

The Hardy Boys Mystery Stories®

**THE
SHORT-WAVE
MYSTERY**

**BY
FRANKLIN W. DIXON**

GROSSET & DUNLAP
Publishers • New York
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THE SHORT-WAVE MYSTERY

WHEN thieves hijack a collection of stuffed animals from a country auction, Frank and Joe Hardy pursue the getaway car and are drawn into a thrilling mystery. The recently acquired interest of their best pal, chubby Chet Morton, in taxidermy as a hobby adds fresh twists to the puzzle.

At the same time, the young detectives' father—famed private investigator Fenton Hardy—is tracking down an industrial spy ring. Over the Hardys' ham radio, Frank and Joe pick up a coded message from the spies, consisting of names of various wild animals. Are the industrial spies somehow mixed up in the hijacking at the auction and the rash of stuffed animal thefts that follow?

This suspense-filled story of pursuit and detection will keep the reader breathlessly following the chain of unexpected developments that lead Frank and Joe to the spine-tingling climax in the wilds of Northern Canada.



They steered into the swirling blizzard

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CHAPTER I

The Apeman's Warning

DIDAHDIT ... dahdahdididit ... didididahdah ... dahdidahdit ... Frank Hardy's fingers deftly pounded out the CW-key sign-off: "R 73 C U AGN AR WB2EKA DE WB2XEJ SK."

Then the dark-haired, eighteen-year-old ham operator jotted an entry into a black logbook. "Coming in clear tonight, Joe!"

"Sure is. Let's see what else we can pick up." Joe Hardy, blond and a year younger, flicked the phone switch and played the transceiver dial along the 2-meter band.

The Hardy brothers, both licensed radio amateurs, were enjoying an hour of short-wave hamming in their newly equipped attic "shack." Static and bits of conversation crackled over the speaker. Suddenly a weird garble of nonsensical, voicelike sounds broke in.

"Sufferin' cats! What's all that?" Joe muttered. As a whistling noise began to drown out the gibberish, he "tendered" the tuning dial left, then right. Again the jumbled voice came in. "Sounds like a tape being played backwards."

Frank frowned. "Must be a scrambler."

"But why would anyone be using a voice scrambler over this frequency?" Joe asked.

A shrill scream from somewhere below caused both boys to leap from their chairs.

"That's Aunt Gertrude!" Frank cried out.

The boys raced downstairs. In the dining room they found Miss Hardy, their tall, bespectacled maiden aunt, standing with a horrified look on her sharp-featured but kindly face.

"Aunty! What's wrong?" Joe exclaimed.

"There's an ape out there—peering in at us!" She pointed a trembling forefinger. "Great heavens! It must have escaped from a zoo!"

"An ape?" Frank echoed incredulously. The boys turned toward the side windows, straining their eyes to see into the gathering autumn dusk.

"In the evergreens." Aunt Gertrude's voice quivered.

Joe gasped in astonishment. Among the branches he could make out a hideous dark face. Its beady orange eyes glared back at him, reflecting the glow of light from the room.

“Good night! She’s not kidding!” Frank made a dash for the kitchen. “Come on, Joe!”

Rocketing out the back door, the two boys sprinted across the yard and around the house. Frank reached the cluster of evergreens first—then froze, wide-eyed. “For Pete’s sake,” he whispered, “it’s a baby gorilla!”

The animal, perched among the branches, appeared not to notice them.

“What do we do now?” Joe gulped. “From what I’ve heard, those things are *strong*—even in the junior size!”

“If it did escape from a zoo, it’s probably tame,” Frank said.

Nevertheless, the boys moved closer cautiously. The gorilla made no movement. Joe, whose high spirits often landed him in dangerous situations, could not resist reaching out and giving one of the evergreen branches a tug. The gorilla slipped downward slightly, but still did not seem to move a muscle!

“Wait a second!” Frank exclaimed. “That thing looks phony to me—I’ll bet it’s not even alive!”

He gave the evergreen a harder shake and the gorilla tumbled from the branches!

Joe stared down foolishly at the chunky black figure at their feet, its sightless glass eyes still wide open. “Well, I’ll be a monkey’s uncle! It’s just a stuffed specimen!”

Frank nodded. “But where did it come from?”

“Search me.” Joe picked up the small gorilla with a chuckle. “Let’s go see what Aunt Gertrude thinks of Junior.”

Grinning, Frank accompanied his brother back to the house. If they had expected Miss Hardy to be frightened, the boys were doomed to disappointment. She greeted them with a scornful sniff. “Humph! Nothing but a moth-eaten dummy. I suspected as much.”

