

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

●●●by Dana●●●

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Chapter Six: Dead Woman's Folly

August 25, 1939

Somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean

The next day, immediately following an early breakfast, the seven friends met at what they were now calling their "usual spot" on the open-air deck in third class. Honey described her conversation with the captain after dinner, and then Di breathlessly told of her adventures with Dan and Jim the evening before. Every so often, Dan or Jim would interject a small fact that Di had left out as Honey, Brian, Mart, and Trixie leaned forward in their seats, absolutely enthralled with the narrative unfolding before them. When Di finished, Mart forgot himself and gave her a huge hug,

"Diana Lynch!" he exclaimed. "That is one of the most amazing stories I've ever heard! What a brave and dedicated woman!"

Trixie, Honey, and Brian added their excited admiration about the trio's exploits of the night before, especially to Di, who had not only come up with the idea, but was critical for carrying it out, as well. Diana, for her part, looked dazed but pleased at the praise, and she seemed especially appreciative of the spontaneous but heartfelt hug that she had received from Mart Belden, who didn't seem fazed at all being on the giving end of a public display of affection with a young woman who was not his official companion.

"We've got all sorts of clues!" Trixie exclaimed when the praising had died down. She used her fingers to tick off the facts as she recalled them aloud for the benefit of the group. "We know the woman's name, that she was German, that she was traveling with her mother as her caretaker and staying in Cabin 2072, that she had dinner the evening before her death with a mysterious man named Schmidt who is staying in Cabin 1013 and with whom she wasn't traveling, that her death was not random nor an accident and she was targeted for a specific reason, that the cause of death was being struck with a pipe-like object, that the German baron probably knows something, and..." She trailed off and looked at her six companions questioningly. She had felt like she had begun to ramble on, and she suddenly felt shy. "Am I missing anything?"

Brian, scientific-minded and always methodically logical in his thinking, shook his head. "I don't think so, sis. I think you've covered all of the pertinent facts." Trixie beamed at the unexpected approval from her oldest brother, even as he asked the group, "So, what's next?"

The seven young people sat in silence for a moment as they considered his question. "We have room numbers. We could pay our condolences to Miss Eberhart's mother," Trixie offered.

"Don't you mean *Fraulein* Eberhart?" Mart asked drily.

"Is it too forward to call on Mrs.—Frau—Eberhart while she's grieving?" Di asked, chewing her lip worriedly as she considered proper etiquette.

"We'd definitely have to walk a fine line," Dan put in. "It's one thing to offer our condolences, but it's quite another to start asking her questions about her daughter, which could very possibly upset her. And

she might not know anything anyway. We don't even know if anyone from the ocean liner has told her the entire truth about her daughter's death. We've been assuming that Miss Eberhart was traveling with her as her caretaker because the woman was simply older and needed a travel companion. What if she needs a caretaker because she's not well? It's possible that she hasn't been told of all of the circumstances surrounding her daughter's death if her health is not good."

"That's a good point." Like Di, Trixie also began to chew her lip thoughtfully. "Honey's butler didn't seem to think that she was incapacitated according to what Honey reported, but he may not know better. Let's consider our other options for a moment and then think about the mother." She paused for a moment. "We *could* stake out the mysterious German man's room and see who comes and goes."

A grin slowly spread across Mart's features as an idea came to him. "Or we could take a page from the fair Diana's book and *make* something happen," he said, his grin firmly in place as he looked around at his siblings and new friends.

Trixie's grin, so much like her brother's, slowly appeared on her own freckled features. "I like the way you think, dear brother mine," she said. "We could pretend to work for the cruise liner and need access to his room."

"Exactly what I was thinking!" Mart exclaimed.

At the same time, Brian scoffed, "And what excuse would we give? And where would we get a uniform?"

The group thought for a few moments before Di said, "I remember that there was a spare nurse's uniform hanging up in the hospital room when I was there last night. What if one of us pretended to be a nurse seeking information on Miss Eberhart?"

