

Ellery Queen
The Adventure Of The Murdered Ship

The Characters

ELLERY QUEEN the detective
NIKKI PORTERthe secretary
INSPECTOR QUEEN Ellery's father
SGT VELIE the inspector's aid
HIGH OFFICIAL a government man
MRS BROWN an American mother
REV JONES an American father
MRS SMITH an American bride

SCENE 1: The private office of a high official in Washington. Ellery Queen and his father, Inspector Queen, are ushered into the official's office. Both men seem puzzled, anxious, and apprehensive.

OFFICIAL:
Sit down, gentlemen.

SOUND: Ellery and the Inspector take chairs hesitantly.

OFFICIAL:
Mr. Queen, I suppose you're wondering why I asked you to come.

ELLERY:
(Very regretfully) Yes, sir. An urgent summons from such a distinguished Government official as yourself, Sir - I can't imagine why I should be so honored.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:
Sir, I hope you don't mind my coming along with my son. I was - well, a little nervous...

OFFICIAL:
I quite understand, Inspector Queen; glad you came. Mr. Queen, I've summoned you to Washington to lay a very important case before you - (Quietly) the most important case you'll ever be called upon to investigate.

ELLERY:
I'm completely at your service.

OFFICIAL:
(Gravely) On a certain date - recently - a certain armed vessel of the United States was waylaid by a swarm of enemy submarines on the high seas. At exactly 5 PM three torpedoes crashed into our ship, and it sank almost immediately. The loss of American lives was considerable.

ELLERY:
(Low) I'm sorry to learn that, Sir.

OFFICIAL:
This ship was involved in an extremely important operation, gentlemen. It's loss through surprise submarine attack not only caused the deaths of a large number of American fighting men, but a war plan closely

integrated with the over-all Allied strategy was licked before it got started.

ELLERY:

But the plan must have been a strict war department secret?

OFFICIAL:

(Dryly) It was even stricter than usual, Mr. Queen. Only six people knew it - and their integrity cannot possibly be questioned. Yet, the nest of enemy subs was lying in wait.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Might'n they have been there by pure accident, Sir?

OFFICIAL:

No, Inspector. In the naval action which followed the attack. One of the enemy subs was captured by our forces. The enemy commander has been thoroughly interrogated, his effects examined. There's no doubt that those subs had positive information.

ELLERY:

But if total secrecy was maintained, Sir, how did the enemy get its information?

OFFICIAL:

That, Mr. Queen, is why you're in Washington today. In the first place, the investigative agencies of the Government are short-handed. We can use all the expert help we can get.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

And I suppose my son's reputation for solving tough problems qualifies him - eh, Sir?

OFFICIAL:

Very much so, Inspector. But there's still another reason I called you, Mr. Queen.

ELLERY:

What's that, Sir?

OFFICIAL:

You're involved.

ELLERY:

(Blankly) I beg your pardon, Sir?

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

(Aghast) My son's involved - in the sinking of one of our ships by the enemy? I don't get it, Sir.

OFFICIAL:

Neither do we, Inspector. We haven't had time to work on it. The clue reached Washington only this morning.

SOUND: He hands Ellery a piece of paper.

OFFICIAL:

This scrap of paper, Mr. Queen, was found on the captured enemy sub commander.

ELLERY:

Thank you, Sir. (He examines it) But - this is fantastic!

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

For Pete's sake, son, what's on that paper?

ELLERY:

Just two words, Dad - or rather a word and an initial. (He reads aloud slowly) "Ellery Q."

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Ellery Q! But - how in time did your name get on a memo in the possession of an enemy sub commander, son?

ELLERY:

(Grimly) I'd certainly like to find out.

OFFICIAL:

(Dryly amused) I take it, then, Mr. Queen, you'd welcome the opportunity to investigate this case?

ELLERY:

Try me, Sir!

OFFICIAL:

Very well. Effective immediately, consider yourself a special investigator for the United States Government.

