

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

●●●by Dana●●●

Author Notes: This chapter title is (obviously) inspired by (okay, copied directly from) the title of Agatha Christie's novel, *Evil Under the Sun*. There's also an *X-Files* reference, which also is included in earlier chapters, but I forgot to point that out when I posted, lol. I also couldn't help throwing a shout out to my doctoral advisor. Thank you so much to the lovely Julia, who always helps me find the perfect way to say something and points out that I didn't *really* mean to type the word I typed! {{hugs}} Many thanks to Susan, who squeezed her stellar edit into her very busy schedule. {{hugs}} Word count: 5,867.

Chapter Seven: Evil Under the Sun

Meanwhile, Trixie, Dan, and Jim were growing increasingly bored as the minutes ticked by and nothing happened outside of the mysterious German man's room. Not that they had expected anything different—it would be too lucky for any major development to happen as soon as they started watching the room. It was nearing the time when Mart and Di were supposed to relieve them when Dan, peeking around the corner, announced quietly that a man was traveling down the hallway toward them.

This did not garner much excitement, as they had seen several passengers moving up and down the hall as they traveled to and fro on the ship. Generally, these had been pairs or groups. Lovers, young and old, strolling hand in hand, enjoying the romanticism of the renowned French ocean liner, or families, chattering happily as they made their way to the pool or the theater to see one of the legendary puppet shows.

As the man slowed near their target's room, Dan's heart began to beat faster, and he hissed to Trixie and Jim, who were flirting innocently with each other, "He's visiting the room."

At that, Trixie and Jim immediately forgot their flirtations and eagerly joined Dan, carefully peering around the corner at their quarry. Trixie noted that the man standing in front of the door looked a lot like the description Honey had given of the German baron. The young blonde sleuth memorized the man's appearance as he hesitated in front of the door and furtively looked up and down the passageway. Clearly convinced that he was alone, the man raised a hand and knocked three times on the door. He paused and then knocked twice. He paused again and then knocked four times.

"A secret knock!" Trixie breathed. "There *must* be something untoward going on!"

Jim and Dan nodded, but neither of them spoke. The trio heard the door open followed by a gruff voice speaking in German. Crestfallen, the three looked at each other. They had forgotten that any conversation would probably be in German, a language that none of them knew!

The man standing in the hallway responded, clearly terse and unhappy. With another furtive glance in either direction, he entered the room, and the door closed loudly behind the two men.

Jim, Dan, and Trixie, who had realized that they had been holding their collective breath, all exhaled and looked at each other.

"What now?" Trixie said, an odd mix of frustration and excitement entering her voice.

"Let's go hang out outside of the room," Dan suggested.

Trixie brightened, clearly not considering the dangers of loitering by the door and eavesdropping. "Okay!" she agreed immediately.

The two set off down the hall straight away before Jim, who had been about to protest about the wisdom of that plan, could even utter a word. Instead, the redhead found himself alone as his friends sped away from the elevator lobby and parked themselves “casually” outside of Room 1013.

Dan leaned against the wall next to the doorway and carelessly took a half-penny coin out of the left front pocket of his worn brown wool pants and tossed it in the air. Anyone walking by would see an air of casualness, but Jim could see the taut concentration his oldest friend displayed as the redhead approached the doorway himself. Dan was a wiry young Irish lad, and right now his lean frame was wound like a tightly coiled spring.

Although the trio could not understand what was being said, they could recognize loud, angry voices in any tongue. Neither German man was happy.

At one point, after a particularly loud outburst, Dan’s face darkened with a sudden look of comprehension, and Trixie wondered what he had understood in that moment. Before Trixie had a chance to ask him about it, loud angry footfalls could be heard approaching the door. The three high-tailed it toward the elevator banks and were just turning the corner when the door opened, and the visiting man said sharply, “*Schweinehund!*” and stalked down the hallway in the same direction from which he had come.

“What did you hear him say?” Trixie asked Dan as soon as the three young people were safely out of sight in the elevator lobby.

“Heard who say?” Mart asked as he and Di joined Jim, Dan, and Trixie in the little lobby area.

