

Voyage of Shadows: Murder on the S.S. Normandie

●●●by Dana●●●

Author Notes: This chapter title kind of speaks for itself. Many thanks to Julia and Susan for editing. Word count: 4,943, although to be fair, a few of them are Julie Campbell's or paraphrased from her.

Chapter Eleven: Curtain

Even through the fear that threatened to paralyze her, Trixie's mind churned. Obviously, Waters had been lurking around the cargo hold and had heard her announce that she had found the engine. The would-be sleuth's heart sank at her own carelessness. She prayed that she was not going to get her brothers and friends killed because of her recklessness.

There has to be a way out of this! her mind screamed. *Take a deep breath and think, Trixie Belden!*

Trixie's inner monologue helped, and the sandy-haired blonde was the first to regain speech. She was going to keep the man talking as long as possible until she could figure out how to get them all out of this scrape she had gotten them all into.

"So, Mr. Waters, you *are* a murderous spy after all."

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Honey and Di gape at her. She didn't know what had made her say that. She just knew that she had to keep him talking. She needed to keep him as off-balance as possible. Trixie stayed calm as an unbidden, fantastical image of distracting the criminal by throwing pots and pans leapt to her mind.

As bizarre as it was, the thought gave her comfort. The seven of them outnumbered him, so if he was distracted, it just might be possible to get that gun away from him and turn the tables. A passenger just needed to enter the passageway—or Miss Trask needed to exit Mrs. Eberhart's room.

The Bob-Whites just needed a little intervention, and they could escape this, Trixie knew. In the meantime, she would keep calm and carry on

"So, you know my name, do you?" the man was saying, an icy sneer curving his thin lips. "Turns out you're more of a nuisance than I thought you were."

Trixie shrugged, hoping her casual gesture belied the fear roiling inside of her. "You should take your own advice and tell your colleagues to keep their voices down," she returned, turning the man's own words around on him. "*You never know who might be listening.*"

The look of anger that passed over the man's distinguished features was breathtaking in its intensity, and for a moment, Trixie wondered if she had gone too far. But then the man laughed—a genuine laugh that was all the more startling—and frightening—in its sincerity. "You're quite a worthy adversary. Too bad you're not going to live long enough to hone your meddling talents."

"That's enough of that," Jim growled, taking a step forward. "You're not going to do anything to us, and you know it. There's seven of us. That's too messy, even for you."

"That's where you're wrong," the man said in a calm, cold voice. "Unlike my colleague, I know how to clean up *my* messes. There'll be no bodies for the French Line to find. Young people are *so* reckless. A group dare gone wrong. Tragic, really, how so many of you managed to fall overboard."

Dan glared at the man. "There's no way that you can get *all* of us."

Mart scoffed. "And even if you could, no one will believe that we all managed to fall overboard as part of some peculiar accident."

"Really?" Waters asked with the same tight, cold smile. "You've kept your parents informed of your sleuthing? They would know to suspect foul play instead of a tragic, *tragic* accident?"

Trixie's heart sank as she realized that the man had a point. *None of their families did know what they had discovered.* If this man's plan succeeded, the Bob-Whites' families probably would never know that the seven friends had knowledge that had left them vulnerable to the vicious Nazi war machine. It would be far easier for them to believe in an accident than that the group had stumbled onto a deadly spy plot. *That* was the stuff of fiction books.

Like those that Mart wants to write some day, Trixie thought as her mind swirled. *And he will live to write them!* she vowed.

The young woman knew that Miss Trask might suspect something, but without evidence, it wouldn't matter. And it would be too late for them anyway. Justice was a nice concept, but in that moment, Trixie realized that justice didn't matter if she and her friends were dead.

I can't let that happen! she thought fiercely.

Again, she did her best to keep her voice calm and steady. "But you're wrong, Mr. Waters," she said, using his name since it had so incensed him before. "There *are* two people onboard who know exactly what we've discovered," she bluffed, referring to Miss Trask and the blond gentleman with whom Mart and Dan had seen her. "So, you won't get away with it. I have a better plan. You let us go, and we won't reveal to British intelligence what a traitor you are to your country."

