

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

●●●by Dana●●●

Author Notes: This chapter title is a play on Agatha Christie's *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* This is self-edited because I am not together enough in any way in my life right now to get the chapter to my editors on time (I'm already a month's behind in posting for goodness sake!); There's a tiny Cherry Ames reference in here, too, but not about one of the volumes Julie Campbell wrote. Darn! Word count: 5,039.

## Chapter Nine: Why Didn't They Ask Miss Trask?

*August 26, 1939*

*Somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean*

The next morning, the seven young people were gathered on the Beldens' private promenade deck following breakfast, and Trixie was telling them about the information that Charlie and Cici Fitzgerald had let spill the evening before.

"We need to find out more about that engine!" Di exclaimed after Trixie had finished telling her tale.

"Captain Lehuédé must know something about it. Aside from the fact that he *is* the captain, he was very eager to change the subject when Mrs. Fitzgerald put her foot in it," Mart observed.

"That's true, but it's not like he's going to tell *us* anything," Brian returned.

"I agree. So then what's our next step?" Honey wanted to know.

Brian immediately answered. "A swim in the pool." He quickly held up a hand before Trixie, whose face had gone absolutely mutinous, could argue with him. "Not only will it be absolutely fun, but I also happen to think that a nice dunk in the water will help us clear our heads. And you," he reminded Trixie, "said that you wanted to spend some time with Bobby."

At this reminder, some of the air went out of Trixie's argumentative sails, and she found she didn't have a good argument. She *did* need to spend a bit of time with Bobby, whether he had a nurse attending to him or not.

Mart nodded his head. "Sage advice from our eldest, very sagacious sibling. Taking time to relax and plan our next move will be more productive than running around the ship without a strategy."

"I love to swim," Honey said, "and I haven't even seen the *Normandie's* swimming pool yet."

Dan grinned. "I've never seen *any* swimming pool."

With that, it was settled.

When they arrived at the pool—the third-class passengers having borrowed proper swimming attire from their friends—they found that Bobby and his assigned nurse, a pleasant French woman named Lilian, were indeed at the pool. Trixie was delighted to see how much her younger brother's swimming had improved in the few days that he had been on the ship. Given that it was his favorite place on the *Normandie*, and he seemed to have taken up permanent residence inside the echoing, chlorinated chamber, it was not surprising that he was swimming almost as well as any fish in the ocean. He still loved to visit the Winter Garden to view the exotic birds, but only swimming seemed to have captured his attention as an activity to be engaged in for long periods of time. Bobby was delighted to meet Jim

and Dan, happily showing them his new ability to do the “dead man’s float” and other aquatic tricks he had learned during the crossing.

While the boys and Diana horsed around with Bobby, and Honey swam lap after lap of the most beautiful crawl stroke that Trixie had ever seen, the would-be sleuth sat with Bobby’s nurse and had an interesting chat. Trixie was bursting to tell her friends and brothers the details, but it would have to wait because suddenly it was time to get changed and meet the elder Beldens, Wheelers, and Lynches for lunch in the first-class dining room, just as Mart had suggested the day before.

Matthew and Madeleine Wheeler had already met Helen and Peter Belden in the Grand Salon, and the two couples enjoyed seeing each other again, chatting about England and New York, and in the case of Matthew and Peter, world finances. Edmund and Kathleen Lynch had clearly been in awe of the luxurious surroundings, looking rather uncomfortable, but the Trixie and Honey’s parents drew them into their conversation so warmly and graciously that the Irish couple soon began to relax and enjoy the meal and the company. Their four youngest children were off playing with Bobby and his nurse, so it was quite a treat for them to be involved in an adult conversation with no juvenile interference, as much as they loved their children.

Trixie was gratified that everyone was getting along so swimmingly, but she was about ready to burst with the information she had been carrying since her encounter with Bobby’s nurse at the pool. She didn’t know how she was possibly going to survive until her crowd was alone so that she could share the exciting news.