“Another German man just visited Schmidt,” Trixie explained. “He looked a lot like the description that Honey gave of the German baron she had dinner with last night. He seemed... cultured. He gave a secret knock and went into the room and then got into an argument with Schmidt.”

“Schmidt’s leaving right now!” Jim hissed. He had continued to watch the room from around the corner while Trixie caught Mart and Diana up on the most recent events.

“Follow him!” Trixie hissed in return, springing into action and acting impulsively, grabbing Jim’s hand and pulling him down the passageway after the man.

Left behind, Dan looked at Mart. “Is your sister always like this?”

Mart nodded ruefully. “She’s pretty impulsive and loves adventure, so...yes. I can’t count the number of scrapes she’s gotten herself into over the years.”

Dan grinned at that but didn’t comment.

Meanwhile, Jim was reveling in the feel of Trixie’s small, soft hand in his larger one. Her palm was silky, warm but not clammy, just right as far as he was concerned. He wondered if he was having the same effect on Trixie that she was having on him.

For her part, in the back of her mind, she was definitely enjoying the excuse to hold the handsome redhead’s hand, but Trixie Belden was so focused on the mystery that it was only a pleasant thought lounging casually at the back of her mind.

They followed the man out onto the promenade deck, where he loitered near a potted ficus plant and took out an elegant silver case and a matching lighter. Extracting a cigarette, he brought it to his lips and lit it. A cloud of smoke billowed around his head and then disappeared into the salty sea air. He had only been there a minute or two when another man joined him. Trixie and Jim were fortunate enough to find a bench near the railing that faced the pair and was also close enough that they could hear the conversation, which they didn't expect to understand.

To their pleasant surprise, the gentleman who joined the mysterious German man revealed himself to be British as soon as he spoke.

"Pardon me, kind sir, would you mind allowing me to borrow your lighter?" he asked, and Trixie was sure that it was some kind of spy code.

Schmidt immediately held out the silver gadget he had just used to light his own cigarette. "It's a family heirloom. Real silver," he responded, his English heavily accented with a guttural German sound.

"And a handsome one at that," the Brit responded.

Trixie was more convinced than ever that the conversation had to be some kind of secret language. Who *actually* spoke like that?

"You're welcome to have a seat if you'd like," Schmidt invited.

"Don't mind if I do," the newcomer said, taking a seat on the bench. "It is a lovely day to take in the sea air."

Trixie studied the British man as he sat. He was slender, with a wrinkled, wolf-like face, silver hair cut very short, and piercing hazel-green eyes. The grey cashmere suit he wore was impeccably tailored to his slender frame, the navy blue silk tie providing the only color to the man's visage.

To Jim, everything about him screamed "predator." He was unpleasantly reminded of the dreadful memories of the predator he himself had been left with after his mother died.

Seemingly satisfied with the exchange, the silver-haired man began to speak in a lower voice. "Well, Schmidt, what do you want? It's not ideal to meet on the ship, you know. Have you learned anything about the gift? The nature of it? Whether it is onboard?"

Trixie was gratified to hear that the name that Dan had gleaned from casing the hospital room had been confirmed. And now they had a definitive face to go with the name.

"Unfortunately, I had to dispose of the package before I could determine anything about the gift," the German man said.

The Brit said drily, "And apparently had no time to dispose of the package properly." There was a long pause as he took a drag on his cigarette and then added disdainfully, "You left a mess."

"I know, but I heard some kids coming down the hallway. Would you have liked me to stay to greet them?" Even with the German accent, it was hard to miss the sarcasm. Trixie and Jim exchanged a glance. They instinctively knew that *they* were the "kids" in question.

“Anyway,” the German continued, “I wanted to talk to you about our friend. He came by my room today. He’s not happy. He didn’t realize how the package would be taken care of, and he wants out. I am afraid he will become what you call...the loose cannon.”

The British man smiled, a grim, determined smile. “There is no out. He should know that by now. I thought his support and resolve had been verified at the highest level.”

“His financial support of the cause is generous and real. Apparently, he is squeamish about certain other aspects.”