It was the older man's turn to scoff. "I'm supposed to believe that?"

"You believe that we value our lives. Correct?" Trixie responded.

"I believe that you'll say anything to save your lives, yes," Waters returned. "I do not, however, believe you'll honor your word if I were to let you go."

"That's only because you are not a man of honor, and you've never kept your word in your life!" Jim interjected hotly, unable to control himself anymore. "*Some* of us live and die by our honor."

"That's certainly true in this case," the double agent acknowledged. He waved the gun, motioning them to move. "Now, before someone interrupts our little gathering, let's go."

"Go where?" Trixie asked, genuinely confused.

She was no longer stalling. The young British woman couldn't imagine where the British man would take them. Any place that he could attempt to push them overboard was sure to be filled with people. The open air decks were the most popular places on the ship during the day and up into the evening, when

people gathered to gaze in wonder at the amount of stars whose light shown down in the middle of the dark ocean.

“The cargo hold. You’re going to show me exactly where that engine is,” Waters instructed.

Trixie’s blue eyes bore into the man’s pale ones. “Fine. But you have to let my friends go.”

“This isn’t a negotiation!” the man snapped as the Bob-Whites’ voices rose in protest. “I’m starting to lose my patience with you!”

“I have knowledge you want,” the young blonde sleuth stated confidently, even as her heart beat wildly. “And I want something for that knowledge. *This isn’t a negotiation.*”

Red spots of anger stained the man’s hollow cheeks, and Trixie was gratified to see that he was beginning to lose control. If he became distracted enough...

Trixie didn’t have time to finish her thought because right then an earsplitting whistle filled the air.

Bob! Bob-white!

Dan seemed to intuitively know exactly what his “brother” was going to do, because before the rest of the group could react to Jim’s whistle, the wiry Irishman had already kicked at the distracted man’s pistol, and the gleaming black-and-silver object sailed through the air as a few passengers *finally* began streaming into the passageway to see what the commotion was about.

Diana was closest to where the gun landed, and without thinking, she dove for it even as Brian and Jim tackled Waters. Honey instinctively began pounding on the door to Anna Eberhart’s room, but she knew that Miss Trask probably wasn’t there. She surely would have had to have heard them talking and would have stepped out earlier. The young American had spent the last few terrifying minutes praying that Miss Trask would enter the hallway and end the nightmare unfolding before her, but the crisp British spy had not materialized in answer to her prayers.

Mart took the gun from Diana—who later admitted she didn’t know she had it in her to dive for a deadly weapon and was amazed at the instinct that had kicked in—and, seeing that Brian, Jim, and Dan had successfully subdued the treacherous spy by sitting on him, he immediately emptied it of its bullets.

Trixie turned to an onlooker who stood on the outer edge of the small crowd that had gathered. “Please! Go get help!” she urged. The man, who had unkempt black hair and a ferret-like face, hesitated. “Please!” she repeated, and the man sprinted off.

Before the dark-haired man returned with help, however, two French Line stewards came hurrying down the hallway from the opposite direction.

“*Qu’est-ce qui se passe ici?* What is going on here?” one of them, an older gentleman with a worn face and gray sprinkled throughout his otherwise dark brown hair, demanded. “What is this disturbance?”

Mart immediately stepped forward, presenting the pistol and the bullets to the steward and explaining, “This man tried to kidnap us.”

“That is nonsense!” Waters replied, his voice filled with outrage as he lay helpless. “This group of hoodlums tried to rob me at gunpoint!”

The Frenchmen pursed his lips and looked at the crowd. “Did any of you see anything? Who is telling the truth?” He then repeated his questions in French. “*Est-ce que vous voyez quoi que ce soit? Qui dit la vérité?*”

There was a ripple of murmuring among the crowd, but no one had seen anything definitive, and no one came forward.

The older French steward turned to the younger steward and issued an order in French. Jim could hear the terseness in the command as the younger steward nodded his head and turned on a sharp heel and hurried down the passage.

“Will you please get these hooligans off of me?” Waters said.

Honey turned pleading hazel eyes toward the steward. “Please don’t let him go,” she implored in her best French. “He really is dangerous.”