Finally, *finally*, after a delectable meal and a wave good-bye at the older generation, Trixie found herself and her friends alone on the third-class open-air deck, where she described her earlier conversation with Lilian Moray.

*“We were very surprised but grateful that the line was able to assign a nurse to my brother,” Trixie said to the plump, middle-aged French nurse.*

*“it is my pleasure. I am very pleased that I was available after Jacques realized that young Master Bobby did not have an official attendant,” the nurse responded. She had a plain but pleasant face, and Trixie could see that the woman would have a great bedside manner. Her French-accented English was impeccable.*

*“They don’t need you in the onboard hospital?” Trixie, always curious, wondered.*

*“I signed on as a companion nurse,” the woman replied as she smoothed a lock of faded brown hair tinged with grey. “I’m available for any passengers who come to need my services on the trip.”*

*“That must be interesting,” Trixie said. “You must have unique experiences and get to meet fascinating people on each new voyage. I think I’d like that much better than being stuck in the medical ward the entire trip.”*

*Lilian smiled indulgently. “Often times there are very interesting things to see in the hospital, too.”*

*Trixie nodded, her blonde curls dancing with the effort. "Like during this voyage..." she said, hoping that her leading statement would cause the nurse to fill in some blanks she so desperately wanted filled.*

*Sure enough, the French woman's pleasant face turned serious. "Yes, this voyage had some unwanted excitement. But I am pleased that the colleague of Mademoiselle Eberhart stepped in to look after her mother after her tragic accident. It allowed me the freedom to look after your delightful little brother."*

*Trixie's mind churned at this unexpected statement. "Miss Trask was Miss Eberhart's colleague?" she asked, surprised. Miss Trask, when she had spoken to Honey and Brian, had not mentioned that fact. Trixie was sure that if she had, Honey and Brian would have reported it to the rest of the crowd.*

*The nurse was surprised. "You know Mademoiselle Trask?"*

*Trixie briefly explained how Honey and Brian had come to meet Anna Eberhart's new companion.*

*"I don't know what to say. Mademoiselle Trask approached me and said that she was a friend and colleague of Margarethe Eberhart and she felt responsible for the girl's mother as a result of their friendship. I agreed that it would be much better for Anna to be with someone she knew, and she didn't require the services of a registered nurse, just a companion, so I agreed that Mademoiselle Trask would be perfect given the situation."*

*"Interesting," Trixie said. "Perhaps my brother and Honey misunderstood her."*

*"Perhaps they did," the companion nurse responded in her accented tones, and then she turned the conversation to focus on Bobby and his activities, particularly his love of swimming. Trixie half-listened to the woman she went on about the youngest Belden, but her mind was spinning, processing the new information that Miss Trask had claimed to know the murder victim.*

*And if the British woman was indeed the dead woman's colleague, did that mean that she was a spy, too? And might she know something about the gift?*

"I think it means that she is and she does!" Mart immediately exclaimed when his sister had finished her narrative.

Honey and Brian exchanged glances, as if trying to remember exactly what the crisp, middle-aged woman had told them. "I'm sure that she didn't mention that she knew the Eberharts. She implied that she had merely heard about the situation—which we readily believed because everyone on the ship is gossiping about it—and decided to volunteer. She even mentioned that she often cares for her invalid sister."

"Almost as if she was trying to convince you of her credentials," Trixie mused.

"I don't know about that, Trixie," Brian reasoned.

"Why else would she volunteer that information?" Trixie contended. "Why wouldn't she just say that she knew the Eberharts and that was why she was looking after Mrs. Eberhart?"

"It does seem like a lie by omission," honorable Jim agreed, earning a grateful look from Trixie.

"And the only reason that she would need to lie by omission..." Di began, her voice trailing off as she turned large violet eyes toward the group.

"Is if she's a spy, too," Dan finished.

