the thieves had left behind. Its label showed that it contained a sound spectrograph of the same model owned by their father.

Joe whistled. “Hey, one of those guys left his hat,” he said, picking it up.

“Bring it along,” Frank said. “We’ll go back to the motel and call the police.”

When they returned to their room, Joe exclaimed, “This is the same kind of hat as the one the man was wearing in the restaurant tonight!”

Frank took the black Homburg. He examined the inside. He lifted out a hair and studied it closely. ~~It was thick, red, and rather greasy. Taking an envelope from the writing desk, he placed the hair inside and slipped the envelope into his pocket.~~

“We’ll save that for the police,” he said, picking up the phone.

While Frank was calling, Joe examined the hat further. From inside the band he pulled out a folded newspaper clipping.

When his brother hung up, Joe said, “Look at this, Frank!” He showed the clipping, headline KIDNAPPER TRAPPED BY VOICEPRINT. “It tells how a guy was arrested on account of a spectrogram,” Joe went on. “He kidnapped a young boy and telephoned the father for ransom. His voice was taped by the police and later the boy was found unharmed!”

Frank put the clue in his pocket next to the envelope. “The police will want this, too,” he commented.

Two officers arrived in a squad car five minutes later. When the boys explained what had happened, one of them put out an all-points bulletin for the truck. Then they drove the police car behind the Voiceprint Lab and illuminated the scene with their spotlight.

Along with the boys, they searched for further clues. The rear door had been jimmied, but the burglars had left no other marks.

“A robbery squad officer will be over shortly,” one of the policemen told Frank. “He’ll make the investigation inside.”

Soon a tall, leathery detective, who introduced himself as Lieutenant Howell, arrived at the scene. Frank and Joe described their encounter with the thieves, then accompanied him to their room, where they gave him the hat, the news clipping, and the strand of hair.

“I’ve called the lab manager,” Lieutenant Howell said. “He’ll be right over. We’ll go and check the building with him.”

They went back to the lab and met the manager at the door. He thanked the boys for their alertness and led them through the building. The alarm system had been cleverly disconnected, but nothing aside from the spectrograph had been disturbed.

One of the policemen came in to report that a bulletin had just come over the radio about the truck. “It was reported stolen earlier in the evening,” he said, “and has just been found abandoned at the airport.”

“Well, that’s that,” the lieutenant said gloomily. “If it hadn’t been too dark for you boys to see the faces of those men, we could have all flights checked for persons answering their descriptions.”

He told the lab manager he would arrange for a police guard until morning, since the rear door lock was broken, then left.

During the following week Lieutenant Howell had no news for the boys on the would-be thieves. Frank and Joe finished their course and received certificates attesting to the fact that they were qualified voiceprint operators.

The boys’ plane landed at the Bayport airport at noon on Saturday. Chet Morton picked them up in his jalopy. It backfired as usual, sounding like a gang war in progress. When he pulled into the Har-

driveway, the uproar brought Aunt Gertrude to the front door.

Fenton Hardy's unmarried sister, who lived with the family, was tall and lean and had a heart as soft as a marshmallow under her decisive demeanor. She was also the best cook in Bayport, and that made her one of Chet's favorite people.

Aunt Gertrude showed how glad she was to see the boys back safely by making a flurry of dire predictions.

"Well," she declared as they carried their suitcases into the house, "you survived another trip in Chet's mechanical monster, I see. You'll all blow up in it yet, if you don't get yourselves stabbed at that fencing school first. Or killed by robbers like those in Somerville."

"How'd you hear about that, Aunt Gertrude?" Frank asked.

"The Somerville police phoned your father. He and your mother got away on their vacation incidentally, so there will be only the three of us for lunch. Unless you've invited guests."

She looked pointedly at Chet, who sniffed the aroma of freshly made chili coming from the kitchen. He grinned. "I'm available if you're looking for somebody to invite."

"Then wash up and hurry," Aunt Gertrude commanded. "Lunch is in ten minutes."

Shortly before three that afternoon Frank and Joe were on their way to the Russo School of Fencing.

"You know," Frank said, "I've been thinking about the maestro's problem. I wonder if we couldn't give him a hand in finding the missing piece of that saber."

Joe grinned. "You just want to have a little vacation on the West Coast!"

"Well, if he has any idea at all of the area where the saber was broken, it might be a good idea!"

They parked the car and went inside. Biff, Tony, and Phil came in a few moments later.

Russo beckoned to the Hardys while the others were changing to fencing suits. "I'll have to leave tomorrow for Switzerland," he announced. "Are you boys still willing to keep the school open for me?"

