

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

●●●by Dana●●●

Author Notes: This chapter title is a play on Agatha Christie's *Cards on the Table*, but in this case refers to dinner at the captain's table. Many thanks to Julia for editing and Susan for taking care of Jix and posting this when my life exploded. I am hoping to be back to Jix soon! Word count: 3,778.

## Chapter Eight: Cards at the Table

That evening, during the second seating, Captain Lehuédé entertained eleven individuals at his table, including five of the six traveling Beldens. The remaining six members of the party were couples from England, France, and America. The English and French couples were older and both visiting family in America. The American man and woman, whom Trixie guessed to be in their thirties, were returning home after a “grand continental tour,” as the bottle-blonde woman chirped to anyone who would listen.

The beginning of dinner was deadly dull to Trixie, as everyone provided their biographies, explaining how they had all come to be on the magnificent ship. She didn't care that Madame Moreau was pining to see her first grandchild, her only son “betraying” the family by moving to New York City to make his fortune on Wall Street and marrying *la Américaine*. She didn't need to know that Mrs. “Francine but you can call me CiCi” Fitzgerald had managed to visit eight countries in a month. She wasn't even particularly impressed to find that the Englishman was an earl.

During a lull in conversation, the English teen turned to address the captain, who sat at the head of the table three seats down from her. “How long have you been captain of the *Normandie*?” Trixie asked.

The captain finished a bite of creamy brie and then dabbed his mouth with a napkin, answering, “I've only recently taken over from my predecessor, Captain Thoreaux, but I have been assigned to this beautiful ship for more than four years now.”

“I bet you have a lot of fascinating stories, sir,” Mart commented as he selected some cheese from *la plateau de fromages*.

Trixie smiled affectionately at her brother. “Mart is going to be a writer,” she explained to the table. “He loves collecting interesting stories that inspire the characters that he creates.”

“That's fascinating,” the Englishwoman, who had been introduced as Mrs. Henry Ainsworth, said. “I'm sure that the captain will prove to be more than inspirational.”

“I don't know about that,” their host said, modestly, “but I do love to tell stories about this beauty I have the privilege of captaining. There was the time, during the summer of 1937, that...” With that, Captain Lehuédé launched into the tale of a storm that had come up rather unexpectedly in the Atlantic and the modern navigation tool, special to the SS *Normandie*, that had been employed to allow the ship to navigate around the storm and ensure that the trip remained calm and pleasant for the passengers.

Brian, ever the scientist, appreciated the use of technology, while Trixie loved the romantic notion of danger on the high seas.

She commented, “This is a beautiful ship—one that makes you forget the real world on land—but I imagine that it can't always be smooth sailing. That just wouldn't be realistic.”

The would-be sleuth had meant for her words to have double meaning, and she carefully watched the nautical man's reaction. She was sure that his face clouded for a moment before he said, “The

mademoiselle is wise. We like to think that we suspend our passengers in an enchanted world, allowing them to immerse themselves in pleasure as they are suspended between two continents—two worlds—but you are correct. The real world, as you say, does intrude at times.”

“We were very sorry to hear that it intruded during this sailing,” Mrs. Fitzgerald said with a slight shudder.

The captain’s mouth tightened ever so slightly, but his demeanor remained pleasant. “Rest assured, Mrs. Fitzgerald, that the professionals on this ship are accustomed to handling all manner of situations. For example, our chefs. Did you know that they are capable of serving this delicious food to 700 people all at once during a single dinner sitting?” the captain said just as impeccable waiters approached with consommés that filled the air with rich, delicious aromas.

Dismayed though she was that the conversation had turned away from the topic of the onboard tragedy, Trixie had to admire the deftness with which the French captain changed the subject. Her quarry unattainable at the moment, the curly-haired blonde only half-listened to the conversation around her as she sipped the delectable consommé and tried to figure out a way to obtain more information from the captain.

It was the chirping voice of the American woman that pulled her from her reverie. “His name was Waters, I believe.”

Trixie quickly looked up from her soup to find that the blonde woman was addressing her own father. “Yes, St. Alban’s is rather near where we’re from in Aylesbury, but I haven’t met the gentleman.” He smiled gently as he dabbed his moustache with a napkin and said, “Not all British people are bound to know one another.”

Trixie entered the conversation then, trying to sound casual. “I met a man named Waters. Was he rather thin and distinguished looking? Short, silver hair?”

“Yes, that’s him,” the woman said. “He was most charming, even though he and Charlie had a very long and dull conversation about Charlie’s business.” She smiled sweetly. “I could listen to that accent all day. You all are so lucky to sound so cultured.”

“And what business are you in, Mr. Fitzgerald?” Trixie asked under the guise of politeness, eager to hear why Waters would be interested in having a long conversation about this man’s business.