“That will not be for me to decide,” the steward responded in impeccable English, haughtily indicating that he knew that Honey’s French was not native. “You will all wait here,” he demanded of the Bob-Whites before he turned to the gathered crowd. “Please disperse now. This is being handled.” He then repeated his words in French. The crowd began to dissipate, although Trixie could tell from the disappointed looks on their faces that they wanted to stay and have their collective curiosity satisfied.

As the last passengers disappeared back into their staterooms, two security officers came hurrying down the corridor with the young French steward following on their heels. Not far behind them was an official-looking man in a mariner’s uniform, whom Mart suspected was the ship’s first officer or some other high-ranking CGT official.

“*Laissons l’homme. Vous viendrez tous avec nous,*” one of the security officers said to Jim, Dan, and Brian. At their blank looks, he translated, “Let the man go. You will all come with us.”

“Will you please handcuff him so that he does not try to escape?” Jim requested. “*Sill voo plate,*” he added in halting French, praying that he was correctly remembering—and pronouncing—the French expression for “please.”

At that, Waters bellowed. “This is bloody ridiculous! I demand that you remove these ruffians from me and arrest them immediately!”

The French steward passed the gun and bullets to one of the security officers, who immediately checked the pistol to confirm that the all of the bullets had indeed been removed. He and the steward engaged in a hushed conversation in their native tongue. Apparently, the older steward was inclined to believe the young people, because as the conversation ended, the officer took out a pair of handcuffs and approached the prone British man.

Seeing this, Waters went absolutely mad, shouting obscenities at the security officers, the stewards, and the Bob-Whites as he struggled against the young men restraining him. Finally, the French Line officer was able to successfully handcuff him, and the two security officers flanked him, each taking an arm as they led him down the passageway.

The French steward with the salt-and-pepper hair signaled toward the group of young people. "You will follow as well," he commanded them in English. Meekly, the seven obeyed.

Trixie was relieved when they entered a doorway marked "*Personnel*." She didn't need to be an expert in French to realize that they were going to take a staff passageway rather than walking through the ship. This passageway, unlike the grandiose first class areas of the ship, was starkly utilitarian. Eventually, they navigated down a narrow, gray stairwell. The two security officers did their best to remain in control of their prisoner as they descended the cramped space.

Soon, the group found themselves in the brig. It was a modest area, with two small cells lining the back of the main room, which held a desk and chair off to the side and a table surrounded by four chairs in the middle. The security officers, over the protest of Waters, placed the man in one of the cells, shutting the door with a loud clank and locking it. They then turned their backs on the man and stood in front of the cell, facing the main room.

The First Officer said something in French to the two stewards who had followed them down to the brig area, presumably excusing them, because they both nodded slightly and left the room, shutting the door behind them.

"Ladies, please be seated," the first officer said, gesturing toward the table. Trixie, Honey, and Di did as they were told. The boys stood behind the girls.

Despite the fact that there was one open seat at the table, the officer remained standing as he asked, "What are your names, please?"

"Beatrice Belden, sir," Trixie said. She motioned toward her brothers. "These are Brian and Mart, my brothers."

"Madeleine Wheeler," Honey, sitting next to Trixie, replied.

Sitting on the other side of Honey, Di said in a nervous voice, "Diana Lynch."

The first officer turned his eyes to the redhead who stood behind Trixie. "And your name?"

"James Frayne, sir," Jim responded.

As the Frenchman turned his eyes to him, Dan immediately spoke up. "Daniel Mangan."

"They're hooligans! I want them arrested! And I will be suing the French Line!" Waters protested vocally from his cell.

"And your name, sir?" The ship's officer raised his voice slightly as he turned to speak to the man in the cell.

"Reginald Waters," the man responded immediately. "I am a British national, and I resent how I am being treated. You will pay for this."

"Quite," the First Officer said dryly. The Frenchman's keen gray-blue eyes took in the group before him before settling on Brian. "Please, Monsieur Belden, tell me your version of events."

“It began when we discovered the body of Anna Eberhart, sir,” Brian began. If the mariner was surprised to hear that this was the group of young people who had discovered the dead body, he did not show it. Trixie had specifically watched his face for signs of surprise, and she was impressed when his solemn façade did not change one bit at her brother’s words.