"But why would a nurse be speaking to the man?" Jim asked. "The security officer already did—or we know he attempted to, at least. Why would a person from the medical staff be following up? And if a medical person did need to follow up, why wouldn't it be the ship's physician?"

"Good questions," Mart muttered, wishing that he had good—that is, easy—answers.

Again, there were a few moments of silence as the group of young people considered this new obstacle.

"We don't have to say it has anything to do with the murder," Trixie finally said. "What if whoever poses as the nurse pretends that it's a routine health call, just making sure that everything is the way it's supposed to be prior to landing in the United States. What do you think?"

"It *could* work," Mart agreed as he continued to chew on the problem.

"But how can we ask any questions about the murdered woman then?" Jim wanted to know. "We'd have to keep all of our questions strictly about the German man's health."

"Well, what other kind of ocean liner crew could we pretend to be? I can't think of any that would allow us to ask any questions about the murder. Other than posing as the *Normandie*'s security staff, and I'm not really comfortable doing that," Brian said. Then he amended his statement. "Not that I'm really comfortable posing as *any* staff."

Dan and Jim nodded together in agreement. “Too many things could go wrong posing as a security crew member,” Jim added.

“Maybe we do just need to go stake out the room,” Trixie said. “Maybe something will happen that we can take advantage of. You never know.”

“We can make it an event,” Brian said. “We haven’t given the rest of them a tour of first class yet. We can do that while we look to see where his room is located.”

Honey grimaced. “The last time we went on a ‘tour,’ we found a dead body! I’m not sure all of us going on a tour together is a good idea!” she stated, only half-joking.

The group ultimately decided that the tour was the best idea, despite how the last group tour outing had ended, and the Beldens and Honey showed their three new friends the Sun Deck, Boat Deck, and Promenade Deck, with their various attractions. Diana fell in love with the Winter Garden, and even Jim and Dan found the area fascinating, with all of its greenery that practically made the room feel alive. The group also toured the Café Grille and delighted in the brilliantly lit art deco columns and intriguing walls made from pigskin. Also on the tour were the longest promenade afloat on the high seas and a theatre that showed the most exciting shows that Europe had to offer right there on the ship.

Honey and the Beldens even showed their new friends their suites. Those staying in first class had been feeling modest and didn’t want to “show off” the opulence in which they were fortunate enough to be staying, but Diana expressed an interest in seeing the suites. So, with some hesitation, they included the Trouville and Deauville Suites in their tour. Moms happened to be on the Beldens’ private promenade deck, cross-stitching in the lively sea air, and she was thrilled to be able to meet her children’s new friends.

“Please, come sit out here and visit with me for a while,” she invited the young people, a friendly smile lighting up her face, after Mart had made the introductions.

For a moment, Jim couldn’t breathe. Not only did he feel like he was looking at Trixie in twenty years’ time, and feeling an odd sense of seeing into his future, but he also felt like he was seeing his own mother. It wasn’t that Mrs. Belden and his mother looked that much alike. Although their coloring was the same, the physical similarities ended there. Mrs. Belden’s features were more round and vibrant than his mother’s—Katie had seemed so thin and fragile to him, even when she was well—but there was a...motherliness, a genuine warmth common to both women that Jim was feeling wash over him now.

While Jim was trying to process his emotions, Brian was hurrying to respond to his mother’s request before Trixie could make the excuse that he knew she would. “We’d love to, Moms.” He glanced over at Trixie, who was shooting him an impatient, dismayed look. Giving her a significant, steady look, he continued meaningfully, “It must be lonely for you with Bobby gone with his nurse and all of us cavorting around the ship.”

His words had the desired effect, and Trixie immediately relaxed. “Yes, Moms!” she cried impulsively. “We’d love to keep you company.” She turned to her friends. “Have a seat. Honey and Di, would you like to help me get some refreshments?”

The three girls quickly set about piling silver trays high with scones, clotted cream, lemon curd, and tea—a perfect mid-morning snack. The Beldens’ butler had stocked a perfect British pantry as soon as he had learned that the family he would be taking care of on that sailing was from Great Britain. When

the three girls returned to the open-air deck carrying their treat-laden trays, they found Jim and Dan animatedly talking to Mrs. Belden.