“I work as an engineer for an American automobile company,” Charlie returned. Trixie couldn’t help but notice how his brown eyes shifted downward at the seemingly innocent statement.

*He’s hiding something!* she thought, but before she could gather her wits and determine how to pursue this particular revelation, her almost twin stepped in for her.

“Would that be the Ford Motor Company by any chance?” Mart asked in what Trixie recognized as a deceptively casual tone of voice. He had finished his consommé, his polished silver spoon resting on the exquisite white bone china bowl, delicately rimmed with gold and emblazoned with the CGT logo.

Neither of the almost twins missed the startled look that came over the American’s face before he masked it with a nervous smile. “Yes, that’s my company,” he admitted.

“That’s fascinating,” Mart said. “I think I might have read somewhere that Ford is expanding into airplane engines.” As he spoke, he lightly tapped Trixie’s foot with his own, signaling to her that this was a significant piece of information.

Trixie was watching Charlie Fitzgerald carefully, and she could see that he looked rather uncomfortable. “I understand that moving into that area is a distinct possibility with the current...political climate. America is Great Britain’s ally, and Ford is an American company,” the engineer replied before he immediately turned his attention to hurriedly spooning up the flavorful beef broth in front of him.

“The French Line is helping, too!” Francine-call-me-CiCi interjected in that annoying twitter that grated on Trixie’s nerves.

At his wife’s words, Charlie Fitzgerald turned to stare at her, *consommé* forgotten, mouth agape.

“Oh?” Trixie asked, staring inquisitively at the Americans.

The atmosphere at the table was fairly crackling with electricity, the guests’ antennae attuned to an undercurrent that spoke of intrigue. All eyes were on the American woman, waiting for her to explain her enigmatic statement, when the next course was served—and the proverbial bell saved either of the Americans from answering.

Captain Lehuédé smoothly entered into the expectant silence, again managing the conversation with deft skill. “Yes, the CGT certainly is doing its part to make its passengers forget the politics of the continent. Please enjoy this delicious poached salmon with mousseline sauce. I can assure you that the chef, trained to the most exacting standards of my home country, has prepared a salmon course that will delight your taste buds!”

Encouraged by their host, everyone turned their attention, if somewhat reluctantly, to their delicious fish with its delicate mother sauce.

Trixie, though she too placed forkful after forkful of the tender fish into her mouth, did not taste the subtle complexity of the dish that the others at the table were raving about. Instead, her mind whirled as the conversation turned to innocuous, vapid topics.

She thought about what had been shared at the table that evening. The subtext of the conversation had been that Ford was gearing up to produce airplane engines for Great Britain. Obviously, this couldn’t have been a great secret if Mart somehow knew about it, but then again, Mart had been traveling and gathering stories for months now. She might be the first to tease him, but she also was the first to admit that Mart had skills, and one of them was ferreting out information that no one else could. That talent was augmented with his steel-trap memory. Trixie knew with certainty that Mart had discovered some important truth during his travels, and it was coming into play now.

As the next course arrived, a delicately roasted duck with *pommes au four*, the sandy-haired sleuth couldn’t help but wonder what sort of specific details that Charlie Fitzgerald might have given to Waters, if he had assumed that the grey-haired man was a loyal Brit and on the right side of the current political mess, during the pair’s “long and dull” conversation.

And what did CGT have to do with it? Trixie had initially dismissed Cici Fitzgerald as a flighty woman not worthy of any attention, even to pass the time with while at dinner. Trixie was certain that this woman

had that effect on most people—which in turn could lead people to dismiss her and speak as if she wasn't even there.

It was entirely possible that Waters had dismissed the woman as Trixie herself had done, underestimating the American woman, and had carried on an important conversation not realizing that his quarry's wife was carefully cataloging everything that he was saying. Mrs. Fitzgerald might know more than she realized. And Trixie knew that this was an important avenue to be pursued.

As the remainder of the twelve-course meal was served, Trixie kept an eye on Cici, but the woman did not make any other enigmatic statements nor let any more interesting morsels slip. All she wanted to talk about were the sights that she had seen in Europe and on the *SS Normandie*. Trixie half-listened as Mart and Brian engaged in a discussion about English literature with the English earl and countess. Although Brian was more scientific minded, he had excelled at all of his courses and was able to speak rather intelligently about a variety of subjects. Meanwhile, the captain was carrying on a conversation with the French couple about the astounding specifications of the Grande Salle a Manger and kitchens, which Trixie heard the captain say had enough ovens to roast 768 chickens at once.

As she kept an ear on the other conversations, she made small talk with her parents, telling them a bit about her friends, and the innocent version of what she and her brothers had been keeping themselves busy doing on the ship during the crossing.

When it was time to retire to the Grand Salon for cocktails and dancing, Helen and Peter were surprised to learn that Trixie wanted to join them.