"But if she wanted to hide the fact that she was a spy, why tell the nurse that's she knew the Eberharts?" Brian asked.

"Because if some random woman came and asked to be Mrs. Eberhart's companion, the nurse wouldn't have a reason to give up the post," Trixie reasoned. "But if she says she's a friend and colleague, that strengthens her position to take over as caregiver."

Jim nodded, his red hair glinting in the sun streaming down on the group. "That sounds logical to me. And it's not like she could predict that the nurse would be assigned to the brother of three of the people who found Miss Eberhart and that her stories might be compared."

The smile that Trixie gave him in response nearly took his breath away, and he grinned delightedly back at her. The moment passed when Mart interjected, "No matter what the actual story is, there's more than what meets the eye here with this Miss Trask, and we need to investigate."

His friends and siblings agreed as they tried to develop a plan to learn more about the now-mysterious Miss Margery Trask.

"We could visit Mrs. Eberhart again," Honey offered. "One of us could visit with her while another one of us corners Miss Trask."

"That's a good idea," Brian agreed, winning a sweet smile from the young lady with the idea. "We can ask if there's been any new news about Miss Eberhart's death."

Trixie grinned and started to rise. "And that will give us an opening to see how Miss Trask reacts and maybe get her to say something."

Mart put a hand on his sister's arm. "Wait a minute, Trix. We can't go in there half-cocked. And if Miss Trask *is* a spy, her training wouldn't allow her to just spill the beans to a group of 'young people' like us."

Trixie fell back into her chair, chewing her lip. "You're right, Mart. She's most likely too smart to let anything slip," she acknowledged with a deep sigh.

"Unless we take advantage of the fact that we're 'young people,'" Brian mused. "Honey has done a pretty good job of getting information from Miss Trask, Anna Eberhart, the Deauville suite butler, and the captain of this ship. Part of it is because she's young, so people don't put their guard up, and part of it is because she's really very innocently clever about asking the right questions."

Honey blushed at Brian's assessment.

Trixie nodded her head vehemently, her sandy curls dancing. "It's true!" she exclaimed. "I wish I had one-tenth of your tact and poise. It immediately puts people at ease so that they're willing to share with you. I bet if anyone could make Miss Trask let something slip, it's you, Honey."

Honey's pink-tinged cheeks at the compliments only made her that much more attractive. "I'm glad you guys have faith in me, but..."

"No 'buts,'" Mart said. "Honey is hereby elected chief interrogator of this club."

Mart's words had the effect of changing Honey's focus from self-consciousness to excitement.

"Oh, let's do have a club!" the honey-haired girl exclaimed, and then looked embarrassed as six pairs of eyes turned toward her. "Oh, I suppose it's silly, and we're a little too old for that sort of thing. When I was in boarding school, I was fond of books about boys and girls who had secret clubs and were always having heaps of fun. But we're too old for that now," she repeated.

Di smiled shyly. "I like the idea. I was forever reading those kinds of books when I was younger, too. I did so want to belong to a club of people my age!"

Trixie grinned as well. "I think it would be marvelous to have a club! Ever since I met you all, well, I just feel so close to you. Like we were all *meant* to meet and be friends. I've been calling us 'our crowd' in my head, which is practically the same thing as a club."

"It's settled, then," Jim spoke. "We're a club, dedicated to finding justice."

Dan nodded. "I like it," he said, and Brian and Mart added their agreement.

"Don't we need a name? And a motto? And some kind of super secret handshake and signal and secret code?" Trixie asked, eagerly getting into the spirit of the idea of a secret club.

"I don't know about handshakes, but there's a game bird, a sort of quail, that's native to America but was introduced in Europe when I was a kid," Jim explained. "My dad thought it was a fascinating bird—he was a naturalist before he died—and it's named for its peculiar whistle, which sounds an awful lot like the bird is saying 'bob white.' My dad taught me how to whistle like the bird to flush it out when we went hunting together." He demonstrated the call. "That could be our signal. It was...well, it's special to me because it was sort of a signal my dad and I shared."