As Trixie set down the tray she carried, she noticed an almost hungry look on both boys' faces, and the full weight of their situation settled upon her. These were two men who hadn't known the loving touch of a mother in years. The young girl's heart went out to them, and she felt a little ashamed. She had been annoyed when Brian had agreed to keep their mother company, eager to be on the hunt for clues to the mystery. She suddenly thought of life without Helen Belden, and she vowed to never take her mother for granted again.

"Diana," Mrs. Belden said after Jim had finished a story about hunting pheasants with his father and everyone had tucked into the delicious treats, "I understand that you're from Ireland. Please tell me about your home. I understand Ireland is absolutely beautiful."

With that simple request, Helen drew Di in, and she began to tell her friends' mother about the beauty of her homeland, her shyness at being in such grand surroundings falling away completely.

It was about an hour later, after the trays of food had been decimated and everyone was feeling quite at home with the lovely blonde woman, that Helen said, "This has been a lovely visit, but I won't keep you any longer. I know that you must want to explore more of the fun areas of the ship."

Trixie smiled and gave her mother a fierce hug. "Spending time with you, Moms, is a far better treat than anything we could find on this ship," she said, her voice full of emotion and her earlier resolution still at the forefront of her mind.

Surprised, Helen hugged her only daughter back. "What a lovely thing to say, Trixie."

After the seven young people had cleared away the trays to the small kitchenette for Jacques to make disappear like magic, they left the Trouville Suite and continued their tour, searching for Room 1013 to see if they could find the mysterious Herr Schmidt or some information that would help them solve the murder of the German woman. After a few minutes, Trixie excitedly signaled to her friends.

"Let's look through here!" she instructed, pointing to a door that indicated that it led to a corridor filled with state rooms. "I have a good feeling!"

Within a few moments of entering the passageway, Trixie was gripping Jim's arm excitedly and pointing at a door. Jim, happiness bubbling inside him at the feel of the warmth of Trixie's grip on his arm, smiled down at the animated young woman.

The seven young people came to a halt as they considered the room in question. It was located near the end of the long hallway, not far from a bank of elevators. It would be an easy exercise to watch the room while having a legitimate reason to be loitering about, as they could pretend to be waiting for the elevator. It might be a boring mission, but it was an achievable one at least.

Having "cased the joint," as Trixie insisted on quoting from the detective pulp magazines she was forever reading, the group headed to the nearby recreation room, which held table tennis and billiards tables, to discuss their next move.

Once they were all seated on a couple of the fashionable sofas and settees that bordered the edge of the recreation room, Jim said, "The set up is perfect for watching what goes on in that room. The

elevators give us a really good excuse for loitering, and we can hide around the corner and still hear what's going on. It's perfect."

"Perfectly perfect," Honey agreed. "So should we start watching him as soon as we come up with a plan?"

"We could pair off," Trixie said. "And take shifts."

"That's not a bad idea, sis," Mart agreed.

"And we can have one group of three," Brian added. "Of course we'll want to have at least one male in each pair. For safety."

Trixie saw Brian's serious dark eyes stray toward Honey, and she couldn't help but grin. "For safety," she echoed knowingly.

"Maybe hour-long shifts?" Mart asked, consulting his watch. "Two pairs of us could take a turn, and then we could all have lunch together."

"That's a grand idea," Honey agreed. "We could try out the Café Grille."

As if of one mind, all three of the third-class passengers looked down at their clothes.

There was a moment of silence before Di spoke up. "I'm not sure I feel comfortable eating in first class dressed like this." Her dress was a simple cotton affair in a lovely violet color that perfectly matched her eyes. It was worn and plain, but certainly very well and meticulously cared for.

"You look fine, Di!" Mart, Trixie, and Honey all cried at once.

"Truly, you do," Honey continued, "but if you're feeling uncomfortable, I don't mind if you borrow one of my frocks."

