

The Mountain Comes to Mohammed

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Chapter 1

Right Under Your Stupid Noses.

Detective Sergeant Forbes made a gesture of exasperated frustration with his big hands.

„I tell you, Mr. Carter, Donovan or Greene or I have had Louie under our eye every minute of the day since you first put us on the case,“ he protested to the district attorney; „and at night one or the other of us has camped outside the door of his hotel room and peeked through the keyhole. If he'd contacted Landis, we'd have seen them.“

„That's right, Mr. Carter,“ Detective Donovan affirmed earnestly. „That guy hasn't even been to the men's room without one of us tag-gin' along; he just couldn't have met Landis without us knowin'.“

„He just couldn't have, but he just has,“ District Attorney Jeff Carter amended with deadly calm. „Or maybe you two think he pulls those phony tens and twenties out of his hat, the way a magician does rabbits. Louie and Landis are meeting somewhere, and meeting regularly.“

His voice rose to a sudden roar. „What's more, they're doing it right under your stupid noses. Now get back on the job, and this time try tailing Louie with your eyes open; you can tell Greene the same goes for him.“

The two detectives muttered hasty „Yes, sir,“ and departed from the district attorney's office with an air of injured dignity which implied that they considered themselves unjustly impugned.

When the office door had closed behind them, Jeff spoke to his younger brother Stephen, who had been slouched sideways with his feet dangling over the arm of the visitor's chair while he waited for the district attorney to be ready to go out to lunch. „I've never known Greene or Donovan—let alone Forbes—to fall down on a simple assignment of this kind before,“ he remarked; „yet the facts prove they've slipped somewhere. But I'm hanged if I can figure out where.“

Stephen pivoted about on the end of his spine until his feet came to rest upon the floor in front of him. „Just who are these chaps, Louie and Landis, Jeff?“ he asked.

„Counterfeiters,“ the district attorney answered. „Lonesome Louie Madden pushes the stuff—gets it into circulation—and isn't especially important. But Big Ben Landis is the brains of the gang; that's why I want to use Louie to lead us to him. Naturally, the Federal men are working on the case, too; but they're leaving this particular angle of it for my office to handle, and I'd like to show them we can make good. Only for some reason that's a complete mystery to me, the best men on my staff seem unable to follow a trail that must be as broad as the back end of a Mack truck.“

„Maybe Landis is passing the money along to Louie through some other member of the gang,“ Stephen suggested.

Jeff shook his head. „Landis doesn't operate that way,“ he replied. „He claims that the middle man is the weakest point in a counterfeiting ring—which is pretty much the truth—so he doesn't use one. He manufactures the stuff himself, from engraving the plates down to the actual printing, and doles it out to two or three legmen, who pass it on small purchases, and turn what they get

in change back to him—less their commissions, of course. He never gives any of them more than a few hundred dollars at a time, for fear they may get ideas about skipping out and going into temporary business for themselves. That's how I know he must be contacting Louie practically every other day or so. The thing that's got me beat is, how does he do it?"

„Could be he's leaving the stuff somewhere for Louie to pick up," Stephen offered. „Say a box in the railroad station, for instance."

„I'm afraid that's out, too," the district attorney said. „I've got the daily reports here from Forbes, Donovan, and Greene ever since they've been on the case," he gestured toward a manila folder of papers on the desk in front of his desk, „and not one of them so much as mentions Louie's having gone anywhere near a railroad station or any other place where he could pick up a package that might contain two or three hundred dollars in phony tens and twenties. All he does when he goes out is stroll about the center of town for an hour or so and make a few small purchases with his phony money. I can't let it go on much longer; yet if I pick him up now, I'll lose the only chance I may get to catch Landis."

„Maybe Landis is wearing a disguise when they meet."

Jeff smiled briefly, also ironically. „It would be easier to disguise a hippopotamus than Big Ben Landis," he observed. „The man must weigh over three hundred pounds. But let's forget about him while we have lunch." He reached for his own hat on the clothes tree in the corner, then tossed Stephen his. „I don't want my appetite spoiled."

Stephen caught the hat with one hand and placed it at a rakish angle upon his dark head. With the other hand, he picked up the folder of reports from his brother's desk, and took it with him.