Brian detailed their activities from meeting with the dead woman’s mother and her conviction that her daughter had been murdered by spies right up through to the Bob-Whites’ visit to the cargo hold. He left out any mention of Miss Trask, as he did not want Waters to guess that she might be a spy if he already hadn’t. He may have already deduced or known this, but Brian would never be able to forgive himself if he was the one to give her identity away.

“When we returned to Mrs. Eberhart’s room to let her know what we had found, Mr. Waters appeared, aiming the gun at us and demanding that we show him the engine.”

At that, Waters gave a derisive snort. “Quite the contrary,” he objected from behind the barred doors. “I was returning to my room when these thugs jumped me and demanded that I give them my wallet. Now, let me out of this cell immediately!”

The first officer again regarded the group of young people with inscrutable blue eyes. He was so stoic and composed that Trixie was becoming increasingly unnerved and frustrated at not being able to read him.

Finally, the Frenchman spoke. “I am faced with a dilemma. It is your word against his. There is no proof of what either of you say.”

“May I speak to you in the hallway, sir?” Brian asked.

“*Mais oui*, of course,” the first officer said, motioning toward the door. “After you.”

Trixie fidgeted while Brian was out of the room, although she assumed that he was describing Miss Trask’s role to the first officer. At first, she had been confused that Brian had not mentioned the woman, but then she realized that he had not wanted to give her identity away in front of the prisoner.

Within a few minutes, Brian returned to the room. The first officer said something in French to the security officers and then disappeared, shutting the door behind him.

Honey translated softly, “He told them not to let us leave, that he’ll be right back.”

The group sat in uneasy silence as the minutes dragged on. Trixie became increasingly fidgety until Jim put a calming hand on her shoulder. “It’ll be okay, Trix,” he said in a low voice.

A warmth flowed into Trixie, and she looked up at the redhead gratefully. “Thank you,” she murmured in response. With Jim’s reassuring, steadfast presence acting as a relaxant, the blonde was able to maintain, if not a serene composure, at least a more composed one as the group waited for the first officer to return.

When the door finally opened, and everyone straightened eagerly, they were surprised that the person who entered the room was not the first officer but the captain himself.

“Mesdemoiselles Wheeler and Belden, Messieurs Belden,” Captain Lehuédé said in a neutral voice, “I had not expected to have the pleasure of meeting up with you again.” He nodded toward the other three, “Messieurs Frayne and Mangan, Mademoiselle Lynch, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, even under these circumstances.”

Jim, Dan, and Di nodded mutely, shocked that the captain of the luxury ocean liner knew their names. “We are in the process of straightening out this situation. Everyone is waiting for you in Mademoiselle Wheeler’s suite—that includes your parents, Mademoiselle Lynch. Please travel directly there.”

“Who is watching the twins?” Di couldn’t help but blurt out. She was horrified that her activities might cause a hardship for her family.

“Please do not fret, mademoiselle,” the captain assured her. “Young Master Belden’s nurse has taken all five of the children to see a puppet show. Now, please go, and leave the gentleman behind bars to me.”

The seven young people hurried out of the room. Trixie, realizing that Waters had been uncharacteristically silent during the exchange with the captain, turned in curiosity before she exited the brig, but the two French security officers blocked her view into the cell.

The Bob-Whites hurried to the Deauville Suite, where three sets of parents anxiously awaited them. On seeing their children, the older couples jumped up, pulling their offspring into relieved embraces. Madeleine, noticing Jim and Dan standing awkwardly off to the side, motioned to them. “You two don’t get to escape this. Come here!” she demanded, and the two young men sheepishly let the women fold them into the family’s hug.

It had been a long time since either Jim or Dan had been held in a maternal way, and they each felt tears spring to their eyes. The two, brothers in spirit, exchanged a glance charged with emotion, small smiles curving their lips.

Once the hugs had ended, and Helen Belden, British to her core, had made sure that everyone had a cuppa tea with the help of Kathleen Lynch, the seven young people were called on to tell their tale. Level-headed, staid Brian once again served as the spokesperson, and during this telling, he included their encounters with Miss Trask. Although the six adults remained silent throughout the account, their faces reflected an array of emotions—disbelief, amazement, fear, and even a little pride.