Trixie grinned wickedly. "You're welcome to borrow anything I own, but Moms had to absolutely force me to bring evening gowns for dinner. She knows how to pick her battles, so I don't have many dresses with me. I have a couple of skirt and sweater sets and dressy pants, but that's about it."

Di smiled at Trixie's impish grin. "I'm glad your mom allows you to be comfortable and didn't make you pack a lot of frilly dresses. You definitely don't seem the type."

"I'll say!" Mart said with a snort. Trixie merely sniffed and ignored her almost twin.

Brian looked at Jim and Dan. "You guys are fine, too, for lunch, but if you're not feeling comfortable, Mart and I would be glad to share some of our threads with you."

"Or we don't have to eat in the Café Grille, which is the most popular lunchtime spot," Trixie said. "We could also eat at lunch in the dining room. It's a lot less crowded than the grill and nowhere near as formal as it is at dinner."

Di said slowly, "I've heard that your dining room is absolutely legendary, so I *would* actually like to see it." She looked down at her basic, homemade dress. "If you're sure I'd look and fit in okay with what I'm wearing, I'm game."

“You fit in more than my dear sister does with her notions of still being a tomboy at her age,” Mart said drily. Trixie, proving her brother’s point, stuck her tongue out at Mart.

Jim laughed. “I like tomboys,” he said. “I think it’s great that Trixie follows her own drummer.” He looked at Di. “Obviously, I’ve not had the chance to frequent the dining room in first class, but I think you look absolutely lovely.”

Di blushed at the compliment. “Thank you.”

Dan interjected then. “So, it’s settled. We’ll eat lunch in the dining room at twelve-thirty sharp. I think I can speak for Jim and myself when I say that we wouldn’t mind borrowing some clothes, as our outfits have not been as well-kept as Diana’s—if you’re sure?” Dan looked to Mart and Brian, who both nodded. “Great. Thank you. Then one pair will keep watch on Schmidt’s room for the next hour, and one pair after that until lunchtime. Meanwhile, the others can go pay a visit to Mrs. Eberhart and give her our condolences.”

“That’s a great idea,” Jim said. “We don’t want to descend on her all at once.”

“How about this?” Trixie interjected, her natural leadership instincts kicking in. “Jim, Dan, and I will take the first shift. Mart and Di can have the second shift, which will give Jim and Dan time to change before lunch. Honey, you are definitely the most tactful among us, so why don’t you and Brian call on Mrs. Eberhart? Your butler said he was trying to arrange a visit, right?”

Everyone had their marching orders, so the group hurried in various directions to execute their plan. Jim, Dan, and Trixie headed to the bank of elevators near Schmidt’s room to spend the next hour watching to see if they could learn anything. Honey and Brian followed along with them, planning to take the elevators to the floor that held Anna Eberhart’s room. Mart and Di headed in the opposite direction to take a stroll along the first class promenade and spend some more time in the Winter Garden, which absolutely captivated the young Miss Lynch.

Jim, Dan, and Trixie stationed themselves in the elevator lobby. Dan and Jim took a seat on a nearby bench that was flanked with two potted ficus plants, while Trixie stationed herself near the corner and peered around toward Room 1013. The trio said their goodbyes to Honey and Brian, who disappeared into one of the gilded elevator cars for the ride down to the deck that the elder Eberhart was temporarily calling home. Brian and Honey exited on the correct floor and quietly made their way to Room 2072, an unassuming room in the very middle of the long hallway.

Once they stood in front of the unadorned wooden door, the two paused in nervous anticipation, looking at each other. Suddenly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world to do, Brian reached for one of Honey’s slender hands and grasped it reassuringly. Honey felt a tingle travel up her arm as a warmth spread through her belly.

“You ready?” he asked in a low voice.

“As I’ll ever be. You?” she returned, also keeping her voice low and trying to ignore the burgeoning feelings within her.

“As I’ll ever be,” he echoed. With a last squeeze for reassurance, Brian let her hand go and knocked on the door before them. Honey, released from his mesmerizing grasp, took a deep breath and smoothed her hair.