Joe burst out laughing. “Aw, you peeked, Aunt Gertrude!”

As he set the gorilla down on the window seat, the brothers examined it. The stuffed animal was shabby and patches of fur were missing.

“Boy, this really is moth-eaten,” Frank murmured. “You have sharp eyes, Aunty.”

Aunt Gertrude pursed her lips as she resumed sweeping crumbs off the dining-room tablecloth. “Probably left over from Halloween,” she snapped. “No doubt some prankster thought the creature would have me screaming my head off.”

“He should have known better.” Joe winked at his brother. “Queer sort of a prank, though. Maybe one of the high school crowd got hold of a stuffed ape.”

Frank gave a puzzled shrug. “I don’t recall hearing any of our gang mention one. It could have been an outsider.”

Both boys loved nothing better than a spine-tingling mystery. Their father, Fenton Hardy, a former New York police detective, was now a private investigator in the

coastal town of Bayport. His success in cracking difficult cases had won him a nationwide reputation. Frank and Joe often helped on his assignments and also had solved several baffling cases on their own, starting with *The Tower Treasure*.

“Look,” Joe proposed. “You don’t suppose this could have been left by one of Dad’s enemies—maybe as a warning the house is being watched?”

“It’s possible,” Frank said doubtfully.

Mr. Hardy had flown to Europe on a secret government assignment, and the boys’ mother was away visiting relatives. In their absence, Aunt Gertrude was keeping house for her nephews.

“Now don’t you two go looking for trouble with dangerous criminals,” she warned. “You’ve been mixed up in enough mysteries. Mark my words, you’ll bring on a real calamity one of these days!”

Though fond of making dire predictions, their Aunt Gertrude was secretly thrilled over the family’s detective exploits.

“Okay, we’ll watch our step,” Joe promised.

“Speaking of mysteries, Joe,” said Frank, “let’s see if we can pick up any more of that scrambled broadcast.”

As the boys headed for the hall stairway, Miss Hardy’s scolding voice followed them. “And take this nasty fake ape with you—or at least get it out of the dining room!”

Grinning, Joe went back to retrieve the gorilla. In the attic, the boys heard only light static trickling from the speaker. Both hunched over the short-wave rig as Frank played the dial back and forth.

The boys’ radio gear for their station—a separate unit from the set in Mr. Hardy’s study—was arrayed on a long table. It included a receiver, a transceiver with VOX hookup, a signal generator, and a phone patch. The transmitter for the main rig was mounted on a relay rack next to the table. On the wall above hung two framed General Class licenses, several award certificates, and a flag-pinned world map. Another wall was papered with rows of colorful QSL cards—acknowledgments of the boys’ contacts with hams all over the world.

“Guess we’ve lost it,” Frank said, after trying vainly to bring in the scrambled broadcast.

“I’d sure like to know where that came from,” Joe said. “No ordinary ham would have any reason for using a scrambler.”

“Or any *right* to, for that matter.” Frank, who was twirling the dial, paused in surprise as a grim, rasping voice blurted out of the speaker:

“Apeman calling the Hardys! Apeman calling the Hardys! Do you read me?”

Frank flashed a startled look at the stuffed gorilla, then grabbed the microphone. “Apeman from WB2XEJ! ... What is all this?”



“Apeman calling the Hardys!” a grim, rasping voice announced

In response came a series of deep-throated snorts and growls. Then the voice resumed: *“This is the only warning you’ll get, Hardys! My agent is watching the house and I have ordered him to—”* More snorts and growls followed.

“His agent!” Joe gasped. “Does he mean that gorilla?”

Before Frank could reply, the menacing sounds from the speaker gave way to wild howls of laughter! The Hardys traded looks of chagrin as both recognized their “apeman” caller.

“Chet Morton!” Joe groaned.

Tubby, freckle-faced Chet—also a ham operator—was the Hardys’ best pal. Though fonder of food than of action, he had been an invaluable help to them on several dangerous adventures.

“WB2XEJ from W2RBR,” Chet’s voice came in with a sound of munching close to the microphone. “Howdy, Hardys! Thought you’d never pick me up. Was I snortin’

loud and clear?”

In spite of themselves, Frank and Joe could not help laughing.

“Very funny, you big ape,” Frank said. “You really had us going there for a while. By the way, before you eat any more monkey food, you’d better adjust your frequency.”

“Oops, thanks for the tip! ... I guess you guys spotted King Kong, my secret agent.”

“That mildewed ape! We sure did.”

Chet explained that he had planted the gorilla in their evergreen and then had sped home in his jalopy to follow up the joke on short-wave.