“Even though she was a traitor to her homeland?”

At that, Schmidt snorted. “You’re a traitor to *your* homeland, Waters,” the man pointed out.

There it was again. That grim smile, as if the man had no soul. “And I fully expect to be summarily executed if I am ever found out. It *does* go with the territory.” He was eerily calm about that fact as he took another long pull on his cigarette. “Besides, my mother was German. It was my British bastard of a father who raised us on that godforsaken dreary island instead of in the Fatherland.”

Schmidt gave him a look of icy disdain. “Life on the continent was no picnic after the Great War, either, you know.”

“That’s neither here nor there,” Waters said in a bored voice. “I believe I have a lead to determine the nature of the gift. I will keep you informed. Keep an eye on the baron. If he needs to be handled, do let me know.”

The predator stood, extinguishing his cigarette butt beneath his foot. His eyes swept over the deck in what Trixie recognized was a deceptively casual manner, and her heart skipped a beat as hazel, determined eyes paused on her for the briefest second. Fortunately, as soon as the man had stood, Jim had thought quickly and leaned in as if whispering something in Trixie’s ear. To a casual observer, it would look as though he and Trixie were a romantic pair, enjoying the sun and each other, and Trixie was simply looking forward as she listened to the sweet nothings her paramour was gently whispering.

Seemingly satisfied with the scene before him, the wolf-like man turned on a well-clad heel and disappeared through one of the doors that led to the interior passenger areas. Trixie and Jim watched as Schmidt finished his cigarette and lit another one.

“My stepfather smoked like a chimney,” Jim muttered as he watched the man, the distaste in his voice evident. “I’ll *never* smoke because of that.”

“Good,” Trixie said absentmindedly. “It smells really bad, and I’d hate to be around it.”

Jim smiled down at her. “Are you suggesting that we’ll be seeing each other after we land in New York? That you care enough whether or not I develop a distasteful habit?”

Trixie’s heart skipped a beat, and she suddenly realized just how close she was sitting to Jim. And she was tongue-tied again to boot! “I...I...” she stuttered.

Jim followed his instinct of the day before and reached out to tug what he now thought of as *his* curl.

"It's okay," he said, his voice husky. "I know I'd definitely like to see you more when we reach New York. Do you have any idea where you and your family are going to relocate?"

Trixie shook her head, trying desperately to regain her equilibrium. "No," she said, struggling to form a coherent sentence in the face of those brilliant green eyes. "Uncle Harold is out in Idaho, but I know my father is not too keen to settle that far west. Uncle Andrew has a sheep farm in Iowa." Suddenly, her voice took on a wistful tone. "New York sounds lovely. I've been reading about the Hudson River ever since my parents told us that we would be emigrating and landing in New York. The rolling hills outside of New York City, out in the countryside, but being near enough to the excitement of the big city—I think I would really like that!"

"My great uncle, whom I'm going to find, lives in a town along the Hudson River north of the city. Maybe you could convince your father that that's where you need to be."

Trixie smiled shyly. "That would be really nice. Honey told me that her mother was going to talk to her father about buying a house in the country north of the city, also somewhere along the Hudson." Forgetting herself, Trixie reached out and gripped Jim's hand in hers. "Could you imagine if we somehow managed to end up in the same place?"

Jim squeezed her hand in return. "That would be the bee's knees, as I believe they say in America," he said, smiling softly down at her.

Just then, Schmidt ground out his second cigarette and stood up. Trixie and Jim reluctantly turned their attention from each other and their fanciful plans and carefully followed the mysterious German man with their eyes. He disappeared through the same door that his British compatriot had, so Trixie and Jim stood and followed at a safe distance.

The man went directly to his room. Trixie and Jim passed by the man's doorway quickly and headed to the elevator lobby to see if their friends still were there. They were and had been joined by Honey and Brian. Everyone was talking excitedly, and it seemed that there was a great deal of thrilling news to be shared. When Trixie and Jim joined the group, everyone wanted to hear their information as well.

Mart looked at his watch. "It's half past eleven," he said. "How about we get ready for lunch and then share all of our information in the dining room?"