Without thinking, Trixie reached out a small hand and cradled Jim's larger, freckled hand. "I think having a signal that celebrates your dad is a swell idea," she said. As the others murmured their agreement, Jim smiled gratefully at his newfound friends.

"Thanks," he said, his deep voice even huskier with emotion.

"I love that it's a bird that is native to America but introduced to Europe. Like me!" Honey said with a smile.

Trixie laughed. "It is perfect that it encompasses the bi-continent facet of our crowd...club," she corrected herself, relishing this new development.

"So, does that make us the Bob-Whites?" Mart wanted to know.

Trixie grinned. "I do believe it does." She looked around at the others. "Hello, fellow birds. Now let's have a bevy and figure out how exactly we're going to extract information from Miss Trask!"

Brian twisted his normally handsome features into a fake grimace. "You sound absolutely evil, Trixie! Extract information, indeed!"

The sandy-haired blonde stuck her tongue out at her older brother before getting down to business. "So, we agree that Honey should definitely be the one to follow up with Miss Trask. Who should go with her?"

"Brian, you went last time, so maybe you should go again, since Miss Trask knows you," Diana offered up.

"But maybe if Honey goes with one of you girls, it'll let Miss Trask's guard down even more than if a fellow accompanies her," Dan pointed out.

"What if all three of the girls went?" Mart asked.

Trixie shook her head. "I am *dying* to go, you guys know that, but I don't want Miss Trask to connect me with the case since the nurse is now assigned to my brother. Di should go."

Mart gave a low whistle. "Smart thinking, Trix. That lets Brian and me out, too."

Brian sighed. "I suppose it does, but I'm not crazy about Honey and Di going there alone."

Trixie gave her own sigh at her brother's over-protectiveness. "They won't be alone. We'll be down the hall. And it's not like we suspect Miss Trask of anything really nefarious, do we?"

"I don't think so, but if there is funny business afoot, who's to say it isn't going to show up on Mrs. Eberhart's doorstep?" Brian argued.

At that, Honey and Di looked decidedly nervous about their role, while Trixie rolled clear blue eyes. "It's highly unlikely that anyone would do anything to Mrs. Eberhart or do anything near her room. There's already a cloud of suspicion surrounding her daughter's death. A second incident on this ship within the same family would draw too much attention. The murderer does *not* want that."

After some more discussion, the members of the newly formed club decided that it would be best for Honey and Di to go calling. Instead of trying to plan out a list of questions to maneuver Miss Trask into letting something slip, Honey would use her natural intuition to guide the conversation. The remaining five club members would station themselves around the corner at the end of each corridor. Trixie, Jim, and Brian would stand guard on one end, Mart and Dan on the other. That way, they would be ready if trouble approached from either direction.

It was only minutes after adjourning their impromptu meeting that Honey and Di found themselves in front of Cabin 2072, knocking somewhat hesitantly on the door.

They heard the sound of the doorknob being unlocked, and once again, it was the crisp grey-haired woman who answered the door. "Hello, Miss...Wheeler, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am," Honey returned politely. "And this is my friend Diana Lynch. I wanted to check on Mrs. Eberhart, to see how she is doing."

Margery Trask, as she had done the last time, stepped out into the hallway and pulled the cabin door shut behind her. "That's very kind of you, dear. Mrs. Eberhart is doing as well as can be expected after having such a shock."

Honey had a sudden inspiration, hoping to catch Miss Trask off guard. "What was Margarethe Eberhart like in life?"

The middle-aged woman turned startled grey-blue eyes on Honey. "Why do you ask?" she inquired carefully.

"Ever since I saw her, I can't get her image out of my mind. I was hoping if I had a kind of portrait of what she was like in life, maybe I could concentrate on that, and the awful image I have of her might fade," Honey explained.