“We thought that was you in the tree, at first,” Joe put in, taking the mike. “Boy, that’s a real prize, Chet! Where’d you get him?”

“At the museum. Been tucked away on a storeroom shelf for umpteen years—in fact they were going to throw him out. You see, I’ve been studying taxidermy over there —”

“Taxidermy?” Joe echoed, grinning at Frank. The Hardys were familiar with Chet’s constant mania for embarking on new hobbies.

“Sure. You know—stuffed animals. No kidding, it’s real interesting!”

“I’ll bet. At least it’ll be a change from stuffing yourself.”

“Okay, gagster. I’m serious. Matter of fact, that’s the main reason I called. How about you guys coming to an auction with me tomorrow?”

“What kind of an auction?” Joe asked.

“At the Elias Batter estate on Hill Road.” Chet gave the address and said that the late owner had been an accomplished taxidermist. “Seems a lot of his stuffed specimens are being sold off with the rest of the household effects. I figure I might pick up some bargains and start a collection. Will you and Frank join me?”

“Why us?”

“I’ll explain later. Come on, be a sport,” Chet pleaded. “Meet you there at eleven.”

Joe conferred hastily with his brother, then agreed. “Okay. Frank says maybe this taxidermy kick will keep you out of trouble with the FCC for monkey business over the air.” Chuckling, Joe signed off, “So long for now, W2RBR from WB2XEJ ... and WB2XEJ is QRT.”

Next day, after their Saturday morning chores, the Hardys drove to the auction. Chet’s gorilla was stowed in the back of their convertible.

The Batter estate proved to be a dark old Victorian mansion, set among wide grounds fringed with oak and beech trees. A number of people were wandering about the lawn, but most of the crowd was clustered near a large stable-garage where the auctioneer had set up his platform. As Frank and Joe found a parking place at one side of the gravel driveway, they could see him holding up an elaborate lamp.

“Eight dollars, ladies and gentlemen! Do I hear a bid for nine? ... Nine, anyone?”

“We should have brought Aunt Gertrude,” Frank said. “Bet she would have loved this!”

Just then the Hardys saw their stout chum plodding toward them, lugging a flat wooden box and a strange-looking stuffed animal. It had ears similar to a donkey’s, powerfully clawed feet, and a long piggish snout.

“Hi, fellows!” Chet called. “Look what I got!”

“Wow! What is *that*?” Joe gasped.

“An aardvark—an African termite-eater.” Chet set down his prize proudly near the Hardys’ convertible, then opened the box, displaying a set of surgical-looking instruments inside. “And get a load of this—Batter’s old taxidermist’s kit! Only eight bucks for both!”

Before either Frank or Joe could comment, they heard a sudden shout, “*Thief! ... Stop, thief!*”

A brown station wagon came roaring out from behind the garage and down the curving drive.

“Look out! He’ll clip us!” Chet screeched. As the boys leaped aside, the Hardys glimpsed two men in the front seat—the driver was unshaven and double-chinned; the other man, thin and bald.

The station wagon was wheeling so fast it was nearly out of control. Skidding on the gravel, it sideswiped the rear bumper of the Hardys’ convertible, rebounded across the drive to a tree on the other side, then zoomed out onto the roadway and sped off with a blast from the exhaust!

“Those crazy nuts!” Joe fumed.

Chet was staring wide-eyed after the station wagon. “Did you see that? It was loaded with stuffed animals!”

“Come on! After ’em!” Frank called to his brother.

Leaving Chet standing open-mouthed with his purchases, the Hardys leaped into their convertible. Frank gunned the engine to life and they roared off in pursuit of the thieves.

CHAPTER II

A Broken Antenna

THE station wagon was nearly out of sight, but Frank pressed hard on the accelerator and gradually narrowed the distance. Far ahead, at the end of Hill Road, they saw the car turn right.

“Must be heading out of town!” Joe muttered.

The Hardys followed at top speed. Fortunately, the blacktopped highway onto which their quarry had turned was almost empty of traffic. In a few moments they again had the station wagon in view.

Joe pulled binoculars from the glove compartment, focused on the thieves’ license plate, and jotted down the number.

“They’re turning again!” Frank said. The brown car shot off to the left into Barmet Woods.

As the Hardys reached the turnoff spot, Frank spun the wheel. With a screech of tires their convertible plunged across the road into a rutted dirt lane, winding among the trees.

“Yikes! Save the springs!” Joe exclaimed.

The jolting forced Frank to slow down. In the crisp autumn air, the trees were ablaze with color, but the Hardys were too preoccupied with the chase to enjoy the scenery. Suddenly they heard a sharp *thump* in the distance.