Trixie looked at her brother knowingly and said with a sniff, "Leave it to you to think of your stomach at a time such as this, Mart Belden."

Before Mart could protest and the almost twins could launch into one of their infamous bickering sessions, Brian interjected, "I want to hear all the information as fast as possible, too, Trix, but we were going to luncheon soon anyway, and we'll be more comfortable there." He looked around. "Not to mention that we'll attract a lot less attention sitting at a table in a dignified manner rather than milling about in the elevator lobby not far from the German man's room. Considering the fact that some of us have been loitering here for quite some time, we're lucky we haven't attracted a lot of negative attention as it is."

Trixie grinned at her oldest brother, her ire completely dissipated by his logical comments. "You're right, Bri," she conceded. "And I have to admit I'm a bit hungry, too." She looked around at her friends, a wide and becoming smile curving her cherry lips. "Let's go!"

After a visit to their suites, where Mart and Brian had loaned Dan and Jim, respectively, outfits, and Diana had given in and borrowed one of Honey's pretty frocks, the crowd of seven entered the Grande Salle à Manger with Honey in the lead. The young Wheeler politely informed the *maître d'hôtel* that she needed a table of seven for her herself and her friends, and he was more than happy to oblige for the lovely young woman who had dined with the captain the evening before. Jim, Dan, and Di breathed sighs of relief as the man did not seem to find them out of place with the rest of the group.

The dining room, with its numerous tables, was nearly empty for lunch. The maître d' led the group of friends, who had become rather quiet as those who had not experienced the dining room gazed in awestruck fascination at the opulent decadence surrounding them, to a table in the corner of the mirrored room.

Once seated, the young people were quiet as they studied their menus—something that did not exist in third class, as everyone ate the same soups and stews at every meal. Jim, Dan, and Diana were captivated by the expansiveness of the *carte du jour*, which offered a variety of delights, including hors d'oeuvres, potages, fish, pasta, roasts, a cold buffet of assorted cold-cut meats, lettuce salads, a cheese course, *entremets* (assorted French pastries), and a variety of beverages. It was a veritable feast with a varied selection for any taste, and the seven young people suddenly realized their hunger and ordered with gusto.

After they had given their selections to the attentive server, Trixie and Jim shared what they had overheard on the promenade deck. Honey and Brian relayed the conversation that they had had with Margarethe Eberhart's mother, whose belief that her daughter had been murdered because she had been spying on Germany for Great Britain had been borne out by Schmidt's and Waters' conversation.

"The 'package' that Schmidt and Waters were talking about taking care of must have been Miss Eberhart. They practically admitted to murder!" Trixie exclaimed.

Brian shook his head. "Not quite. Nothing about a package says 'murder,' at least not conclusively."

Dan grinned. "No, but directly talking about murder directly is pretty damning."

Trixie stared at Dan for a moment before realization dawned. "That's what you heard when Schmidt and the baron were arguing! I never did find out what you understood!"

"I did recognize two words said very close to each other," Dan confirmed. "One was the word *Mord*, which means murder, and the other was *Mädchen*, which means girl."

"I wonder if Waters is the Englishman whom Mrs. Eberhart said that she trusted," Trixie mused aloud just as several waiters approached with a variety of foods to place on the table. Lunch was served *service à la Française*, with all dishes served at once in a very impressive display rather than in separate courses, as during the dinner service.

The seven young people tucked into the food with enthusiasm after all of the dishes had been placed on the table. Some of the items were not to their liking, but some of the items they found to be downright delicious. Jim, Dan, and Di were basking in the change in variety of their normal diets. For the last few years, Di's diet had mainly consisted of corned beef, cabbage, and potatoes—and those were the good days, when meat had been available. Most times, the family's diet had consisted exclusively of porridge.

For Jim and Dan, having *any* food, especially fresh food, was exciting. Being on the ship had been a blessing in that regard. Meals were a given, even in third class, and filling meals at that, if not quite as palatable as all of this gourmet food being showered on them now.

As they were halfway through the meal, Trixie said, “We’ve only got two more full days left on the voyage. We should eat here for lunch each day.”