Miss Trask's face softened, but she pressed on. "No, I'm sorry. I mean why do you ask *me*?"

Without specifically implicating the nurse, Honey replied, "I thought that you were acquainted with Miss Eberhart, and that's how you came to take over as Mrs. Eberhart's caretaker."

Miss Trask smiled at this. "I didn't mean to give you the impression the other day that I knew Miss Eberhart when I explained how I had come to be caretaker."

"You didn't," Honey said, wondering how Miss Trask would react to this bit of information. She took a deep breath and decided to be bold. "That's why I was surprised to learn that you and Miss Eberhart had been colleagues. What was she like when she was alive?"

Honey and Di watched as, for just a fraction of a moment, annoyance and apprehension flitted across Miss Trask's features before she visibly worked to relax her face into a neutral expression. "I'm not sure where you heard that," she said.

*But you still haven't denied it,* Honey thought before persisting, "But it *is* true?"

Miss Trask laughed, but to Honey and Di's ears, the sound was forced. "I'm afraid not," the older woman said. "Now if you'll excuse me, I really need to get back to Frau Eberhart. I'll let her know that you stopped by."

Before either girl could utter another word, Miss Trask had slipped back into the room, and they heard a lock clicking in finality.

The two girls turned toward each other, eyes wide. Honey whispered, "If she truly didn't know Miss Eberhart, there's no way she would have reacted like that."

"I agree," Di murmured, even her whisper unable to mask her lovely Irish lilt.

"You go get Mart and Dan," Honey continued in a low voice. "I'll get the others. We can meet in the Winter Garden."

Di nodded and slipped silently along the corridor in the direction Mart and Dan were waiting, while Honey hurried along in the opposite way. Di was just rounding the corner when she heard a door

opening. She paused for a moment to look. She saw that Honey had already disappeared around the corner, and Miss Trask was entering the hallway and heading in Diana's direction.

"Mart! Dan!" she whispered urgently as she met her companions in the corridor. "Miss Trask is coming this way! She'll recognize me, but you need to follow her! Meet us in the Winter Garden when you're done!" With that, Di quickly darted down the passageway and entered a stairwell to avoid the British woman.

Mart, thinking quickly, said to Dan, "Let's go to the elevator lobby. Chances are that's where she's headed." Dan nodded, and the two hurried toward the elevators. When they reached the lobby, Mart stared for half a second at the call buttons before siding with chance as he pressed the up button. That was where most of the public areas were, so that was most likely where Miss Trask was heading.

"What are you doing?" Dan whispered.

"If we hide and then come out, we'll look suspicious. If we're already here, it doesn't look like we're following her."

"What if she's not going up?"

Mart looked at his friend with large, troubled eyes.

*Then they would lose her...*

*And I'll disappoint Di.*

Mart didn't have a chance to respond out loud because a trim, grey-haired woman entered the lobby just then. She looked at the call buttons, and Mart held his breath. She appeared to be satisfied with the selected option, and she smiled at the two young men. Dan and Mart smiled back in relief and waited with Miss Trask for the car to arrive.

The doors opened to reveal an empty car, and the young men allowed their quarry to enter first. She pushed the button for the deck she wanted and turned to them.

"Which deck, gentlemen?" she asked.

Mart nodded toward the button she had just pressed. "Same as you, ma'am," he said with an innocent smile. She smiled back at him, and the three settled into the self-conscious silence that envelopes elevator rides with strangers. When the doors opened at their floor, Miss Trask turned and gave them a slight smile as she exited ahead of them.

They followed behind her, keeping up innocuous conversation about the ship, and were relieved to see that she was headed toward the Tourist Class lounge, as they could ostensibly be on their way there, too.

