Name: _____ Date: _____

The Tower Treasure

Reading level 13 · 1889 words

Frank was sixteen and his brother Joe a year younger, and they lived in the seaside city of Bayport with their father, Fenton Hardy, a famous detective who had once been the pride of the New York police. Both boys had made up their minds to follow him into the profession, and on a bright spring Saturday, as they rode their motorcycles along a cliffside road to deliver some papers for him, they were talking of nothing else. Suddenly they heard an automobile roaring behind them at tremendous speed. It swung around the curve on two wheels, skidded toward the edge of the drop, and hurtled straight at them, missing both boys by inches. The driver, hatless, with a shock of flying red hair, shook his fist and was gone.

Still furious, the brothers rode on to the farm of their friend Chet Morton, a plump, good-natured boy who was usually smiling, but who met them at the gate with an anxious face. His bright yellow roadster had been stolen from the garage only half an hour earlier. Frank remembered that they had passed a wrecked touring car lying upside down in a ditch, and when they hurried back to look at it, they found that it had no license plates at all. They realized it was the very car that had nearly run them over. The red-headed driver had evidently crashed, walked to the nearest farm, and taken the first car he saw.

In Bayport they discovered that the thief had already struck again. Only a little while earlier, a man had driven up to the steamboat ticket office in a yellow roadster and tried to rob the old ticket seller, and he had run away when a passenger walked in. Chief Collig, a stout, slow policeman who was fond of long stories, wrote down everything in an enormous notebook, but when he asked the two witnesses to describe the man, the ticket seller swore that his hair was short and dark, while the passenger swore that it was long and red. "Perhaps he was bald," suggested the chief, who often made remarks of that kind.

That evening Fenton Hardy listened thoughtfully, and said that two witnesses who agree about nothing may both be telling the truth. Then he tested his sons. What color was the hair of their school principal, whom they had seen for three years? Neither of them could say, and their father told them that the man wore a chestnut wig, wore buttoned shoes, and loved the novels of Charles Dickens, all of which he had noticed simply by passing him in the street. "A good detective trains himself to remember little things," he said. A week later, on a picnic at Willow Grove, Joe remembered that lesson, and he stopped to study a strange tire track in the mud of an old, overgrown road.

Chet recognized the pattern at once, for it was the tread of his own tires. Following the track into the woods, the boys pushed through the bushes and found his yellow roadster hidden in a clearing, unharmed and ready to run. Chet whooped with joy, and the whole party piled

aboard, clinging to the running boards and the hood, and rode in triumph back to Bayport, cheering at the top of their voices. But the town, they found, was in an uproar, and a policeman stopped them in the street to tell them the news. The Tower Mansion, the grandest house in Bayport, had been robbed.

Tower Mansion stood on a hilltop overlooking the bay, a great stone building with a tower at each end, like a castle from a story, and people came from miles around merely to admire its outline against the sky. It belonged to Hurd Applegate, a gloomy old man who collected rare stamps, and his sister Adelia, a loud, eccentric lady who dressed in every color of the rainbow. Jewels and bonds worth forty thousand dollars had been stolen from the library safe, and Mr. Applegate had come to Fenton Hardy to ask him to take the case. He had already decided whom to blame. "It was Robinson," he told the detective. "My caretaker."

The boys were stunned, for Henry Robinson was the father of their classmate and close friend, Perry, whom everyone called Slim. Mr. Robinson was gentle and honest, but the evidence looked bad. He admitted that he had once found the combination of the safe written on a slip of paper, and he had just paid off a loan of nine hundred dollars that he could never have afforded, yet he refused to say where the money had come from. "I am not at liberty to tell you," he said. Mr. Applegate telephoned the police in disgust. "My father is innocent!" whispered Slim to Frank and Joe, and they believed him.

The next morning the brothers went back to the wrecked car and searched it again. Frank found a tuft of coarse red hair attached to a scrap of linen, which was part of a wig. That explained why the ticket seller had seen short dark hair and the passenger long red hair, for the thief had simply taken off the wig. Their father said that this linked the car thief with the man who had tried to rob the ticket office, and he persuaded the police to drop the charge against Mr. Robinson. But Hurd Applegate dismissed him anyway, and the family had to move to a poor part of the city, and Slim left school to work in a grocery.

In the woods where Chet's roadster had been hidden, the boys soon found the red wig itself, hidden in a thicket with a battered hat and coat. Mr. Hardy took the clues to New York, traced the wig to a theatrical shop, and then to an actor from whose dressing room it had been stolen, and finally to a notorious thief named Red Jackley, who wore red wigs to confuse his pursuers. He chased the man for days, through freight yards and along railway lines, until Jackley stole a railroad handcar and crashed. In a hospital not far from Bayport, the doctors said, he was dying.

Chief Collig and Detective Smuff planned to catch the seven o'clock train and question Jackley themselves, and Fenton Hardy knew that they would bungle it. So Frank and Joe gathered their friends and decided that the chief must miss his train. They hid an old alarm clock in a box, ticking loudly, and slipped it under a fruit stall near the police station. When the fruit seller found it he ran shouting for the police, and the chief and Smuff, convinced that it

was some deadly machine, spent so long pouring pails of water over it that the train left without them. It was nothing but an old alarm clock, and the whole street roared with laughter.