“What a great idea, sis,” Mart agreed as he took a second helping of the leg of veal from an elaborate silver platter. He turned to Di. “And you should invite your parents and the twins, too. And Honey’s parents and our parents could come, so that everybody can get to know each other.”

“That would be brilliant!” Trixie exclaimed. “It would be so wonderful for all of the families to get to know each other and settle nearby! Jim and I were talking about it out on the promenade. His great-uncle lives in a little village on the Hudson that sounds a lot like where Honey’s parents want to buy a place. Do you know where your family is going to settle, Di?”

Di shook her head. “No, but I think my mum and dad figured that we would settle somewhere in New York City. We have some relatives there. We’ve a cousin who lives in Brooklyn and another in the Bronx. They’re both firefighters. We’ve a distantly related uncle in Hell’s Kitchen, a policeman.

“I know my dad is worried, though. He’s too old to be a firefighter or a policeman, so he’s not sure what kind of work that he’ll be able to get. Our family’s lived in Kilmainham for generations, and it’s more rural than industrial. We had a farm, but the bloody English killed that pretty well, they did.” She blushed and began to stammer an apology as she realized that four of her companions were “bloody English.”

It was Mart who waved her apology away. “Understood, Di. Please do go on.”

Somewhat apologetically, Di continued her explanation. “My dad got a job as a janitor in Dublin, and it nearly killed him, it did. I know that his roots are with the earth and that he would love to go back to farming rather than work in a crowded city, but he figures that’s where the jobs are. We haven’t the money to buy a farm when we get to America.” Her voice grew wistful. “But havin’ a farm along the Hudson River sounds lovely, it does. Our farm in Ireland was just south of the River Liffey, the main river that flows through Dublin, and I imagine it to be similar.”

“Our family is more country than city, too,” Trixie said. “Both of my dad’s brothers have settled down in the country, both of them in the more western part of America. I don’t think my dad really wants to live in either of those areas, though. I think he wants to stay in the eastern portion of the States because he figures that it will be easier to travel back to England. I don’t think he really wanted to leave.”

As the seven continued to make their way through the massive amounts of food in front of them, they chatted about how fun it would be if they could all manage to settle near each other in America. After they had stuffed themselves beyond belief, most everyone agreed that they needed to take a stroll around the promenade deck to help them digest their considerable meal.

Only Di had to decline, saying, “My stroll is going to have to be from first class down to third class. Mummy has been absolutely wonderful in allowing me some freedom, but I really need to help her out with the twins this afternoon.”

“I’ll escort you, my dear lady,” Mart said in a formal voice, holding his arm out for her with a flourish. “And I will help you take care of the twins. I remember when Bobby was that age.”

Trixie sniffed, but her blue eyes were twinkling. “You may remember, but not because you had any personal experience with taking care of him. That was *my* job!”

Brian interjected with a smile, “Moms has always done the lion’s share of raising us kids, even Bobby, so you can *both* stop right there.”

After the laughter had subsided, Mart asked, “Before we leave, tell us the plans for later so we know where to meet.”

“I think we should pay a visit to the baron. Honey mentioned that he and his wife are staying in the Rouen Suite. A couple of us could check that out. As for later, I’m not sure. Like Di, I should probably check in and see what’s going on with Bobby. I know that the ship was kind enough to assign a nurse for him and that he’s been having a wonderful time seeing puppet shows and swimming in the pool, but I still feel like I should spend some time with him. A nurse just isn’t the same as family,” Trixie concluded.

Honey, who had had her fair share of nurses and governesses over the years, murmured her approval of Trixie’s statement.

“We Beldens have been invited to dine with the captain at the second seating tonight,” Mart added.

Jim let out a sudden bark of laughter. “That captain doesn’t know what he’s in for between Honey’s clever interrogation last night and Trixie taking a swing at him tonight.” Everyone joined Jim in his amusement before Mart and Diana regretfully said their good-byes and departed for the lower deck.

The remaining group decided what to do next.

“I think we should definitely linger around the Rouen Suite and see what we might find,” Jim offered.