"Darling, we're thrilled, but are you sure?" Helen asked. "I really thought you'd want to retire to the suite so that you could change out of that gown as soon as possible!"

Mart had caught the significant look his almost twin had sent his way, and he jumped to her rescue. "Being in these swanky clothes is pretty dull, but I know that both Trix and I are dying to see the Grand Salon. It's one area we haven't seen yet."

Peter grinned at that. "Of course! You two are curious as cats, ready to explore. We'd love for you to join us." He looked at his oldest son. "Brian?"

Brian turned dark eyes to Trixie, and reading what he saw in her blue eyes, quickly turned back to his father. A slow smile spread across his quiet features. "I guess I'm just as curious as these two cats."

Peter gave a smile very similar to his oldest son's. "What a wonderful development," he said, turning to his wife. "Well, love, we're going to have to suffer through having our dear children join us in the Grand Salon. Are you up for that?"

Helen beamed at Peter as she offered him a gloved hand, which he accepted. "Quite, quite," she said. Even Trixie, usually so one-track minded when she had the scent of something, found herself softening as she witnessed the amused affection her parents displayed.

*I really am lucky*, she thought, suddenly thinking of Jim and Dan, who had each tragically lost both parents.

*How is something like that even allowed to happen?* she found herself thinking, but she immediately drew her attention back to the task at hand. She needed to get some answers from Cici Fitzgerald.

The Belden family gaily entered the luxurious Grand Salon just behind Captain Lehuédé, and the Belden siblings stood in awe at the opulence before them. The *SS Normandie's* captain witnessed their reaction and once again beamed with pride.

"She is amazing, no?" he asked.

"She is amazing, yes," Mart said as his round blue eyes took in every detail, capturing them for a future story. He knew that this exquisite room would have to enter into one of his writings some day.

Behind them, Trixie heard that twittering voice and knew that Cici and Charlie Fitzgerald had just entered the Grand Salon.

"It looks even prettier at night than it does for afternoon tea!"

Mart and Trixie shared a sly look and secret smile before they turned to the woman. "It is lovely, isn't it?" Trixie said as she deftly moved to stand by the blonde's side. "Shall we explore together?"

Cici giggled and looked at her husband. "I know that Charlie is dying to mingle with the captain away from that stuffy dinner table and have a 'man's talk,' so I'd love it if us gals could giggle and gab!"

Trixie smiled indulgently and winked at Mart, who returned her surreptitious gesture with a sly wink of his own before subtly leading Charlie off in the direction that the captain had taken. Brian noticed that his parents were taking the scene in with sharp eyes, so he moved forward to distract them.

"What did you like best when you were here the other night?" he asked smoothly, his future bedside manner on display.

With that question, the elder Beldens' thoughts strayed from the actions of their two middle children, and they immediately led Brian toward the twenty-two-foot-high windows with their enchanting view of the dark, rough waves shimmering under the glow of the nearly full moon above.

Meanwhile, Trixie was with Cici, and Mart, who had led Charlie Fitzgerald to the captain, had returned to her side. The young Belden woman had been sizing up her prey and decided that there was simply no reason to even try to be subtle in her questioning.

"That was an interesting comment earlier," Trixie said. At Cici's confused look, she explained, "You know, the one about the French Line helping to fight the Nazis."

That hadn't been exactly what the American woman had said, but Trixie figured that it was close enough and would prompt a better reaction.

Cici's puzzled face relaxed into a smile. "Oh, that! Yes, well, that charming British gentleman, Mr. Waters, said that he had heard a rumor that the *Normandie* was transporting a Rolls-Royce airplane engine to the United States so that my husband's company could start making them. He wondered whether that was true. He thought it was silly because it would be so much easier to transport plans."

"He just walked up to you and asked that?" Mart asked incredulously.

Cici gave a tittering laugh. "No, silly! I somehow managed to misplace my cigarette lighter. Mr. Waters was on the deck enjoying a cigarette nearby, so I asked him for a light. He, Charlie, and I got to talking

after that. When he learned that Charlie worked for Ford, he told him about the rumor and wondered if Charlie was responsible for transporting an engine.”

“Is Charlie responsible for the engine?” Trixie asked.

“No. At first, he didn’t even seem to be aware of it. But he and Mr. Waters kept talking, and Charlie did end up saying that Ford was considering the possibility of manufacturing Rolls-Royce engines.”

“Can that be true? Henry Ford isn’t exactly shy about saying that he opposes any U.S. involvement in a ‘European war.’” Mart had learned a lot about how various countries felt about the current state of European politics during his year interviewing anyone and everyone who would talk to him. Trixie had never been more grateful for Mart’s “year of exploration,” as he had called it when justifying it to their parents.

