

AND ON THE EIGHTH DAY



Ellery Queen

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Looking for more suspense?

About the Book

While stranded in the desert, Ellery Queen stumbles across a religious cult.

It's 1943, the war is raging, and sleuthing scribe Ellery Queen wants to do his bit. After a tortuous cross-country drive, he takes a job writing scripts for a Hollywood propaganda house - twelve hours a day of hack work that quickly turns his mind to jelly. After a few weeks, he is so worn down that he can type nothing but gibberish, and he decides to drive home. The trouble starts as soon as he reaches the desert.

His ancient roadster breaks down on the edge of Death Valley. Wandering in search of help, he is saved by a man known as the Teacher, who takes him to an oasis called Quenan. Here, Queen finds a bizarre, reclusive cult that seems to have come straight out of the ancient past. A murder has been committed in the desert, and the Quenanites plan on delivering some Old Testament justice. Queen is just the detective they've been waiting for.

Review Quote.

"Are not to rob the beleaguered cops of their human core—a courtesy he also extends to Moscow, which comes across as a character in its own right: rough and dangerous and somehow tragic." —*The New York Times*

"A great way to visit Moscow without having to live there." —*San Jose Mercury News*

"A new Ellery Queen book has always been something to look forward to for many years now." - Agatha Christie

"Ellery Queen *is* the American detective story." - Anthony Boucher, author of *Nine Times Nine*

About the Author

Ellery Queen was a pen name created and shared by two cousins, Frederic Dannay (1905–1982) and Manfred B. Lee (1905–1971), as well as the name of their most famous detective. Born in Brooklyn, they spent forty-two years writing, editing, and anthologizing under the name, gaining a reputation as the foremost American authors of the Golden Age “fair play” mystery.

Although eventually famous on television and radio, Queen’s first appearance came in 1928, when the cousins won a mystery-writing contest with the book that would eventually be published as *The Roman Hat Mystery*. Their character was an amateur detective who uses his spare time to assist his police inspector uncle in solving baffling crimes. Besides writing the Queen novels, Dannay and Lee cofounded *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*, one of the most influential crime publications of all time. Although Dannay outlived his cousin by nine years, he retired Queen upon Lee’s death.

And on the Eighth Day

Ellery Queen



BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT ■■■■▶

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I SUNDAY

April 2

SOMEWHERE SAGEBRUSH WAS BURNING, but on neither side of the road could Ellery see smoke. Once he thought he saw fire. It turned out to be an ocotillo shrub in flaming flower. Either the spring rains had fallen earlier than usual, or the elevation in this part of the desert brought occasional rainfall throughout the year.

He decided it was a campfire, perhaps from a wish. He had run across no human trail for hours, except the road itself.

A fuzzy whim had made him turn off into the state road east of Hamlin (named, a sun-roasted marker said, after Lincoln's first Vice-President). The road had been passable as far as it went; the trouble was, it had not gone far enough. About fifty miles from Hamlin it suddenly became an untidy wound. The California highway department's crew had evidently been caught in mid-repair by the outbreak of the war.

Rather than backtrack Hamlinward, Ellery had chanced a detour. He had long since regretted the gamble. The rutted and rotted dirt failed to connect with the state highway. After hours of jouncing, Ellery was convinced that it was no detour at all but a lost wagon trail of the pioneers, leading nowhere.

He began to feel uneasy about water.

He saw no signs. He did not even know if he was still in California or had crossed into Nevada.

The sweet-burn odor died. He had forgotten it by the time he saw the wooden building up ahead.

Ellery should have set out for Hollywood earlier, but the prospect of bucking the pre-Christmas traffic and spending the holiday alone in a motor court somewhere had decided him to wait. That and the remark of the chain-smoking government man with whom he had discussed his trip. "The way things stand, Mr. Queen, we can spare gas for your car a lot easier than space on a plane or train. Or, for that matter, a bus."