ELLERY:

(Crisply) Thank you, Sir. To whom am I to report?

OFFICIAL:

You're accountable directly to me - Inspector, it's been a pleasure.

SOUND: The inspector responds in the usual manner.

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Queen, good luck.

ELLERY:

Thank you, Sir. I'll find out how those enemy subs knew about that ship if I never solve another case in my life!

SCENE 2: The Queen apartment in New York. Next day. In the apartment are Ellery Queen and his secretary, Nikki Porter. They have been talking about Ellery's new commission to solve the mystery of the torpedoed US warship.

NIKKI:

Do you suppose the Inspector and Sergeant Velie will get a leave of absence from the Police Department, Ellery?

ELLERY:

(Chuckling) I've deputized them as assistant special investigators, haven't I, Nikki? They won't have any trouble. But where are they, blast it? I can't do a thing till I get those lists!

NIKKI:

What lists, Ellery?

SOUND:They hear the Inspector and Sergeant Velie of the Inspector's staff enter the apartment.

ELLERY:

Dad! Velie! Did you get it?

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

(Coming into the room) Here it is, son.

VELIE:

Just came by special courier from the War Department, Ellery.

SOUND:Velie waves a sheaf of papers.

NIKKI:

(Sniffing) A lot of papers! Don't tell me we have to go through a batch of stuffy reports.

VELIE:

(Grimly) They ain't "stuffy reports," Miss Porter.

NIKKI:

Then what are they?

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

A list of the names and home addresses of the survivors, the missing - and the dead of that torpedoed American ship.

ELLERY:

(Crisply) All right, Dad, now we can get to work. We've got to question the families of every man on this list.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

(Heavily) Yes, son.

VELIE:

But, Maestro, there are thousands of names here. They stretch all the way from Maine and Florida to Oregon an' California.

ELLERY:

There's no other way, Sergeant. Nikki!

NIKKI:

(Crisply) Yes, Ellery.

ELLERY:

Your job is to take these lists and arrange them by states and cities. Dad, you and Velie work out a practical traveling schedule for the four of us. We'll cover the entire country working West.

NIKKI:

But, Ellery, what do you expect to find by questioning the families of the victims?

ELLERY:

Clues, Nikki - clues that will tell us how the enemy knew about our warship and where to lie in wait for it! Somewhere in these names and addresses are our suspects and the solution.

VELIE:

And maybe the answer to that "Ellery Q" on that piece of Axis paper. That one gets me.

ELLERY:

Never mind that now, Sergeant. Let's get to work!

SCENE 3: Mrs Brown's house in Richmond, Virginia. Some weeks later. The Queens, Nikki, and Sergeant Velie are walking up the path of a shabby little frame house. Nikki is consulting a list.

NIKKI:

Mrs Mary-Jane Brown - it's this house, all right.

ELLERY:

Mrs Brown. Widow. One son. Richmond, Virginia.

VELIE:

We sure are coverin' territory! How many visits does this make?

NIKKI:

Five hundred and forty-one, Sergeant.

VELIE:

And we're still on the Eastern seaboard.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

I hope we have some luck with this Mrs Brown, Ellery. I can't see that we're getting anywhere at all. Not a clue so far.

ELLERY:

(Grimly) I told you it would be a big job, Dad.

SOUND: They mount to the porch.

ELLERY:

Well, Sergeant, rouse Mrs Brown.

SOUND:Velie wearily rings the doorbell.

ELLERY:

Mother of Harry Brown, Seaman Third Class, U S Navy.

SOUND:The door opens.

ELLERY:
Mrs Brown?

MRS BROWN:
(She is a faded woman of southern stock, middle-aged and work-worn.)
I'm Miz Brown.

ELLERY:
Mrs Brown, we're special investigators from Washington.

MRS BROWN:
Gover'ment people! Come in.

SOUND:They go in and she leads the way to a dim parlor.