“And so you think this Waters fellow is a spy?” Matthew asked when Brian was done.

“Along with the baron and that Schmidt character?” Peter added.

Everyone nodded. “We do,” Trixie stated. “I do hope that the French Line will be able to prove it.”

At that, Honey’s father spoke up. “It’s my understanding that the French Line has dispatched security to search their rooms. With any luck, they will find the evidence that they need.”

“And if they don’t?” Di asked in a scared voice. “If they let Waters go...”

Kathleen and Edmund, sitting on either side of their daughter on the plush ruby settee, hugged the black-haired beauty protectively. “Don’t you fret, luv,” Kathleen said, her voice full of emotion. “We’ll not let that scoundrel harm a hair on your head.”

“Indeed,” Peter said. “We will do everything in our power to ensure that you are all safe.”

“As a matter of fact, none of you will be returning to third class,” Matthew Wheeler announced. “We have two unused bedrooms. Jim and Dan, you will be sharing one of them, and Diana, you will use the other one.”

“But where will my family stay?” Di asked immediately, turning worried violet eyes first toward her father and then her mother.

“You’ll not be worrying about us, m’dear,” Kathleen reassured Diana. “The Wheelers and Beldens, in their infinite graciousness, have offered us accommodations. Apparently, each of these magnificent suites has an additional, adjoining two-room suite for any staff that may be traveling with the lucky suite guests.”

“Ours has remained empty, as we certainly don’t have staff traveling with us,” Peter interjected with a warm smile, which caused Helen to laugh.

“Certainly not!” she agreed. “I’m still amazed at my brother-in-law’s generosity in treating us to these grand accommodations.”

Matthew smiled. “Had I been traveling on business, I might have had an assistant or two with me, but this was a vacation with my two beautiful girls. Our additional suites are empty as well. Diana, your mom will stay in ours with your sisters, and your father will stay in the Beldens’ with your brothers.”

Trixie clapped her hands together, her smile wide. “Why, everything’s just...” She looked at Honey. “What’s that phrase you said the other day?”

“*Perfectly perfect!*” the three Bob-White girls chorused.

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The seven Bob-Whites and three sets of parents were just finishing their dinner, which Madeleine had ordered from the ship’s main kitchen to be served in the Deauville Suite’s dining room, when a knock sounded on the door of the suite. Honey hurried to answer it and immediately found herself unexpectedly face-to-face with the captain of the ship for the second time that day.

“*Bonsoir, le capitaine,*” she greeted him.

“*Bonsoir, mademoiselle,*” Captain Lehuédé returned with a bow. “I hope I am not disturbing your family.”

Honey smiled warmly. “Of course not. Please come in,” she invited him.

“*Merci,*” he said as he entered the suite.

“We were just finishing another wonderful meal,” Honey explained, as everyone else entered the living room.

“Yes, your chefs are absolutely spectacular in their talent, Captain Lehuédé,” Madeleine said, moving forward to welcome the ship’s captain into her suite.



“*Merci*,” the older gentleman said. “We are proud of the exceptional food that we serve on the *Normandie*.”

“With good reason,” Matthew said, extending a hand to the captain. “Welcome to our suite. I think that you’ve been introduced to most people here, but please let me present Edmund and Kathleen Lynch, whom I do not believe you have met.”

The Lynches moved forward timidly, the awe apparent on their faces. When they had boarded the fabled ocean liner a mere five days before, they never could have imagined that they would be meeting the *Normandie*’s captain in one of the ship’s most luxurious suites. It was difficult for them to grasp. They stuttered out a gracious greeting and then retreated to a more anonymous position in the room.

“We don’t want to keep you, though, Captain,” Matthew said. “I am sure that you must be very busy, but would you like a drink? Whiskey? Some of your fine French wine?”

The captain shook his head, a gracious smile on his lips. “No, but I thank you for your kind hospitality. I do have quite a few issues to attend to, but I wanted to provide you with an update. Monsieur Waters remains in custody, and Monsieur Schmidt has been taken into custody as well. I am not at liberty to say what evidence was found, but we were able to obtain proof of the veracity of the young people’s version of events.”