In that December of 1943, depots and terminals and waiting rooms across the land demanded *Is This Trip Necessary?* and they were all packed with people who clearly thought the answer was yes. Businessmen waving priorities; students pointing home for their last civilian vacations; recruits on noisy boot leave; beribboned brass in perfect custom-made uniforms; combat veterans wrapped in silence; and, everywhere, sweethearts and pregnant brides and wives clutching children "going to see my daddy—he's a soldier," or sailor, or Marine, or airman, or Coast Guardsman—servicemen unable to wangle a Christmas furlough. And it was all strident with gaiety: "He'll be so happy. He's never seen the baby!" and tears: "Then I'll *stand*. I don't need a seat. Please?" and the unspoken, unspeakable words: *But I've got to get there, I may never see him again.*

"I'll drive," Ellery had said.

So he had spent Christmas Eve at home with his father and the radio. Christmas Day brought church, unrationed turkey, and a walk in Central Park. After which the Inspector snuggled down with his latest leisure project, a rereading of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*—replete with clucks over the misdeeds of some royal Byzantine gangster—while Ellery wrote appallingly overdue letters.

On the twenty-sixth he had packed and rested for the journey ahead, which he contemplated with no joy whatsoever. He had been working hard and his bones lacked bounce. At eight the next morning he piled his

suitcases into the antique Duesenberg, embraced his father, and took off.

By some leer of fate, several of the servicemen he picked up early in the trip spelled him at the wheel while he was still fresh; but after he crossed the Mississippi, when he was beginning to feel the strain, not one of the hitchhikers he stopped for proved able to drive or had a license. So by the evening of December 31, when he pulled into a Hollywood already boiling over with New Year's Eve good cheer, he was weary in every cell and desperate for a hot bath and a good mattress.

"I know, Mr. Queen," said the desk clerk with the basset eyes, "I *know* we confirmed your reservation. But ..." It seemed that Ellery's room had been boarded by two ensigns freshly in from the South Pacific.

"And in the finest tradition of the Navy," sighed Ellery, "they won't give up the ship. All right, I'm licked. Where's the nearest phone?" But by this time he had to find it for himself.

Lew Walsh exclaimed. "Ellery! You bet we can put you up. For as long as you like. Get over here pronto. The party's going good."

It certainly was. But he was unable to back out with grace, and it was almost dawn before he achieved the bath and the mattress. His sleep was turbulent. Voices howled faintly in his inner ear; he rocketed down an endless white line on an endless highway; and his fingers ached from steering with the sheet.

From time to time the world of his senses coupled with the world of his dreams and spawned phantasmagoria. Once he saw a splash of sunlight, smelled roses growing in freshly watered earth; but then his eyes slid shut again and he struggled into a dark dusk somewhere in the mountain snows, snows stained with splotches of blood like roses. Another time a radio voice pronounced a passionate *Helen!*, and immediately he was being tossed between the

gong tormented sea of Homer and a modern ocean hellishly aglare with exploding ships, while gongs sounded and resounded and the tormented sea roared in agony.

He slept until dark, and he was still tired when he awoke, the hot shower barely lapping at the shores of his tiredness. Evelyn Walsh pounced on him—"We thought you'd died in your sleep, Ellery!"—and proceeded to stuff him with orange juice and eggs and toast and pancakes and brassy tea ("We're out of bacon and coffee, darn it." It seemed the Walshes had been prodigal with their ration stamps). Ellery sipped the tea thinly; he had envisioned coffee by the quart.

Lew Walsh gave him his choice between joining them in a quiet New Year's Night get-together at the home of a movie-star friend of theirs in the Hills or "just sitting around the house yakking." Having experienced quiet New Year's Night get-togethers in Hollywood, Ellery shamelessly chose the alternative. They talked the war, and the flesh situation—Lew was a partner in a talent agency—and the Nazi concentration-camp stories, and the voices began to go away, and then Ellery heard Evelyn say, "That does it," and his head jerked up and his eyes flew open. "You're going right back to bed, Ellery Queen, if I have to undress you myself."

"Well ... but will you and Lew go to your party?"

"Yes. Now *march*."

When he opened his eyes it was midway through Sunday afternoon. He was still wrung to the withers. And something new had been added, a case of the shakes.

"What's the matter with you?" his hostess asked. She had rustled a bit of coffee somewhere, and he was trying to hold the cup steady as he gulped. "You look awful."

"I can't seem to throw off this fatigue, Evelyn."

Lew Walsh shook his head. "If you feel this way now, Ellery, how are you going to live through the rat race? I

understand this O.W.I. fellow you're to work for at Metropolitan is trying to win the war all by himself."