“What was that?” asked Joe.

“Maybe that driver hit something,” Frank said.

Rounding a bend farther ahead, the boys saw a large animal lying across the road.

“It’s a deer!” Joe leaped out as his brother slammed on the brakes. The creature was lying on its side with no sign of life.

“Never had a chance,” Frank said grimly. Tire marks in the dirt showed that the station wagon had backed up and steered around its victim.

As the boys dragged the deer off the road, Joe noticed a gleam of metal in the underbrush. “Hey, look!” he said, picking up a slender rod with three branching extensions. “It’s the thieves’ short-wave antenna!”

“You’re right—I remember seeing it mounted on their front fender. Must’ve snapped off when their wagon hit the deer.” Frank examined the find. “Never saw one like this before, did you?”

Joe shook his head. “Looks homemade to me.”

“Keep it. This might be a clue,” Frank advised.

The Hardys resumed the chase, but now with little hope of overtaking the culprits. A mile or more farther on, the woods ended and the dirt lane connected with a heavily traveled highway.

“Fat chance of catching them now,” Joe said. “We don’t even know which way they went.”

Frank agreed. “The State Police should be notified,” he said.

Over the convertible’s short-wave the boys transmitted an alarm to State Police headquarters. Then they stopped at the nearest gas station to phone a report of the deer accident to the local game warden, a friend of the Hardys.

By the time they returned to the Batter estate, the auction was over and most of the crowd had left. Chet was waiting patiently at the parking area, perched in his high-sprung yellow jalopy, the Queen, near a Bayport police car. In the Queen’s back seat, with the aardvark and taxidermy kit, stood a black bear cub.

“What happened?” The chubby youth hopped out anxiously from behind the wheel. “Did you catch those thieves?”

Frank shook his head. “No, but we got their license number.”

“Don’t tell us you added *another* prize to your collection!” Joe said, grinning at the bear cub.

“Sure, that was my first buy—before you two got here,” Chet said proudly. “It was a bigger bargain than the aardvark!”

“It’s big enough, all right. Where do you plan to keep this stuffed zoo of yours?”

Chet gave a slight cough. “Well, er, as a matter of fact that’s why I—”

“Hold it!” Frank said. “That squad-car officer just motioned to us, Joe.”

The policeman who had beckoned was conferring with the tall, dapperly dressed auctioneer and a smaller, gray-haired man near the garage-stable while another officer took notes.

The Hardys hurried over, bringing the broken antenna, and reported their fruitless chase. “Here’s the license number,” Joe added, handing over the scrap of paper. “We’ve already alerted the highway patrol.”

“Good work, boys,” the policeman said. “This antenna may help us get a line on the thieves.”

“We suspect it’s a handmade job,” Frank said. “By the way, what did they take?”

“Not much, luckily,” the auctioneer replied. “Just nine stuffed animals.”

“That’s the queerest haul I ever heard of,” Joe put in. “Why in the world would the thieves want them?”

The auctioneer gave a puzzled laugh. “Good question. They certainly weren’t worth a lot. The bids on all nine didn’t amount to more than a hundred dollars.”

He explained that after being auctioned off, each item had been taken to the garage, to be claimed later by the high bidder. It was there that the gray-haired clerk had been held up.

Apparently the two thieves had arrived at the auction late, when the nine animals had already been sold but not yet picked up. The men had first offered to pay the clerk more than the amounts bid. When he refused, they had seized the animals at gunpoint and fled.

“Too bad. I hope they’re caught,” Joe said.

As the Hardys walked back to Chet, Frank said thoughtfully, “You know, Joe, this robbery has the makings of a real mystery. There must be *some* reason for pulling such a crazy holdup.”

Joe nodded. “Unless we were chasing a couple of nuts!”

Chet was struck with a sudden idea when he heard about the deer. “Gee, good study specimens are hard for us taxidermists to come by,” he said. “I wonder if the game warden would let me have the head for mounting.”

“Probably.” Frank climbed into the Hardys’ convertible. “We’ll call him when we get home.”

“Great! But—er—what’s the hurry? Wouldn’t you guys like some lunch?”

“That’s where we’re going—home to eat.”

“Come on to the Hot Rocket,” Chet said, “and I’ll stand treat for hamburgers and malts.”

Joe looked at his brother in surprise and burst out laughing. “Wow! We don’t get an offer like that every day! It’s a deal, pal!”

Later, as they were finishing lunch at their high school crowd’s favorite eating spot, Chet cleared his throat nervously. “Say, fellows, how are you fixed for lab space at your house?”

“Lab space?” Frank raised his eyebrows.