"Mr. Russo," Frank began, "I'm sure the others can handle that. How would you like my brother and me to find the Adalante?"

"How do you expect to do that?"

"We thought if you had any clue at all—"

Russo shook his head. "I just don't know. All I can tell you is there's an old recluse named Miguel Jimenez who lives in the delta region of northern California. He is supposed to know the details of my grandfather's duel and also where the tip end of the broken sword was found."

"Haven't you asked him about it?" Frank put in.

"He refuses to talk to me," the fencing master said. "I don't know why." He scratched his head and looked thoughtfully at the boys.

"If I paid your fare to California, perhaps you could get the old man to tell you!"

"What's his address?" Joe inquired.

“I don’t know. I only met him once in Stockton. He lives near there on a houseboat.”

After some discussion, the Hardys decided to leave for California on Monday.

“You’ll find that my grandfather was well known in that area,” Russo said. “There’s a book in the Stockton Public Library about him. His name was Giovanni Russo, and he was one of the richest men in the delta at the time he died. He made his fortune from the extensive vineyard he owned there.”

“Okay, maestro,” Joe said with a grin. “You just hired yourself a couple of detectives.”

Russo smiled. “Good luck,” he said. “And now you’d better change. This will be your last lesson before I leave.”

That evening Chet stayed for dinner at the Hardy home. Aunt Gertrude had baked rhubarb pie, which was his favorite, and he ate three pieces. Miss Hardy pretended to be worried that he would burst, but secretly she was pleased that he liked the pie so much.

When the boys told her they were flying to California on Monday, her concern was not feigned. She imagined all kinds of dire things that could happen to them, including getting caught in an earthquake.

Fortunately Bayport’s Chief of Police Ezra Collig stopped by after dinner and allayed her fears. The husky, keen-eyed friend of the family told her that he did not believe the doomsday prophets who kept predicting that California would slide into the ocean. “They’re the same ones who always predict the end of the world.” He chuckled. “And neither event is likely to happen in the near future.”

Collig assured Miss Hardy that the boys were well able to take care of themselves.

He had come by to see the sound spectrograph. The boys took him and Chet to the lab to demonstrate it. After recording all their voices on tape, they made spectrograms of them.

“So that’s my voice!” Chet said in amazement. “Look at those funny shapes.”

“Your voice isn’t the only thing about you that has a funny shape,” Joe needled.

“Lay off,” Chet grumbled. “I’m still growing, that’s all.”

On Monday morning Frank and Joe were packing when the phone rang.

“Maybe it’s Dad,” Frank said hopefully. They had tried to reach their parents to tell them about their trip, but with no success.

Frank scooped up the phone. It was Chief Collig.

“Bad news,” Collig said curtly. “The Bayport Bank and Trust Company was just robbed. They got three hundred thousand dollars in cash, plus the box your father had in the storage room!”

CHAPTER IV

A Phony Voice

FRANK and Joe rushed downtown to meet the chief at the bank. They found the place in an uproar. Everyone was talking at once, trying to tell what happened.

Holding up both hands for silence, Collig said, "Take it easy. First I want to hear Mr. Dollinger's story."

Plump Henry Dollinger was the bank's vice-president. He said, "There were four bandits, all with nylon stockings over their heads. How they got in I don't know, but they were concealed in various places inside the bank when we got to work."

"When was that?" Collig asked.

"At eight-thirty. The bank doesn't open until nine, but employees get here a half-hour early to prepare for business. One of the gang was hiding in my office closet. I was dictating a letter into my dictaphone about a quarter of nine when he stepped out, put a gun to my head, and said, 'This is a stick-up. Make a wrong move and you've had it!'"

Dollinger mopped his forehead and went on. "He made me open the vault. I'm sure he must have known the time lock was set so it could be opened at a quarter of nine."

"Where were the rest of the bandits hiding?" the chief asked.

"I don't know. When we came out of my office, they were covering the other employees with guns and making them lie face down on the floor."

A woman teller said they had been hiding in the bank president's office.

A squat, muscular man who spoke with an accent said, "That was a good place for them to hide. The president is on vacation."

Chief Collig peered at him. "Who are you?"

Mr. Dollinger answered. "He is Signor Zonko, from the Ticino Bank in Bellinzona, Switzerland. He's here on an exchange program to study United States banking methods."

While the Swiss and the chief were shaking hands, Joe whispered to Frank, "His accent sounds Italian to me!"

"He's from the Italian section of Switzerland," Frank whispered back. "That's where Mr. Russo

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