Ellery closed his eyes and said, "More coffee? Please?"

The next morning he made it a point to get to the Metropolitan lot at nine o'clock—by Hollywood writers' standards the middle of the night. He found Lieutenant-Colonel Donaldson waiting for him with a chill smile.

"Too much New Year's, Queen?" The chicken colonel's eyes were clear as a schoolboy's. "I'd better make it understood right off that the early bird isn't caught napping. I run a tight little cadre here. Know Charley Dyers?"

"Hi, Charley," said Ellery. If Charley Dyers was already at work by 9:00 A.M. on the Monday after the New Year's weekend, Colonel Donaldson ran a tight little cadre indeed. Dyers had been hacking out screenplays since the days when the close-up was a daring innovation.

"Hi, sonny," said the old-timer, and he squinted down his ruby nose to the inch-long ash on his cigar. "Welcome to the Espreeda Corps."

"Yes. Well," said Colonel Donaldson. "Queen, are you familiar with what we're doing here?"

"Somebody told me the other night that the screenplays deal with subjects like The Importance of Keeping Flies Out of Mess Halls and V.D. Will Get You If You Don't Watch Out."

The colonel's chill look formed ice. "He doesn't know what he's talking about. V.D.'s being handled by another unit altogether."

Ellery glanced at Charley Dyers, but Dyers was gazing innocently out the colonel's picture window, through which came the medicinal odor of peeling eucalyptus. Same old Hollywood. The only difference was the uniform on the man behind the De Mille-sized desk.

"All *right*," said Colonel Donaldson briskly. "We have three months—four at the outside—to prepare twenty screenplays, ten for service personnel, the rest for civilian viewing. Now, gentlemen, to quote a Chinese proverb, one picture is worth a thousand words, so you can figure out for yourselves how many words we've got to turn out to get these films in the can. And no time for mistakes," he added sternly. "To err is human, but in war you've got to be divine. Nobody's heard a shot fired in anger in this country since 1865, and most of us don't realize—simply do not realize—that we can lose this little old war." While Ellery was puzzling out this last juxtaposition of thoughts, the colonel pressed his attack with, "Well, the war's not going to be lost in *my* theater," in a voice of naked steel. "Teamwork, Queen! Remember that I represent the armed forces, Dyers the studio, and you ..." For a moment the colonel seemed at a loss. "And you," he rallied, "you'll be working *with* us, Queen, not *for* us, and when I say work I mean ... *work!*"

Work he did, belly to belly with a cursing Charley Dyers. Twelve hours a day, often longer. If Ellery had come to Hollywood worn out, he was soon in a state of ambulatory exhaustion.

Somehow the accommodations he had been promised by the Office of War Information melted away in a snafu and he found himself, feebly protesting, still in the tender billet of the Walshes. But Evelyn Walsh's mother-henning and Lew's unaggressive hospitality failed to make even the weekends tolerable. The colonel's Pavlovian discipline in early rising made it impossible for Ellery to sleep late on Sundays, so that on his day off he found himself going over, rather than getting over, the week's work—and cringing over the thought of Monday morning.

Even worse than Colonel Donaldson's hot spearmint-scented breath on his ear was the rewrite situation. No sooner had Ellery and Dyers settled down to a new script than back came the old one, or the old two or three or four,

with demands for rewritten scenes, new scenes, cut scenes, bridges—revisions in wholesale lots. At least twice Ellery caught himself writing a scene into one script that belonged in another.

He and Dyers had long since stopped speaking to each other except in command situations. Each labored within a force-field of his own purgatory. With gray-dirt faces and red-eyed as albinos they became prisoners of the war, filled with eternal, hopeless hate.

The pay-off came on Saturday, the first of April. All Fools' Day.

Ellery had checked into the studio that morning at seven-thirty. How long he had been slogging away at the typewriter he did not know; but suddenly he felt cold hands on his, and he looked up to find Colonel Donaldson stooping over him.

"What?" Ellery said.

"I said what's the matter with you, Queen. Look!"