Within a few minutes, they heard the sound of a lock being turned, and a slender middle-aged woman with short grey hair answered the door. She wore a tailored pantsuit and sensible shoes and exhibited a crisply efficient manner. The woman smiled pleasantly but curiously as she said, "Hello. May I help you?"

She sounded very British, and both Honey and Brian were thrown for a minute. They were expecting a French nurse, which this woman didn't appear to be. But neither was this woman German.

Brian recovered first and called on his best manners. "Hello, ma'am. I'm Brian Belden, and this is my friend, Madeleine Wheeler," he introduced, deciding at the last second to use Honey's more formal given name. "We're sorry to intrude, but we were hoping that we might be able to speak to Frau Eberhart."

The woman hesitated for a moment, stepping out into the hallway and shutting the door behind her. "I hate to be rude, but is this about her daughter?"

"Yes, ma'am," Honey responded. "You see, we were the ones who found her, and it made quite an impression on us, and...well, we wanted to pay our respects and enquire about Frau Eberhart's well-being. We can't even imagine how she's feeling, and we completely understand if she's not well enough—or doesn't want—to receive visitors."

At Honey's words, the woman's face visibly relaxed. "Frau Eberhart *is* rather upset," she said, sounding very stiff-upper-lip British in describing a mother who had lost her child as "rather upset," but Brian and Honey immediately understood as she continued, "but I think meeting the young people who found her daughter may actually give her comfort in a perverse way.

"I'm Miss Margery Trask, by the way. Margarethe—the poor thing—was serving as her mother's caretaker during the crossing. Word came my way about the situation, so I volunteered to see to Frau Eberhart for the remainder of the voyage. I often look after my invalid sister, after all. Please do come in," Margery Trask said, moving aside as she opened the wooden door to let the pair of young people into the meager but adequate room.

As Brian and Honey stepped through the threshold, Miss Trask addressed the German woman lying on the bottom bunk. "Anna, a pair of young people are here to see you," she said in a gentle and soothing voice.

There was no movement from the bunk.

"They knew Margarethe."

Brian and Honey were startled at the caretaker's rather audacious words—could you know someone in death?—and looked at each other in a panic, but the gently spoken phrase actually caused the woman to stir. The hazy form on the bunk began to shift and move until the bed's occupant—a stout woman with silvery blond hair that hung long and limp and a face lined with grief and age—turned to face them.

Her eyes, a pale, watery blue so bleak and dead of emotions as they stared at the newcomers, made both Honey and Brian flinch. Before them lay a woman who had given up all hope and had absolutely nothing left to live for. It was absolutely painful to witness.

“You knew my girl?” the older woman rasped, her voice scratchy from disuse or a long cigarette habit impossible to determine, but the mixture of grief and hope dripping from those four words was unmistakable.

Brian and Honey looked to Margery Trask for guidance on what to say next, considering that they didn’t truly know Margarethe Eberhart.

The temporary companion seemed to sense their panic because she stepped up immediately and said honestly, “They’re the ones that found her, Anna, and they wanted to pay their respects.”

There was a beat, and then the grieving, plaintive, German-accented voice asked, “You found my girl?”

“We did, Frau Eberhart,” Brian said, trying to keep his voice strong and masculine. “And we’re very sorry.”

There was a silence. “She was still beautiful at the end, was she not?”

Brian looked to Honey before answering. In response, it was she who grabbed his hand and squeezed it for reassurance this time. It gave him what he needed to continue, “She was indeed beautiful, Frau Eberhart. We thought that she was sleeping at first.”

That had certainly been true in one sense. The seven young people had not been able to comprehend that the woman was dead, so sleep was the only possible explanation their traumatized brains had put forth in that horrible moment. But as each one had processed the violence before them—the blood...*everywhere*—they had known on another level that she was dead. But what harm could it do to tell the poor suffering woman a comforting white lie that was only a lie on a technicality?

“Did they tell you the truth?” the woman asked. Brian and Honey looked at each other in confusion before turning their attention back to the pitiful woman in the lower bunk.