MRS BROWN:
Ain't nothin' wrong with my son, Harry?

NIKKI:
No, Mrs Brown. Your son's getting along fine in the hospital.

MRS BROWN:
Thank goodness! Gave me a start - Mah parlor's a little messy - won't y'all set?

SOUND:They thank her and sit down.

ELLERY:
Your son, Harry, was wounded in a recent naval engagement, Mrs Brown - was quite a hero.

MRS BROWN:
(Proudly) I know, suh. He's a real American.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:
So we're just here to talk to a hero's mother.

MRS BROWN:
Harry's a wonderful boy, suh. Enlisted right off in the Wah. Proud? Why, suh, he thinks bein' an American sailuh is the finest thing theah is!

VELIE:
Ain't nothin' finer, Mrs Brown.

MRS BROWN:
Why, my Harry's so proud of The Manila Bay - that's his ship - he says it's the best ship in the Navy.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:
(Chuckling) That's what all the boys say, Mrs Brown.

MRS BROWN:
Well, suh, it's a fact I got into an argument with Mistuh Williams a couple weeks before Christmas . . .

ELLERY:

Who is Mr Williams, Mrs Brown?

MRS BROWN:

(Sniffing) Yankee storekeeper - keeps the groc'ry and meat market half mile into town. He's got a boy in the Navy, too. And he says his son's ship, the Buffalo, is the finest in the Navy. "Izzat so?" I says. "Mah Harry's ship, The Manila Bay, is!" Almost came to throwin' things. Theah was a crowd aroun' the counter laughin' their heads off, that ol' fool Williams was so mad.

(Softening) But then we sort o' patched it up, an' Mistuh Williams give me a specially fine mess o' chitlin's to show there was no hard feelin's.

NIKKI:

Mrs Brown, did you ever hear your son, Harry, mention the name "Ellery Queen," or "Ellery Q?"

MRS BROWN:

Beg pardon, ma'am? I don' think so . . .

ELLERY:

(Smoothly) We needn't take up any more of Mrs Brown's time, Nikki.

NIKKI:

But, Ellery -

ELLERY:

Thank you, Mrs Brown.

(Quietly) Dad. Sergeant -

MRS BROWN:

But, suh, I could tell y'all lots more 'bout mah Harry . . .

ELLERY:

I'm sure you could, Mrs Brown.

SOUND: They bid Mrs Brown goodbye as they go to the door.

MRS BROWN:

Tell Harry his mom's prayin' he'll get better quick, suh.

SOUND: They reassure her, and go down the path.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

I don't blame you for cutting that one short, son.

VELIE:

Another washout.

NIKKI:

Hasn't heard of Ellery Queen! We'll never solve the mystery of "Ellery Q."

ELLERY:

Nevertheless, gentlemen and Miss Porter, Mrs Brown has given us our first clue in five hundred and forty-one visits.

SOUND: They look blank.

ELLERY:

Nikki, you took notes?

NIKKI:

Yes, Ellery, of everything she said, but -

VELIE:

But what clue, Maestro?

ELLERY:

Didn't you spot it, Sergeant? It's not an important clue - it doesn't tell us much - but it encourages me to keep going. We're on the right track! Dad, who's next on our list?

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Somebody in Lexington, Kentucky. Clue Number One, uh? Too much for me!

ELLERY:

Let's hurry, or we'll miss our train connection. Who knows? We may find Clue Number Two in the State of Kentucky!

SCENE 4: Rev Jones vestry in Minneapolis. Two weeks later. The Queen group is sitting tiredly waiting. Organ music is playing in the background audible from the Church.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Nikki, how do we stand now? (He yawns)

NIKKI:

No luck in Kentucky, Inspector. Or in Ohio, or in Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin. Number of states covered: twenty. People visited: 'way over a thousand. (She yawns)

So we find ourselves in Minneapolis, Minnesota, about to question the father of Lieutenant Thomas L Jones, US Army - (change of tone) - deceased.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Not even killed in action. Drowned on that ship the subs sank.