Ellery sighted along the colonel's military finger. It was trained on the paper in the typewriter. *Richard Queen Richard Queen Richard Queen*, he read. *Richard Queen Richard ...*

"I spoke to you," the colonel said. "You neither looked at me nor answered. Just kept typing *Richard Queen*. Who's Richard Queen? Your son?"

Ellery shook his head and immediately stopped. He could have sworn something rattled inside, something with a long extension, like a chain. "My father," he said, and pushed cautiously away from the desk. When nothing happened, he gripped the edge and changed the direction of the push from horizontal to vertical. This, he found to his surprise, was considerably harder to do. Also, his legs were quivering. Frowning, he clung to the desk.

Colonel Donaldson was frowning, too. It was a chief-of-staff-type frown, fraught with decisions for the further conduct of the war.

"Colonel," began Ellery, and stopped. Had he stuttered? It seemed to him he had stuttered. Or was hearing things. He inhaled smartly and tried again. "Colonel ..." There. That was perfect. And he was so very very very very tired. "I think I've had it."

The colonel said, "I think you have." There was no rancor in his voice. A cog in his military engine had worn out; the sensible thing to do was replace it before it snapped. Fortunes of war. "Glad it didn't happen sooner—we're almost to our objective. Well, well, we'll carry on. And oh," he said, "will you be all right, Queen?"

Will I be all right, thought Ellery. "No," he said. "Yes."

Colonel Donaldson nodded hastily and turned to go. But at the door he hesitated, as if he had just remembered something. "Well," he said, and cleared his throat. "Good show, Queen, good show!" And left.

Ellery sat wondering where Charley Dyers was. Probably out for a bourbon break. Good old Charley. The hell with him.

And New York. Oh, New York, its April damps and dirt-flecked beauty. California, here I go—back home and broken—with gratitude in my heart. To the comfortable, shabby old apartment. To the end of a Gotham day and the dearly beloved father-image in the threadbare bathrobe intent on leather-bound *Decline and Fall*. To rest. To rest. Did they give squeezed-out writers Purple Hearts?

And so it was that the next morning, before the Walshes were out of their circular bed—he had made his good-byes the night before—Ellery stowed his suitcases in the Duesenberg and drove out of Hollywood, eastward bound.

The wooden building, he realized later, came into sight almost a mile away, but he had not at first identified it as such. The air was clear enough; it was the undulating ground that now revealed, now concealed it. It might have been a set from a Western film except that it was not neat

enough. "Ramshackle" had probably been the word for it from the beginning. There was no sign that it had ever known a coat of paint.

But a sign—a painted sign—there certainly was. It must have been five feet across. Its lettering, more ambitious than accomplished, read:

END-OF-THE-WORLD STORE

Otto Schmidt, *Prop.*
Last Chance To Buy Gas And
Supplies. Next Chance Is
Other Side of Desert

Ellery guessed that he might not be far from the southern edge of Death Valley; but in this country guesses were sibling to disaster, and he felt in no condition to face disaster. Also, the state of his fuel gauge made a stop for gas the better part of wisdom. And while the food hamper Evelyn Walsh had pressed on him was still untouched, who knew what lay ahead? Yes, it might be a smart idea to stop and see what he could pick up in the way of additional supplies—and, of course, information.

Ellery slanted the Duesenberg toward the rickety porch, wondering vaguely why he should feel it necessary to rationalize the stop. Perhaps it was because there was something about the place, a quality of unexpectedness. It stood quite alone in the sun-baked landscape. There was no other building, not even the ruin of one; no other car.

There was a wagon, however, hitched to two animals.

At first he thought they were mules—smallish mules, to be sure, but their size was less matter for wonder than that they were there at all. He had never seen mules farther west than Texas. But then, as he turned off his ignition, he saw that they were not mules; they were donkeys. Not the stunted burros of Old Prospector fame, but a more robust

variety, like the asses of the Near East—handsome beasts, well-bred and well-fed.

Ellery had never seen their like outside films and paintings, and it was only the exhaustion which rode him like the Burr-Woman of the Indians that kept him from going over for a closer look. Supplies lay heaped beside the wagon: sacks, crates, cartons.

But then he forgot the wagon and the beasts. For in the silence left by the cutting off of his motor he heard men's voices, slow and deep. They were coming from inside the store. He backed heavily out of the Duesenberg and moved toward the porch as if he were wading through swells.