Fenton Hardy reached the hospital alone, and Jackley, dying, confessed that he had robbed Tower Mansion. "I could not get away with it," he whispered. "I hid it in the old tower." Those were his last words. The brothers raced to the mansion the next morning, and the Applegates let them search the old tower from cellar to roof, but they found nothing except dust, and no footprints in the dust. They tried the new tower as well, with Mr. Applegate himself helping them, but the missing jewels and bonds were not there either, and Adelia cackled at them from the doorway.

Mr. Hardy searched both towers again, tapping walls and tearing up floorboards, and he searched the grounds as well, but the treasure did not turn up. Soon the whole city was laughing at the great detective, who had believed a dying thief's story. Chief Collig announced triumphantly that Robinson and Jackley must have been partners, and he arrested the caretaker again. Frank and Joe felt that they had failed Slim and his family. "We have simply got to find that loot," said Frank. One evening they walked to Tower Mansion at dusk and saw a light flashing in the old tower. It was Adelia, with a flashlight, searching for the treasure herself.

A week later, discouraged and hoping to clear their heads, the brothers took their motorcycles for a long ride along the highway beside the railroad and stopped for a picnic on a hill. Below them, beside the tracks, stood two water towers, a bright new one near the station and a rickety old one that had been abandoned. Frank remembered that Jackley had once worked for this very railroad. The boys looked at each other. "He never said the old tower of the mansion," said Joe slowly. "He just said the old tower." They dropped their sandwiches and raced down the grassy slope.

They scrambled over the fence and along the cinders to the old tank, which swayed in the wind. Rungs were missing from the ladder, and one snapped under Frank's foot, but they climbed to the top, hauled up a heavy trapdoor, and crawled into the dim, dusty space under the roof, where Frank struck a match. Among old lumber, tin pails and iron bars, Joe noticed some boards piled in an odd way, as though to hide something. Behind them lay a gunny sack. Inside it were bracelets, rings, and a bundle of bonds issued by the city of Bayport.

Without stopping to finish lunch, they rode back to Bayport with the sack lashed to Frank's carrier, and their father arranged a surprise. When Chief Collig brought Henry Robinson to Tower Mansion, he expected new evidence against him. Instead, Fenton Hardy turned the sack upside down on the library table, and out tumbled the missing jewels and bonds. "There is more than one old tower," he said. "This was in the old water tower at the Junction, where Jackley used to work." Chief Collig looked at Detective Smuff, who looked at the ceiling, and neither of them could think of a single thing to say, which, for once, was exactly what the

occasion required.

Hurd Applegate apologized to Mr. Robinson and offered him his old post, with a raise and back pay, and he wrote two checks for five hundred dollars, one for each brother. Miss Applegate, who had once threatened to chase them off with a broom, declared that they were real detectives. Mr. Robinson explained, at last, that the nine hundred dollars had been paid to him by a man who owed it, and who had made him promise to say nothing because he did not want his other debts discovered. And Slim went back to school, and the family moved home to Tower Mansion.

A week later Adelia Applegate invited the brothers and all their friends to supper at the mansion. They ate roast chicken and mashed potatoes, pickles, salads and puddings until even Chet declared that he could not eat another bite, and Slim, blushing, thanked his friends on behalf of his family. Hurd Applegate, who had not entertained a houseful of boys in many years, stood up and said that his door would always be open to them. "He is a good old scout after all," said Frank. "You bet," said Joe. And their father smiled, and wondered what trouble they would find next.

Questions

1. Why did the two witnesses disagree about the thief's hair?

A. The thief had taken off a wig
B. One of them was fibbing on purpose
C. It was dark outside

2. Why did Mr. Applegate suspect Henry Robinson?

A. He knew the combination and had suddenly paid off a loan he could not explain
B. He had been seen climbing the tower
C. He had red hair

3. What did Jackley mean by "the old tower"?

A. The old tower of the mansion
B. A water tower beside the railroad, where he used to work
C. A church tower in town

4. What did Fenton Hardy teach his sons about being a detective?

A. To notice and remember little things
B. To arrest people quickly
C. To always carry a gun

5. The brothers' friends made the chief miss his train. Why did they do it?

A. To keep him from spoiling Jackley's confession
B. They wanted him to be late for supper

C. They wanted to play a trick on Adelia

6. Adelia Applegate was called "eccentric." What does that tell you about her?

A. She was unusual and did things her own way

B. She was very poor

C. She was always angry

Words to know

roadster: two-seat open car

wig: fake hair

caretaker: building's keeper

bonds: paper money promises

eccentric: odd and unusual

Answer key: The Tower Treasure

1. A. The thief had taken off a wig
2. A. He knew the combination and had suddenly paid off a loan he could not explain
3. B. A water tower beside the railroad, where he used to work
4. A. To notice and remember little things
5. A. To keep him from spoiling Jackley's confession
6. A. She was unusual and did things her own way