VELIE:

If y'ask me, it's hopeless. Twelve hundred and sixty-five visits - and one clue. In Richmond, Virginia. He says.

SOUND: The door from the church opens, and Rev Jones appears.

VELIE:

Uh-uh. Here's the Reverend.

Rev Jones is a fragile gentleman of sixty, looking as if he has recently suffered a great shock.

REV JONES:

(As he comes into the vestry)

Mr. Queen? Forgive me for having kept you waiting. But my duties in the church . . .

ELLERY:

It's quite all right, Reverend Jones. You know why we're here?

REV JONES:

My sexton's told me. Won't you all sit down?

(He sighs)

It's about my son . . . and how he died in the service of his country.

VELIE:

(Muttering)

Drowned without a rat's chance.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

I'm a father myself, Reverend . . .

NIKKI:

We know how you feel.

REV JONES:

Thank you. We were very close, Tom and I. He was so full of life - I'm afraid sometimes my parish though Tommy was a bit too full of life!

(Tremulously)

God bless him.

ELLERY:

(Gently) He wrote to you frequently, Reverend?

REV JONES:

(Brightening) Oh yes, Mr Queen, every day! My wife is bed-ridden, you know. Tome knew how anxious his mother was about his daily welfare - how much his letters meant to us.

SOUND:He opens a drawer of his desk.

REV JONES:

As a matter of fact, I . . . happened to keep the very last letter he ever wrote to us. Dated Christmas eve. If you wouldn't be bored . . .

ELLERY:

I assure you, Reverend, we're very much interested in Lieutenant Jones's last letter to his parents.

REV JONES:

That's kind of you, Mr Queen. I . . .

SOUND:He stops, turning the pages of a letter slowly. Suddenly he chuckles.

REV JONES:

For example, listen to this - it's a part of the letter I've repeated to many friends and parishoners. You're sure I'm not boring you?

ELLERY:

(Gently) Quite sure, Reverend Jones.

REV JONES:

(Clearing his throat)

"You especially will appreciate this, Dad. Just today one of the boys brought out an autographed photo of Dorothy Lamour, and Shavetail Billy Green said he'd swiped it from him and the other contestant - one of my special buddies in the company, Frank Winters - Frank said the h--- he had, and they almost had a brawl about it."

(Everybody chuckles)

"So finally I said: 'You both claim it - why not put it up to Old Grouchy?' (our CO). They said okay and I had a hard time keeping a straight face, because our CO is full of surprises. Well, Old Grouch heard the case, and without batting an eye, he says: 'Gentlemen,' he says, 'you each claim possession of the autographed photo of this comely and estimable young woman,' he says, 'and since there are no other facts, I'll decide the case with absolute justice, to wit: I'll tear the photo in half - like this!' - and he rips poor Lamour right down the middle - 'and give each of you one half. Now scram,' the CO snarls, 'and start thinking about the War, or you'll find yourselves with a couple of desk jobs, while the rest of us are having fun!' You should have seen Frank's and Billy's faces . . ."

(His voice breaks)

. . . "Dad."

(Pause)

ELLERY:

(Low) Dad. Velie. Nikki. Let's go.

REV JONES:

(Muffled) Oh, but really. I'm sorry. It - all came back. If you'll give me just a moment, please . . .

ELLERY:

Thank you, Reverend Jones. We shan't intrude any further.

SOUND: They make their adieu, leaving him at his desk, a broken old man.

NIKKI:

(Sniffing) That was . . . such a sad letter. Ellery, you didn't even give me a chance to ask about the "Ellery Q." You never do.

ELLERY:

Never mind "Ellery Q" now, Nikki. Dad, we're in luck!

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

What luck?

VELIE:

Yeah. So we meet Reverend Jones in Minneapolis, so he read us Lieutenant Jones's last letter, so what have we got? The usual nothin'.