The boards of the porch wavered under his feet, and he walked even more gingerly. At the screen door he paused to rest. Then, as he was about to open it, the door opened seemingly by itself. Ellery was pondering this phenomenon when two men stepped through the doorway, two very strange and strangely dressed men.

It was the eyes of the first man, by far the elder of the two, that seized him. Later he was to think: *He has the eyes of a prophet*; but that was not his thought at the time. What came into his head at the moment of meeting were words from the Song of Songs: *Thine eyes are dove's eyes*; and with this, instantly, the knowledge that they were not dove's eyes at all. The eyes of an eagle? But no, there was nothing fierce or predatory about them. They were black-bright, blazing black-bright, like twin suns viewed with the naked eye. And there was something far-seeing about them. And yet non-seeing, too. It was the queerest thing. Perhaps—that was it!—they saw something that was there for only them to see.

He was tall, this strange man; bone-thin tall, and exceedingly old. In his eighties, certainly; possibly his nineties. His skin had been so worked upon by time and the sun that it was weathered almost black. From his chin fell a small sparse beard of yellowed white hair; his face

otherwise was quite hairless. He was clothed in a robe, a robe with the cut and flow of an Arabian burnoose or *jallābiyah*, made of some unsophisticated cloth whose bleach had come, not from processed chemicals, but directly from the sun. He wore sandals on bare feet; he carried a staff taller than himself. And on his shoulder he bore a keg of nails with no sign of strain.

No actor could play this man, Ellery swiftly thought (the denial reaching his mind's surface even faster than the thought it denied—that the old man was here from Hollywood, on location for some Biblical production). He was not made up for a part; he was really aged; in any case he would be inimitable. This old man could only be, Ellery thought. He is. An original.

The old man moved by him. The extraordinary eyes had rested a moment on his face and then had gone on—not so much past him as through him.

The second man was commonplace only by contrast with the old man. He, too, was sun-black—if a shade less darkened than the ancient, perhaps only because he was half the ancient's age. In his early forties, Ellery guessed; his beard was glossy black. The younger man's garments were made from the same odd cloth, but they were of an entirely different character—a simple blouselike shirt, without a collar and open at the throat; and trousers that reached only far enough down to cover his calves. He carried a hundred-pound sack on each shoulder, one of salt, the other of sugar.

The eyes of this younger man were a clear-water gray, and they rested briefly on Ellery's face with shy curiosity. The gray eyes shifted to look over at the Duesenberg, and they widened with an awe rarely inspired by that venerable vehicle except on the score of its age. The glance returned to Ellery for another shy moment; then the younger man moved after the elder and went over to the wagon and began to load the supplies.

Ellery stepped into the store. After the inferno outside, its dim coolness received him like a Good Samaritan; for a moment he simply stood there accepting its ministrations and looking about. It was a poor store, with sagging shelves scantily stocked and a dusty foliage of assorted articles hanging from the tin ceiling. The store proper was far too shallow to comprise the entire building, Ellery saw; there was a door at the rear, almost blocked by a stack of cardboard cartons imprinted *Tomatoes*, that probably led to a storeroom.

Along one side of the store ran a flaked and whittled counter; behind the counter, over a lop-eared ledger, stooped a roly-poly little man with a patch of seal mustache in the middle of his round and ruddy face—obviously the Otto Schmidt, *Prop.*, of the sign. He did not look up from his ledger.

So Ellery stood there, not so much observing as absorbing, taking a sensual pleasure in the laving coolness; and then the tall old man came back into the store, moving very quietly. He went over to the counter, his blackened hand slipping into a slit in the side of his garment; it came out with something, and this something he laid on the counter before the roly-poly proprietor.

Schmidt looked up. In that instant he spotted Ellery. He snatched the something and pocketed it. But not before Ellery saw what it was.

It was a coin, large enough to be a silver dollar, and remarkably bright and shiny, almost as if it were new. But no new silver dollars had been minted for years. Perhaps, he thought dully, perhaps it was a foreign coin. There were colonies of bearded sectarians, Old Russian in origin, in Mexico ...

But dollar, or peso—whatever the coin was—the heap of supplies being loaded onto the wagon seemed far too much to be paid for by a single piece of silver.