

Paul Terhune In Queer Town

(Continued from Page 15.)

One or two of the bedroom doors had been open, and he had seen they were unoccupied. The landlord had evidently lied to him when he had first arrived. Evidently no other visitors were staying there.

An undersized boy with the face of an old man had helped him upstairs with his bags. As he gave the youth a tip, Terhune had inquired,

"Many visitors for the holiday?"

"Uh-uh! Gug-gug-guh!" had come from the cavernous mouth of the other, and he had pointed to his ears and mouth before snatching the money and departing.

"A deaf-mute!" Terhune had growled. "A bright assortment of people around here in the winter. It may have a holiday atmosphere in the summer, but now—Ugh, it give me the creeps! This room is nearly as bad."

The light was poor, for there were only candles upstairs.

He kicked the logs on the fire to make the flames rise higher, and was able to see that the furniture was massive and very old.

The bed was a four-poster, there were window-seats under the shuttered windows, and

Harry the Hornet says:—



no less than seven doors to the room.

He went around these one by one, and discovered that six of them opened into deep cupboards which smelled of mustiness and damp. The

seventh was the one by which he had entered. He locked that one.

Lying in bed, he was wondering about all that had happened. What had been the real reason he had been received with alarm and resentment when he had first arrived at the hotel?

Why had the crowd in the bar-room laughed when he had mentioned going to the police?

As he lay there watching the flicker of the flames on the ceiling, he could hear a dull booming noise, mingled with the lapping of water.

It seemed to come from just outside the window, and at first he was puzzled. Then he remembered the tide would be in now. It sounded as though it came almost to the outer walls of the hotel.

The idea intrigued him. Holdenwall must become an island at high tide. The inn was probably right up against the sea-wall. He had not noticed in the darkness. Wind rattled the shutters, but he decided to open them and take a look.

Padding across the carpet in his bare feet, he made a startling discovery. It was impossible to open the shutters of the window because they were padlocked.

In each case there was a strong new padlock fastening the shutters tightly in place. Without shattering those, or getting a key, he could do nothing.

His expression hardened. "If they think they're going to shut me in here with closed windows all night, they're mistaken," he muttered. "The landlord will have the key."

As he donned slippers and thick dressing-gown, he heard a clock somewhere strike midnight.

He hurried to the door, unlocked it, and tried to step outside. To his surprise the

door would not budge. He pushed harder, but with the same result.

Tight-lipped, Terhune went to the bell-pull on the wall and tugged with all his might.

Terhune could hear it ringing and clanging somewhere below. Nothing happened. Nobody came up the stairs to answer it.

The clanging seemed to fill the hotel, but there was no result. His ringing was ignored. It began to dawn on him that the hotel was empty. There was no one to hear his summons.

Gritting his teeth, he went back to the fireside and did some hard thinking.

As he stood there, turning the matter over in his mind, he heard the chug-chug of a motor-boat somewhere outside the window, then the sound of men's voices, subdued and low-pitched.

Other sounds came to him, the unmistakable rattle of oars, the lapping of water under the bows of a sturdy craft, then bumps and thuds which indicated heavy objects were being moved about.

It was maddening not to be able to see what was going on. His expression grew harder and harder, and he suddenly remembered there was one way of cheating those who had locked him in and fastened the shutters.

In his kit he had some burglars' tools which had more than once served him well.

Hurriedly he searched his bag, and found them. Selecting what he wanted, he climbed on to one of the window-seats and started work on the nearest padlock.

It was not the first time he had opened a lock of this kind. He did not need light to do this, touch was more essential.

His lean brown fingers moved with assurance, and he knew that in a few moments the padlock would be open.

Then a faint rustle in the air made him half-turn. He glimpsed a tall, dark figure standing close behind him, and as he instinctively threw up an arm to protect himself, a shattering blow descended on his head.

Paul Terhune became unconscious, and toppled backwards into the strong arms that awaited him.

Who is Terhune's mysterious attacker and why has he knocked out the detective? NEXT TUESDAY Terhune starts an investigation to find out.

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