ELLERY:

On the contrary, Sergeant. We've got Clue Number Two.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Now wait a minute, son. You mean to say that somehow the enemy got hold of that boy's yarn to his father about Dorothy Lamour's photograph?

ELLERY:
(Grimly) I mean just that.

VELIE:
But suppose they did, Maestro? So what?

ELLERY:
Never mind now, Sergeant. Dad, we're really beginning to get somewhere!
Nikki, who's next on our list?

NIKKI:
(Wearily) Somebody in Laramie, Wyoming.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:
(Wearily) Westward ho!

SCENE 5: An airplane factory near Los Angeles. The Queens are ushered into the executive office of the factory. The din is deafening - they can scarcely hear one another. They all look tired and discouraged.

MAN:
Wait in this office, Mr Queen. I'll get her off the assembly line.

SOUND: He goes and shuts the door. The noise of production comes through faintly.

VELIE:
So how do we stand, Miss Porter?

NIKKI:
We're scraping the bottom of the barrel, Sergeant.

VELIE:
East, South, Middle West, Far West - Oregon, Washington, now Los Angeles, California - and whatta we got? Sore pups.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:
And two clues I don't understand.

NIKKI:
Are you sure you weren't dreaming of clues in Richmond and Minneapolis, Ellery?

ELLERY:
(Impatiently) No, no, Nikki, they were clear as crystal. But there must be another clue somewhere! Perhaps more than one.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:
Who's this we're investigating in this airplane factory?

NIKKI:
A Mrs Richard K Smith of Los Angeles. She works here.

SOUND: A door opens, letting in the din again, and Mrs Smith enters - a bitter-looking girl with a smudge on her cheek.

NIKKI:

Why, she's no older than I am. In overalls!

MRS SMITH:

(Abruptly as she comes in)

Who's Mr Queen?

ELLERY:

I am, Mrs Smith. Special investigator for the . . .

MRS SMITH:

(Curtly) Yeah, I know - the foreman told me. I don't know what I can tell you. My husband's dead - died on a ship. So I got myself this job helpin' to make planes.

ELLERY:

That's courageous of you, Mrs Smith.

MRS SMITH:

Courageous? Hooey. I wish they'd let me shoot a machine gun. Make it snappy, please. Every minute I'm away from my bench means I'm holding up a plane.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Your husband was Private Richard K. Smith?

MRS SMITH:

Yeah. A draftee. We met while he was in camp near San Francisco. We . . .
. . . fell for each other.

(Tensely)

Why do I have to go over all this? I wanna get back to my work!

ELLERY:

I assure you it's necessary, Mrs Smith.

NIKKI:

I know how you feel, Mrs Smith.

MRS SMITH:

(Bitterly) Yeah?

(Low) Dick didn't get leaves more'n once in a blue moon, and I couldn't afford to make the trip up to Frisco to visit him. It was . . . tough. Then - all of a sudden Dick shows up in L A - December, twenty-fourth. Unexpected one-day leave, he says. I bawled like a fool. Dick said there was a rumor in camp they were shovin' off, and that's why the boys got leave

. . .

(She begins to cry)

NIKKI:

(Low) Do you want my handkerchief, Mrs Smith?

MRS SMITH:

Th-thanks. (Sniffs) I had a feelin' in my bones I'd never see my Dick again. So I said: "Dick, let's get married. Now. Right away!" . . . He

- he kissed me. But he said we ain't got no time - he's supposed to report back to camp in Frisco, and he just had time to make it . . .

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

But you did manage it, didn't you, Mrs Smith?

VELIE:

You must of, since you're a missus.

MRS SMITH:

(Raptly) Yeah. It was like a miracle. The last minute Dick gets a phone call from some officer in his camp, sayin' he was not to report back to camp but somewhere else . . .

ELLERY:

Just where was he to report, Mrs Smith?