Chapter 2

A Little, Friendly Call on Louie.

Late in the afternoon, having a free hour or so, Stephen went over the reports carefully in the privacy of his own law office. He learned from them two things that he considered significant. The first was that every morning at exactly ten-thirty, Lonesome Louie left the cheap hotel where he was staying to go for a walk, during which he merely strolled aimlessly about for an hour or so, then returned to the hotel; the second was that he repeated this procedure every afternoon at exactly one-thirty. Stephen smiled with satisfaction at the reports. They had told him precisely what he wanted to know.

That evening during dinner, he brought up the subject of Lonesome Louie and Big Ben Landis. „What would you say, Jeff," he began, „to my going along with Sergeant Forbes tomorrow morning when he goes on duty?"

The district attorney looked up suspiciously from his plate. „What for?" he demanded.

„I think I know how we can make Lonesome Louie lead us to Big Ben Landis."

Jeff snorted skeptically. „This isn't a problem in deduction, Steve," he pointed out. „It's a matter of routine tailing that doesn't call for any fancy mental

gymnastics, but just for ordinary police training and practice; which Forbes has had, and you haven't. If he hasn't been able to spot the way Louie makes contact with Landis, how can you expect to do it?"

„Still, I don't guess it'd do any harm if I tried," Stephen persisted.

Jeff was forced to concede the point.

The following morning Lonesome Louie was temporarily disconcerted upon descending from the unclean flea-bag that was his room, to find two tailers instead of the usual one waiting for him in the lobby of the hotel—especially when he recognized in the smaller of the two the younger brother of the district attorney. But his generally lugubrious countenance relaxed in a confident grin when, as he sallied forth, both Stephen and the big sergeant fell into step behind him in the usual way.

„You see, Mr. Stephen," Forbes said, discouraged, after they had played a kind of shadow tag with Louie for the better part of an hour, „he doesn't meet anybody or do anything worth battin' an eye at. He acts more like a man who's just out to kill time."

Stephen smiled in agreement.

„Forbes, how right you are!" he murmured, but he didn't sound in the least discouraged.

Louie continued to lead them a merry, if somewhat leisurely, chase for another half hour, then he headed back to the hotel.

This time, instead of taking up their former position on the scuffed leather bench in the lobby facing the staircase and the perpetually out-of-order elevator, Stephen waited until the man they were tailing had disappeared from sight up the stairs; then he began to follow.

„We'll just pay a little, friendly call on Louie," he remarked to the sergeant. „I've a notion this is his time to be receiving company, although I don't guess he'll be expecting us."

When they unceremoniously flung open the door to Louie's room, the enormous fat man who was there with Louie sprang up with a violence that sent his chair crashing over backwards. His hand made a quick jab toward his hip pocket, but stopped midway when he saw the muzzle of Sergeant Forbes' police automatic trained upon him.

„Okay, Landis," the sergeant said with grim satisfaction, „you can reach, but it's not gonna be for anything you can touch."

Chapter 3

The Mountain.

Back in the district attorney's office an hour or so later, Stephen lolled in the visitor's chair and cocked one leg indolently over its arm. „It was all perfectly simple, Jeff," he drawled. „I spotted it as soon as I read those reports, and noticed that Louie went for a walk every day at exactly the same time in the morning, and again in the afternoon. After he'd left the hotel—with Forbes or Donovan or Greene, as the case might be, following—Landis simply walked in and waited in his room for him to come back, when he gave Louie a fresh supply of the counterfeit money and collected his share of the real money Louie

had got in change when he passed the phony bills. Then, when Louie went out for his afternoon walk, Landis left again. It was all perfectly safe and, as I said before, perfectly simple; so simple that I'd have spotted it even without reading the reports."

"That," Jeff stated flatly; "I don't believe."

Stephen smiled with the bland ingenuousness that always set his older brother's teeth on edge. "But it's true, Jeff," he protested. "If Louie wasn't meeting Landis—and it was plain that he wasn't, or Forbes or one of the other men you had tailing him would have spotted them—then the only other way for them to make contact was for Landis to meet him. You all made the quite natural mistake of expecting Mohammed to go to the mountain, whereas," his smile became even more ingenuous, "this was one of the rare instances in which the mountain came to Mohammed."