After watching Miss Trask go through the doors, the pair entered the lounge, which was not nearly as breathtaking as the first-class lounge. Still, it was a handsome space, pleasant and comfortable. The room was flooded with natural light from the wall of windows, and the leather chairs that outfitted each table beckoned one to lounge with one's fellow passengers. Some of the tables sported backgammon



and cribbage boards to entertain guests. Mart and Dan watched as Miss Trask settled into one of the creamy leather chairs at a table for two in the corner of the room.

Fortunately for her pursuers one of the nearby tables, which held a backgammon board, was empty. Under the pretense of playing a game of backgammon, the two sat down, and Mart began to set up the board.

"It's great of you to offer to teach me to play backgammon," Dan said, letting Mart know that he had no idea how to play and yet still keeping their cover with Miss Trask.

"I have no idea how to play," Mart uttered under his breath. At Dan's horrified look of dismay, the towhead grinned. "Just kidding!" he breathed quietly. Dan shot him a dirty look and vowed to get back at him later.

"It's a great game," Mart said in a normal voice, keeping up with the charade. "Did you know that it's thousands of years old and was played by the Ancient Romans, Egyptians, and Persians?"

"I had no idea," Dan said honestly.

"Chaucer and Shakespeare both mention the game in their works," Mart continued as he finished setting up the board. "Now, here's the basic rules..." he began as he launched into a lengthy explanation. He had no idea how long they would have to keep this up, so better to err on the side of long and boring than brevity. He was just finishing the fundamental instructions and was about to start on strategies and a history of the game when a blond man, looking to be in his thirties or so, joined Miss Trask. He was wearing dark-brown trousers and a tan, short-sleeved, casual sport shirt with a pattern of brown chevrons.

"Margery," the man said in a smooth British accent, sounding surprised. "How nice to see you here. Do you mind if I join you?"

"Edward," Miss Trask returned pleasantly. "What a surprise. Yes, please do join me."

As the tall, thin man sat down in the chair opposite her, Miss Trask continued. "I thought I'd get out of the room and change my view, perhaps even have a spot of tea here in the lounge. How has the voyage been treating you since we last spoke?"

Mart and Dan continued to pretend to concentrate on their game, with Mart offering explanations every so often and Dan capitalizing on his novice backgammon status to draw out the silence by pretending to study each move very intently. This allowed them to easily listen to the adjoining conversation

"And how is your charge doing?" Charles asked after he and his companion had engaged in chitchat about the weather and the quality of the food.

"She's doing as well as can be expected, I'm afraid. She's had a rather interesting repeat visitor," Miss Trask said.

Mart and Dan's eyes met. They both surmised that she referred to Honey. Mart tried hard to keep up the pretense of a friendly board game as he gave Dan an instruction about rolling the dice, but it was hard when he just wanted to listen to the conversation.

“Someone who knows her?” Charles asked. “I didn’t think that she knew anyone on the ship.”

“A lovely young woman, actually,” Miss Trask responded. “The poor thing found Frau Eberhart’s daughter, and she feels responsible for checking in on the woman.”

“That’s very nice of her,” the man responded, “but surely that’s not unusual. I can imagine what a shock it must have been for her.”

“Quite,” the woman said with a nod. “I feel badly for the poor dear. She’s somehow gotten it into her head, though, that I was a colleague of the dead girl.”

Dan, who had the best view of their quarry’s table, watched out of the corner of his eye as the man reacted to that statement. It was obvious that the man was surprised—and not pleased.

There was a beat before Charles responded, “That’s unfortunate. I wonder where she could have gotten such an idea.”

“Perhaps from the nurse that I relieved?” Miss Trask offered, more as a question than anything else.

“Perhaps,” Charles murmured. “And when you told the visitor that that wasn’t the case? I assume that she was satisfied.”

“I believe so,” Miss Trask responded. “As I said, she’s a lovely girl, that Miss Wheeler. I wouldn’t want her inviting any trouble because she had the wrong impression of me.”