MRS SMITH:

I don't know. All I know is the switch in plan gave my Dick seven hours' extra leave. So we got a lot of my friends together and told 'em all about it, and - and we got married, and then . . . Dick went away. I never even got a letter from him . . .

ELLERY:

(Gently) We're terribly sorry, Mrs Smith.

MRS SMITH:

(Fiercely) What am I cryin' for? I got a date with a bomber! And I hope it gets the dirty rat that got my husband!
(She strides out)
I gotta get back. . .

SOUND: She disappears in the maw of the factory, a forlorn, gallant little figure.

NIKKI:

(Sniffling) I don't like this job, Ellery. I - want to go home.

SOUND: Ellery soothes her.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

We can't go home, Nikki. Not till we finish with this list of survivors and casualties from that torpedoed ship.

VELIE:

(Heavily) Who's next, Inspector?

ELLERY:

Never mind that list. We're through with it.

NIKKI:

Through with it!

ELLERY:

(Crisply) Yes. We've just found the third - and most important - clue. We don't need any more.

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Don't need any more? But Ellery, that means. . .

ELLERY:

Yes, Dad, now I know how the enemy found out when and where to ambush that American ship!

NIKKI:

Bit how about the "Ellery Q," Ellery? That scrap of paper with your name on it that was found on the enemy commander?

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

You know what that means, too, son?

ELLERY:

Oh, I knew the answer to that, Dad, a long time ago. Let's go back to Washington - and report a successful solution.

ANNOUNCER:

And so Ellery Queen now knows the answer to the mystery of The Murdered Ship. Do you?

You should be able to answer the three questions correctly:

- (1) What were the three clues Ellery spotted?
- (2) What did they mean to the enemy?
- (3) What did "Ellery Q" mean?

And now the solution...

SCENE 6: The Washington Official's Office, two days later. With the Official are Ellery and Inspector Queen, Nikki and Sergeant Velie.

OFFICIAL:

So you also solved the mystery of that "Ellery Q" on the enemy sub commander's scrap of paper, Mr Queen?

ELLERY:

(laughs)

It wasn't my name. It isn't a name at all - the appearance was a coincidence. It's a code.

SOUND: Nikki, the Inspector, and Velie exclaim in surprise.

ELLERY:

Let's take the "Q" part first. Which letter of the alphabet is "Q"?

VELIE:

(Muttering rapidly) A, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, . . .

NIKKI:

The seventeenth letter, Ellery.

ELLERY:

Remember that. Now one of our facts was that the ship was torpedoed at five PM. In one international system of figuring time, AM and PM are not used - the hours are numbered from one to twenty-four. By this system, the letter "Q" in the code-phrase "Ellery Q" would stand for the seventeenth hour. What is the seventeenth hour in terms of AM and PM?

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Five PM - the time of the torpedoing!

ELLERY:

So we know "Q" is the time-instruction given to the commander of the enemy submarine.

NIKKI:

But what does the "Ellery" stand for?

ELLERY:

Obviously, Nikki, for a word which, when grouped with "Q" or "five PM" gives a clear message. Think of it as a group of letters - E, L, L, E, R, Y. Now note that the first and fourth letters are the same, and the second and third. Can you think of another word with similar construction?

VELIE:

(Heavily) Who, me, Maestro?

ELLERY:

Well, Sergeant, what happened at five PM? There was an attack on the ship. "Attack" - A, T, T, A, C, K!

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

"Ellery" - the code word for "Attack!"

ELLERY:

Yes, Dat. "Ellery Q" simply meant to the sub commander "Attack at five PM," which, combined with his other information gave him all he had to know.

OFFICIAL:

Exactly what the FBI figured out, Mr Queen, the day after you took this assignment. But how did the enemy know about the ship - that it was sailing, when, from where, and all about it?

ELLERY:

I found three clues, Sir, that told me the whole tragic story. Dad, what did Mrs Brown of Richmond, Virginia tell us?