Cici shrugged. “I don’t know about that. I just know what Charlie and Mr. Waters spoke about. Charlie said that as far as he knew, he was the only Ford employee onboard, and he certainly didn’t have an engine, or even plans for one. Charlie did mention that he had seen a particular crate that, for some reason, had made him think of an airplane engine. The size or the shape or...something.” The woman gave a sigh. “Occupational hazard. *Everything* reminds Charlie of engines! Anyway, that seemed to confirm for Mr. Waters that an engine was onboard. I don’t think Charlie believes that, though.”

Trixie and Mart shared a glance. Given how ruthless they knew Waters to be, Charlie was probably better off knowing as little about the engine as possible.

“I need a glass of champagne. Would you two care for one?” Cici asked, clearly bored with the subject.

Trixie and Mart smiled politely and shook their heads. “No, thank you, but you go enjoy,” Trixie said.

Cici gave the pair a little wave and headed further into the expansively decorated salon, disappearing behind one of the Lalique “tower of lights” that adorned several of the first class areas of the ship.

“Well, what do you think?” Trixie turned to Mart.

“I think ‘keep mum, she’s not so dumb,’” Mart quoted. Trixie looked at him questioningly. “It’s an admonition that speaking around anyone, even someone you don’t think can do harm, is dangerous. That woman could repeat that rumor all over the ship without thinking twice about it because ‘dear Charlie’ spoke openly about it.” He mimicked the woman’s chirp as he had said the words “Dear Charlie.”

The spot-on impersonation brought a brief smile to Trixie’s lips, but she quickly sobered. “Do you mean like the *Lusitania*?” she asked, paling.

Mart shook his head. “No, I don’t think we have to worry about anything like that. Germany warned that the *Lusitania* would be fair game before the ship even left New York. Plus, Germany torpedoed her in a declared ‘zone of war.’ Not to mention the fact that I really doubt a French ship is carrying tons and tons of munitions, like the *Lusitania*, especially not to America. That would make no sense.”

Trixie breathed a sigh of relief as Mart continued, “But those rumors about the *Lusitania* that ultimately led to her downfall—and all those deaths—had to start somewhere with someone who was talking out of turn in front of the wrong people.”

“But you don’t think a Rolls-Royce engine is worth torpedoing the *Normandie*, right?”

Mart shook his head just as Brian joined them. “No, I don’t.”

“Don’t what? What sort of gems did Mrs. Fitzgerald drop during your conversation?” the dark-haired Belden sibling wanted to know. Trixie and Mart filled him in.

“I agree with Mart. I really don’t think that the ship is in danger. Possibly Charlie Fitzgerald is if Waters thinks that he has secret information for Ford that will help the Allied war effort. He’d want to get that away from him and give it to the Germans.”

“Why would Rolls-Royce send an engine?” Trixie wanted to know. “Couldn’t they just send over the plans? Wouldn’t that be easier?”

“You’d think,” Brian agreed, “but since I’m not an engineer, I don’t know. We don’t even know that there *is* an engine onboard.”

“Should we find out?” Trixie wanted to know.

“I think we need to focus on solving the murder. If the engine had something to do with that, then maybe...” Brian said.

Mart nodded. “I agree. “

“So, we didn’t really learn anything tonight that could help us with the murder,” Trixie said, disappointed. “We know that Waters is a spy and that he’s interested in an engine. Maybe we should just go to the captain with what we know.”

“We need proof,” Mart argued. “We can’t just go making accusations without evidence to back it up. If the captain even did do anything in response, all it would do is tip off Waters that we’re onto him.”

Suddenly, Trixie clutched Mart’s arm. “The gift!” she said.

Mart and Brian looked around, confused. “What gift?” Brian asked.

“When Waters and Schmidt met, Waters wanted to know if ‘the gift’ was onboard and what the ‘nature of it’ was. Then, Schmidt responded something to the effect that he hadn’t been able to get information about the gift before he disposed of the package, which we know is Margarethe Eberhart. Maybe she had information about the engine! Maybe the engine is the gift!”

Mart gave a low whistle. “It’s certainly possible, Trix. And the ‘nature of it’ was whether it was plans or an actual prototype engine.”

“But *why* would they send an engine?” Trixie wondered again. “It would be so much easier for someone to carry plans.”

Mart shrugged. “It would be, but then those also would be more easily stolen. No one is going to steal an airplane engine from a ship!”

“True, true,” Trixie agreed. “But they *could* sabotage it. Maybe that’s why Waters is so eager to find out where it is!”

“That’s probably not far off, Trix,” Mart agreed with a proud look at his sister. She had never gotten the highest marks in school—the subjects just didn’t hold her interest—but he had always known that his almost twin was smart in figuring things out. He’d never admit it, but he loved watching her brain whirring and clicking.

Unaware of the pride her brother was feeling, the young blonde was practically vibrating with excitement. “Maybe we’re on to something! Maybe we have a clue that we can pursue! I can’t wait to tell the rest of the crowd tomorrow!”