“You know,” Dan said thoughtfully, “if the baron isn’t pleased with the new development, he may be willing to talk—or easily tricked into talking.”

“Unless the British guy does his job and scares the man, which it certainly sounds like he was going to do,” Brian countered.

Honey shuddered involuntarily. “I don’t think I’d be brave enough to talk if I knew that there was a potential for death! How much danger are we putting ourselves by pursuing this?” she wondered.

Brian, Jim, and Dan exchanged glances, which caused Trixie to put her hands on her hips and frown at the three young men. “Hey! *Boys!* Don’t be looking at each other like me and Honey are fragile flowers!”

Dan and Jim grinned at Trixie’s response, even through their unease at Honey’s question, while Brian remained unwavering. “We *do* need to be careful, Trixie,” he admonished.

“Yes, big brother, *we* do. As in *all* of us. Boys *and* girls.” Trixie kept one of her hands on her hips as she raised the other arm and poked her protective older brother with a determined finger. “Don’t you go treating Honey and I as anything less than the very capable women that we are!”

Shocked, Brian could do nothing but try to stutter a response as Dan and Jim looked on in amusement.

“It’s okay, Trixie,” Honey soothed. “It just means that the boys care about us and our welfare.”

The moment smoothed over by Honey’s tact, the five young people agreed on a plan of action and headed toward the middle of the Promenade Deck, where the Rouen and Caen Suites were located.

As it turned out, they didn’t even make it to the Rouen Suite before they met the German baron and his wife out strolling arm-in-arm on the promenade.

“Hello, Miss Wheeler,” Baroness von Ottendorf greeted the young debutante with a genuine, charming smile. “Having an outing with your friends?”

Honey focused on the baroness, who looked nothing but friendly, rather than on the baron, who was eyeing Jim and Dan. She didn’t even want to glance at Trixie, whom she was sure was bristling at the condescending look on the German baron’s face.

“Yes, it’s such a lovely day that we didn’t want to spend time at the indoor pool or in the Winter Garden when the crisp sea air is so invigorating,” Honey responded, a pleasant smile on her face. She gestured toward her companions. “These are my friends. Miss Beatrix Belden and her brother, Brian Belden. These are James Winthrop Frayne the Second and Daniel Mangan, who are relocating from London to New York with Jim’s great-uncle.” And finishing the introductions, “Trixie, Brian, Jim, and Dan, these are the Baron and Baroness von Ottendorf from Germany.”

After a round of polite pleasantries, Honey explained to the rest of the group, as if they weren’t already highly aware, “My parents and I had dinner last night with the baron and baroness at the captain’s table. We all had a wonderful time.”

“That’s marvelous,” Brian said. “My family is dining with the captain this evening, and we’re quite looking forward to it.”

“It will be *wunderbar*,” the baroness responded. “Captain Lehuédé is a gracious host and a marvelous storyteller with so many fascinating sea tales. And the food! It is, as the French say, *magnifique!*”

Brian chuckled. “My brother Mart will be glad to hear that. He has quite a fondness for both stories and food!”

The baroness laughed, a pleasing sound that was infectious. Given how agreeable and charming she was, it was hard to believe that she was married to such a bland, unpleasant man. Honey briefly wondered whether it had been an arranged marriage, and the baroness had only stayed so pleasant over the years because she was one of those happy, optimistic souls who could make the best of any situation. In any case, Honey’s admiration for the woman grew immeasurably during their encounter on the promenade.

“So, your brother, he loves stories. He is a writer?” the baroness wanted to know.

Brian nodded. “That’s his ambition, ma’am. We’re emigrating to the United States, so I’m sure that he will find a good university in which to study writing.”

“Brian, here, will be attending the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons when we arrive in the States,” Trixie offered, once again beaming with pride.

“*Wunderbar!*” the baroness exclaimed. “Congratulations for being accepted into such an esteemed university—and for medical school.” Her face clouded a little. “Too bad you haven’t graduated already. We could use a doctor with a good head on his shoulders.”

“Baroness?” Brian asked, confused as to what she was saying. All five of the young people noticed that the bored look had left the baron’s eyes at his wife’s words, and he was suddenly paying her rapt attention.