“What about the baron?” Trixie couldn’t help but ask.

“The baron should not be a problem,” Captain Lehuédé assured the young woman. “He has not been implicated, but it is my understanding that he is more of a financial supporter rather than an active participant in, shall we say, political issues.”

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. “The British and French governments thank you for your diligence in this matter, and you can rest assured that Mademoiselle Eberhart will receive justice.” His manner became stern, though, after offering this gratitude. “In the future, however, I implore you to please allow the proper authorities to handle matters such as this.”

Matthew spoke up. “Next time? Let’s hope that there *isn’t* a next time. I think stumbling into a mystery is more of a once-in-a-lifetime type of event!”

Even as the other parents heartily agreed, Trixie and Honey couldn’t help but exchange glances. The incident with Waters had certainly been frightening, but the intense feelings of excitement and satisfaction that the two felt at solving the mystery and bringing Anna Eberhart justice could not be ignored by either girl.

Mart leaned over to Trixie. “I saw that look, Moll Dick,” he said softly, not without affection.

Trixie grinned at him briefly and then turned her attention back to the captain, who was saying his good-byes. After he had exited the suite, Madeleine turned to the group.

“Now that I know that the danger has passed, I feel like celebrating!” she said. “It’s the last evening, and I hear the Grand Salon is the place to be. Who would like to join me?”

The elder Beldens readily agreed to join Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler for the final night’s festivities in the Grand Salon. Both couples then persuaded Di’s parents to join them, pointing out that both sets of twins

were happily playing with Bobby, and the nurse was more than capable of taking care of the lot. Helen was able to loan Kathleen a dress that only fell a little long on the Irish woman, and Matthew produced an extra tuxedo for Edmund. It was slightly ill-fitting on the former farmer, but it would do.

The seven young people decided that they would much rather spend their evening sitting out on the Wheelers' open terrace enjoying the last night of the refreshing, briny sea air than dressed to the nines in the luxurious but somewhat intimidating salon. They were sitting on the deck, enjoying the salty breeze on their faces, when Matthew poked his head out.

"We're heading out to the Grand Salon now. I know you're all adults, but could I please request that you stay here tonight? It will make the ladies feel better if they know you're all here safe. Of course, please help yourselves to anything in the pantry or the bar."

Honey got up and impulsively hugged her father. "Of course we'll stay in, Daddy. The last thing we want to do is worry you more on this trip!"

Matthew returned his daughter's embrace. "I appreciate that. Have a wonderful—*safe*—evening."

His exit was serenaded with a chorus of "We will!" and "You, too!" and "Thank you, sir!"

After the red-headed man's departure, the talk turned to their imminent arrival in New York, and the hope that they would all be able to keep in touch.

"I hope you're able to find your uncle in...what was the name of the town, Jim?" Honey asked.

"Sleepside-on-Hudson," the husky redhead answered.

Mart grinned wickedly at his almost twin. "I hear Sleepside would be a great place to start a moll dick detective agency."

Trixie stuck out her tongue at her brother.

"Moll dick?" Brian asked. "Mart, I think you've been watching too many gangster pictures at the cinema!"

"I'm not the lamebrain Belden who wants to start a detective agency!" Mart protested.

"It's not lamebrain! Honey and I will find a way!" Trixie retorted. "Just you wait and see, Mart Belden!"

Jim smiled. "I like the idea. You can call your agency Moll Dicks, Incorporated. I can just see your business cards. 'When the Secret Service gives up, we take over!' printed in red."

Everybody laughed. "Is it called the Secret Service in America, Honey?" Trixie wanted to know.

"I believe that's who protects our president," Honey responded. "I think it's the Federal Bureau of Investigation that investigates crimes."

"That doesn't sound as good," Trixie stated. "Too many syllables!"

"They go by FBI for short," Honey offered.

They looked at each other, grins alighting their happy faces, all of one mind. “When the FBI gives up, we take over!” the seven Bob-Whites chorused.

Amid the resulting laughter, the three girls added an impeccably synchronized, “Perfectly perfect!”