“Uh-huh. You see, Mom’s not too happy about me doing this taxidermy at home, and—well, I thought...” Chet’s voice trailed off and he looked at his pals beseechingly.

The Hardys joined in peals of laughter.

“Now it comes out!” Joe exclaimed. “I knew there was a catch to this free lunch!”

“Not to mention inviting us to that auction!”

“I wouldn’t take up much room—honest!” Chet looked so wistful that the Hardys relented.

“Well, okay, if Aunt Gertrude doesn’t object,” Frank said. “I guess she won’t mind as long as you’re working up in our garage lab.”

“On second thought,” Joe said with a grin, “maybe we’d better call the game warden from here, where she can’t listen in. Somehow I don’t think she’d care much for a deer’s head.”

Mr. Dorsey, the warden, readily promised that Chet could pick up the head and pelt at the game preserve later that day. After Joe emerged from the phone booth, the Hardys drove home to Elm Street in their convertible, followed by Chet’s backfiring jalopy.

Aunt Gertrude peered suspiciously out a back window as the stuffed animals were being unloaded and soon emerged to give advice to the boys.

“Humph! Taxidermy, eh?” she commented. “Very well. I daresay it has some educational value. But don’t let me see any messy stuffing being tracked into the house, or I’ll have three scalps mounted over the door! Understand?”

“Yes, ma’am!” Chet gulped.

Frank and Joe had fitted up the entire second story of the garage as a detective laboratory and clubhouse. Leaving Chet to arrange a working space, the Hardys hurried into the house to their father’s study and checked his criminal files for pictures of the auction thieves.

“No luck,” Frank said at last. “But let’s keep in touch with Chief Collig on this case, Joe. I have a hunch there may be some interesting angle we don’t know about yet.”

Chief Collig, a veteran of the Bayport police force, was a long-time friend of the Hardys. The two young sleuths stopped in to see him on their way back from the game preserve with Chet.

“Have you traced the auction thieves’ license number yet?” Joe inquired eagerly.

The husky officer replied with a quizzical grin, “We tried to, but we got a surprise. No license plates with that number were ever issued. Sure you didn’t read it wrong?”

“Positive! I was using binoculars.”

Collig rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. “Then it sounds as if those hoods were no amateurs—not if their car’s equipped with fake plates.”

“What about the radio antenna?” Frank asked.

“No use. That turned out to be homemade too, as you suspected, so there’s no way to trace it.”

Frank had an idea. “May we have it?”

“Sure, why not?” Collig pulled the antenna from one of his desk drawers and handed it over. “Want to use it on the rig in your convertible?”

“No, but it’s an odd design,” Frank explained. “If Joe and I mount it on our car, it may attract attention. Someone might even recognize it and give us a lead on the owner.”

On Sunday, after church, Aunt Gertrude said good-by to her nephews and went off

with a ladies' group to visit sick members of the congregation. The boys were alone in the house when the telephone rang. Frank answered and was delighted to hear his father's voice.

"Dad! What a swell surprise! Where are you?"

"At Bayport Airport, son. Just landed from Paris this morning and then hopped a plane from New York. Think you and Joe could pick me up?"

"You bet. We'll be there in a jiffy!"

Fifteen minutes later the tall, broad-shouldered investigator was embracing his two sons.

"Boy, you look great, Dad!" Joe said. "How'd you make out on your case in Europe?"

"Tell you about it later. Right now I could use some of Aunt Gertrude's home cooking."

"You're out of luck," Frank said. "She won't be home until three o'clock."

Mr. Hardy chuckled wryly. "In that case I'll settle for ham and eggs at the nearest diner."

After stowing their father's luggage in the trunk of the convertible, the boys took him to a roadside restaurant just outside Bayport. Soon the three were settled in a comfortable booth, enjoying their meal. "Okay, let's hear about your case, Dad," Frank urged.

Mr. Hardy explained that he had been investigating the theft of secret data from a California aircraft company. Certain features of its latest commercial jet plane had been copied by two European firms. "A clear case of industrial espionage," the detective went on. "And some of those features are usable on military aircraft."

"Any clues?" Joe asked.

"Just one, so far. The gang that peddled the data uses 'aardvark' as a code word."

"Aardvark?" Frank echoed. He glanced at Joe and both laughed. "There's a funny coincidence! Chet Morton bought a stuffed one yesterday."

"What's Chet up to now?" Mr. Hardy inquired.

Before Frank could reply, Joe bolted from his seat with a startled gasp.

"Hey! What's wrong?" Frank asked.

"That bald auction thief!" Joe exclaimed, pointing out the window. "I just saw him out there on the parking lot!"