“*Liebling*, I don’t think—”

The baroness waved an airy hand. “Nonsense! Fraulein Eberhart could use a good doctor to try to get her some justice. That lazy French doctor on the ship is incompetent!”

“Is the fraulein sick?” Trixie asked, already knowing full well the answer, but feeling it was important not to let the baron know that she knew the name of the dead woman. “Brian has been studying medicine for quite some years already, on his own and through his more medically oriented classes at Imperial College London. He might be able to help her get well.”

A sad look passed over Baroness von Ottendorf’s pleasant features as she said, “No, I’m afraid—”

“Franziska!” the baron said sharply. “This is really not something we should be burdening children with!”

Trixie bristled at his comment, but she was too polite to argue that she was *not* a child. And she didn’t need to, for the baroness was in full control of the conversation. Despite her husband’s sharp and disagreeable tone, the German woman laughed her twinkling laugh and waved an airy hand, her fingers long and slender and adorned with only her simple gold wedding band, worn on the right hand as was the German tradition.

“Please! These are *hardly* children, Werner. This one is heading to the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons!”

Trixie knew it wasn’t very polite, but at the baroness’ words, she couldn’t help but grin—a wide, satisfied, cat-that-ate-the-canary, taunting grin.

The baroness turned her attention from her husband to the young people before her. “I’m sure you’ve heard of the tragic incident on board. There was a German national, Margarethe Eberhart, and she was found dead on board under, shall we say, suspicious circumstances.” The baroness turned to Honey. “I know you’ve heard of it because that gossipy woman had the nerve to bring it up at the supper table. And at the captain’s table, no less!”

The baroness shook her head in reproach as she continued, “Well, with her being a German national—and a lovely young woman whom I’ve actually entertained in our house in Berlin—I’d like to make sure that she receives justice. The ship’s medical officer examined her, but he has not acted on what he learned! By the time that we arrive in New York City, I am sure that the American medical examiner will not have much to work with.”

At that, she sighed, not seeming to notice her husband’s discomfort at the turn the conversation had taken. “I wish we had encountered you after you had completed your training,” she said to Brian. “I am sure that you would be an improvement over that French man—who’d rather be flirting with his nurses and lounging about the ship than actually working!” she finished indignantly.

She seemed to realize that she had been rather outspoken in her opinions and suddenly gave an embarrassed smile. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't be so candid," she said contritely. "I just feel...*passionately* about justice, and it pains me that this poor young woman is not going to receive it."

It was Trixie who spoke up first. "She *will* receive it, Baroness von Ottendorf. I'm...well...I know that I *am* young, but that doesn't have to be a disadvantage." To Trixie's credit, she did not turn and give the baron a withering look as she said this, although she had considered it. "I, too, feel strongly that everyone should receive the justice that he or she deserves. And ever since we discovered that poor woman's body, I, too, have desperately wanted justice for her."

The baroness gasped at the young woman's words. "You found the body?"

Trixie nodded gravely. "We didn't know her name at the time," she explained truthfully, "but yes, we all did. All seven of us. My brother Mart and our friend Diana were with us, too. And we all agreed that we wanted to find that poor woman justice."

The baroness reached out to touch Trixie's arm. "Well, bless you for that."

"Franziska," said the baron, whose face had turned increasingly red throughout the conversation, "justice is a wonderful concept, but these ch...*young people* should not be burdened with such profound notions, particularly when they should instead be enjoying this marvelous ship and all she has to offer. As a matter of fact, we should not be talking their ears off. Let us allow them to go enjoy themselves."

He bowed stiffly at the young people and placed a firm hand on his wife's elbow, leading her away even as he was saying, "Have a pleasant afternoon."

The baroness smiled apologetically at the group and said her good-byes as she allowed her husband to lead her away. Apparently, she did not want to make a scene, because nothing about her previous behavior had indicated that she was the type to just meekly follow her husband—just the opposite, in fact. The five called their good-byes and then turned to stare at each other.

"Guilty conscience, anyone?" Dan asked.