“I’m sorry, Frau Eberhart,” Brian said. “The truth?”

At that point, the woman’s grieving features twisted into something vicious and hateful. “That those bastards murdered her!” she hissed.

Honey gasped as Miss Trask interjected, “Anna, you need to calm down.”

Brian took a few steps closer to the bed, kneeling down and grasping the woman’s hand, which she had stretched out to him even as wracking sobs overtook her. “Frau Eberhart, what do you mean they murdered her? *Who* murdered her?”

“*The Nazis!*” the woman spat out, as if the word “Nazi” was the most vile of profanities that she could have possibly choked on. “She confided in me the night before she died...”

At that, Miss Trask hurried over to the woman’s side and knelt, effectively displacing Brian. “Anna, you’re not feeling well. You’re not thinking straight. Please calm down. You’re going to hurt yourself.”

At that, Anna Eberhart turned venomous eyes on her new caretaker. “I am most certainly thinking straight,” she spat out. “My girl, my Margarethe, she knew the Nazis were evil. She knew they had to be

stopped. She was giving secrets to the British Secret Intelligence Service. It's why we were here, on this cursed French ship. I was her cover. But she was meeting an SIS agent. Giving him Nazi secrets."

At that revelation, Mrs. Eberhart gave a brittle laugh. "Margarethe looked like the perfect Aryan—those icy blue eyes, that flaxen blonde hair, the genealogy. Everything that they wanted in a good Aryan woman, a good Nazi." Again, the woman spat the word. "But they didn't know about our family's distant English connections. I am a good German woman, but my parents sent me to England after all of the upheaval on the continent during the Great War."

At that, a faraway look came into the woman's pale eyes. Miss Trask looked as though she wanted to speak, but Mrs. Eberhart continued her narrative. "As a young girl, Margarethe was so obsessed with doing good, being her best, with knowing my stories of the war, with learning English. It served her well in connecting with the SIS and helping them with their intelligence. It also served her well in getting a job within the Nazis. They drooled over her blonde hair, her blue eyes, and they positively salivated over her knowledge of English, which would help them infiltrate the enemy."

Suddenly, as if everything had just become too much, the older woman let her head fall back onto her bunk, clearly exhausted. It was in a weak voice that she finished, "And that's what killed her."

There was a moment of stunned silence as Brian and Honey tried to process the woman's words, and then suddenly Frau Eberhart turned her head again, struggling to place herself up on her elbow so that she was in a position to stare at them.

"*Bitte*, do not let my daughter die in vain," she pleaded in a newfound strong, clear voice. "Get that bastard she met with. Not the Englishman. I've met him. He was very kind to me. It's that German bastard, Schmidt, who came sniffing around and invited her to dinner. They found out she was spying. I know it."

At that, the woman collapsed on her bed, and Miss Trask was galvanized into action. "Please let me tend to her," she said as she looked directly into Brian's bewildered eyes. "You understand that she is grieving, and she has made up a fantastic story to help her process her daughter's death. You do not need to be worried about secret Nazi spy plots on the ship. I appreciate you wanting to pay your respects, but please take your leave so that I may take care of her."

"Of course," Brian managed to gasp out. He and Honey said hurried good-byes and left, careful to close the door behind them.

Outside of the room, the duo looked around and determined that they were alone. They stood there, speechless.

"Could it be true?" Honey finally asked in a voice barely above a whisper.

"I don't know," Brian responded. "It seems strange that a spy would confess to her mother that she was a spy, but maybe she knew she was in danger? On the other hand, the mind protects itself in fantastic and mysterious ways. The whole thing could be a fantasy, as Miss Trask said, and a way for the woman to deal with her grief. Instead of blaming herself for bringing her daughter on the ship that caused her death, it's easier to blame it on Nazis. They *do* rather seem to make a good scapegoat for just about everything these days."

“But if it *is* true...” Honey said, her voice trailing off. The two stared at each other, the gravity of the situation suddenly crashing down around them.