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Why, Mrs Brown said her son claimed his ship, The Manila Bay, was the finest in the Navy.

ELLERY:

Clue Number One! The name of the ship - The Manila Bay. Ships in the United States are named by a system. One type of American warship is named after famous American battles. Manila Bay was a famous American battle of the Spanish-American War. What type of ship is named after

famous battles?

VELIE:

Aircraft carriers!

ELLERY:

An enemy agent overheard Mrs Brown's thoughtless remark that morning two weeks before Christmas - in a crowded store. When the enemy's intelligence headquarters in the United States fitted The Manila Bay into its other information, it was able to say: An aircraft carrier never sails alone. It is always accompanied by fighting craft, to protect it. Therefore a large naval force is involved.

NIKKI:

But Ellery, I still don't see. . .

ELLERY:

Ah, but what little bit of information did Reverend Jones of Minneapolis unconsciously reveal?

VELIE:

That joke about the argument in camp over Dorothy Lamour's photo and how their C O settled it. . .

ELLERY:

That yarn came from Lieutenant Jones's last letter - written, therefore, just before he was shipped out of camp. Rev Jones's son knew he might never come back, so on the eve of departure he tried to give his father

ELLERY:

an important piece of information by inventing a bit of apparently innocent camp gossip. Can we figure out what Tom was trying to say? Oh, yes. Consider that the letter was written to a minister of the Gospel on Christmas Eve. Consider that it was the story of two people claiming the same cherished object and a wise arbiter who said: "Cut it in half."

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

Tom was writing a parallel to the Bible story! Of the wise king who ordered an infant cut in half when two women claimed it!

ELLERY:

And who was that wise king? King Solomon.

NIKKI:

The Solomon Islands!

VELIE:

Tom was trying to tell his father he was bein' shipped off to the Solomons!

ELLERY:

Precisely. Reverend Jones thoughtlessly repeated it to his friends and parishioners. . .

OFFICIAL:

(Grimly) And eventually it reached a spy's ears, or some Axis sympathizer, and was sent along to enemy H Q to be added to the other bits of information about The Manila Bay and its accompanying naval force. And the third clue, Mr Queen?

ELLERY:

Nikki, what did Mrs Smith say?

NIKKI:

Well, that there was a rumor Dick Smith's outfit was going overseas. The day before Christmas when he was on unexpected leave, at the last minute he got an extra seven hours' leave.

ELLERY:

Or put it this way. Private Dick Smith, on unexpected leave in Los Angeles, was supposed to return to his camp near San Francisco. This trip normally takes ten hours. But because Smith was notified at the last minute to report to a different place, he found himself with seven hours' extra leave. In other words, his outfit had suddenly been moved from a place ten hours' travel from Los Angeles to a place only three hours' travel from Los Angeles! What important troop-embarkation point is three hours' travel from Los Angeles?

INSPECTOR QUEEN:

San Diego!

NIKKI:

And everybody at the Smiths' last-minute wedding was told about it by Mrs Smith.

ELLERY:

Yes, Sir, and when the enemy put all the bits and places together, along with other information that clearly tied them into a single operation, he knew: first, that a large naval force of fighting ships was involved. Second, this naval force was found for the Solomons - and not only that, but troops were involved, because Tom Jones was an Army Officer and Private Smith was a draftee. But this meant the fighting ships were convoying troop transports. And to warrant such a large naval escort, it must involve a great number of transports - so it was an important troop movement. Third, the convoy was sailing from San Diego, California. When? Lieutenant Jones wrote on Christmas Eve - Private Smith got his unexpected leave the same day, December twenty-fourth - so the time of the sailing was the next day, Christmas Day! The enemy relayed to its subs operating in the South Pacific these facts, and they merely lay in wait along the easily estimated route until the convoy appeared - a simple nautical calculation. There it is, Sir - the whole picture, from three little bits of loose talk!

T H E E N D