Dan and Mart exchanged a worried glance. Was that a threat? Or true concern? Was she passing on Honey’s name so that the man would take action? And would that action be protection...or something sinister?

“No, that *would* be rather unsatisfactory,” Charles agreed. He gave a small cough and changed the subject. “What of the parcel we spoke of the other day?”

“Its delivery is still on schedule when we arrive in New York,” Miss Trask responded. “Have you been hearing the interesting rumors that have been circulating?”

“Rumors? Do tell,” Charles leaned forward as if he was ready to receive a bit of particularly juicy gossip.

“The wife of an American engineer has mentioned that there is a Rolls-Royce aboard this very ship,” Margery said. Even from his vantage point, Dan could see the significant look she gave her companion.

“Interesting. Has she seen it?”

“Not that I know of, but I did think it was of note.”

“Quite. A Rolls-Royce aboard a ship would be fascinating to see. There was a Renault Coupe de Ville onboard the *Titanic*, you know,” Charles said.

“I did not know that,” Miss Trask returned. “Perhaps determining who is the most interested in seeing the Rolls-Royce will provide some answers.”

“That would be beneficial,” the blond man said with a nod. “Our friend deserves answers.”

“Quite,” Miss Trask murmured, sipping the hot tea that had been delivered by an attentive lounge attendant.

“It’s been lovely chatting with you,” Charles said, standing. “I promised a proper British gentleman I met on the ship a game of tennis. I certainly do not want to keep him waiting.”

“Of course not,” Miss Trask said with a smile. “We Brits are nothing if not punctual. I won’t detain you. Have a wonderful tennis match.”

“I will. It was nice seeing you again,” Charles returned. With that, he was off. It wasn’t long before Miss Trask stood and headed toward the lounge exit.

After Dan and Mart watched her go, Mart turned to Dan. “I think that proves that she’s a spy. I’m sure the parcel that she was talking about was the engine.” As Mart spoke, the two abandoned their game to follow the middle-aged woman.

Dan nodded as the two causally moved through the second-class lounge, staying well behind their quarry. “They only pretended it was a car, I’m sure,” he said. “And their ‘friend’ is probably Margarethe Eberhart. They want to find out who killed her and get her justice.”

Mart agreed. “Probably even more than we do.”

~~~

Additional notes: I feel obliged to note that I did a bunch of research on elevators to determine what type of automation and call buttons would have been available in the 1930s. Automated elevators were available in the late nineteenth century and began to be installed more and more starting in the 1930s (as a result of elevator operator strikes that left people stranded in big metropolises; they weren’t common before that because people didn’t trust automated elevators, convinced they would be plunged to their death in a small cage, I suppose, lol).

The SS Normandie was built in 1931, so she was on the cusp of this new wave of automation. I can’t tell you how much I’ve lived and breathed the SS Normandie for the last 2 years, but information on her elevators themselves are scarce (although her elevator lobbies were apparently the stuff of art deco dreams, and I saw lots of pictures of them, but not from an angle where I could actually see the buttons). Since so many celebrities adored her and the French spared no expense in making her—and making her modern and record-breaking—I took creative license and made them automated.

Why not just employ an elevator attendant since that was common in the day, you ask? I wanted to be authentic, hence all of the research. If she had elevator attendants, by golly, so would my story. If she didn’t, then she wouldn’t. Ultimately, I really wanted to have Mart not know which button to push for that split second and then have to hope that his gamble paid off while Dan looked at him like he was crazy. If he could just hit one button to call an elevator operator, there wouldn’t have been the drama. \*angelic smile\* So, when I couldn’t find a definitive answer, I went with what worked for the story. Please excuse my dramatic license if you happen to know a lot about 1930s elevators and, specifically, the SS Normandie’s elevators.

---

*Trixie Belden® is a registered trademark of Random House Books. These pages are not affiliated with Random House Books in any way. These pages are not for profit. Story copyright © GSDana*