
4. THE PERFECT MURDER

"The QM2, Darling, is the finest **ocean liner**¹ in the world. Sure, there are one or two bigger than her, but none of them has her romance or her luxury," Mrs Carolina Heath says as they enter the dining room.

Her young, new friend only smiles. She is a quiet young thing, and beautiful too, and Carolina likes to have beautiful things around her, so she is more than happy to talk for both of them.

"This is your first **cruise**², you say? You're going to love it. Just look at the view out there." And from the large glass windows they can see the majestic figure of the Statue of Liberty as the ship slowly moves away from the port of New York and heads into the deep of the ocean.

"It's fantastic," Eleanor says, and again Carolina is very happy to have a new **companion**³.

The dining room is magnificent. The tables are covered in white, and the lights are low and **atmospheric**⁴. The band in the corner is playing soft classical music.

"Well, I wonder what the other people at our table are like. **Oh my**⁵, look, here we are, table six. Well, good evening gentlemen." Carolina says, and the three men stop their conversation and smile.

"Mrs Heath," one says, "how good to see you again. Another evening of champagne and dancing?"

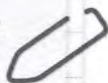
1 ocean liner - Ozeandampfer

2 cruise - Kreuzfahrt

3 companion - Begleiter(in)

4 atmospheric - stimmungsvoll

5 Oh my! - Meine Güte!



"Every night, Peter. My doctor tells me that I must," she laughs. "Gentlemen, let me introduce you to my new friend Miss Eleanor Chance."

Eleanor only nods and smiles.

"And these, Eleanor, well, how to describe them... I suppose every ship needs some pirates, and these are they. Meet Peter, Edward and Michael."

The men stand and nod politely, and Carolina is amused by the interested looks they give Eleanor Chance.

"Pirates?" Eleanor asks.

"Well, maybe not pirates, but you should still be careful. They are, in fact, writers, and I don't know which is **worse**¹."

"Writers? How interesting."

"Please, sit down," Edward says with a smile that shows early signs of **infatuation**².

"No, I can't, I must find the captain: he promised to tell me all about the new people on board today; you know how I must know who I am sailing with." She looks at the men. "Oh, but can I trust you three to look after Eleanor? This is her first night, and her first cruise. She does not need to hear any of your **horrible**³ stories or strange ideas."

"Oh, well, I **suppose we can**⁴ change the subject, but we are having a really interesting conversation."

Carolina laughs. "I don't want to know! Just be nice." And she smiles at Eleanor. "If they scare you, just scream, and I can **rescue**⁵ you."

"Oh, I think I can look after myself," responds Eleanor, and again Carolina thinks what a sweet, lovely thing she is. She must be only twenty-five or twenty-six. Her long blonde hair

1 worse - schlimmer

2 infatuation - Vernarrtheit

3 horrible - schrecklich

4 I suppose we can... - wir können wohl...

5 to rescue - retten

is elegant and her face full of classical beauty. And those eyes, such **innocent**¹, blue eyes.

Yes, a lovely, new companion, she thinks as she leaves.

At the table Edward offers Eleanor a chair, and Michael passes her a glass of champagne.

"So, are you all writers?" she asks.

"Yes," says Peter, "of different types. I'm in film, Edward here is a novelist and Michael writes plays."

"Fascinating," she says, and all three look happy that she thinks so.

"And what is this interesting conversation that I am interrupting?"

"Oh, we can't bore you with that. Please, tell us about yourself," says Edward.

Eleanor smiles **shyly**² and moves the elegant white silk scarf that lies around her neck above her black dress. "There is very little to say. I am sailing from here to Southampton, then I **intend**³ to stay in England for some time. For the summer perhaps." Then she is quiet, and the three men think how polite and gentle she seems.

"I see," says Peter. "Well, this is a tradition of ours. Every year we take a cruise on old Mary. This is the sixth year. A good escape from **editors**⁴ and deadlines."

"And wives," says Michael.

"Well, for them, not for me: I'm not married," says Edward a little too quickly.

For a moment there is an **awkward silence**⁵, and Peter and Michael exchange a smile.

"Well, our conversation is about murder," says Peter to fill the silence "the perfect murder."

Eleanor smiles. "I see."

1 innocent - unschuldig

2 shyly - schüchtern

3 to intend to - beabsichtigen

4 editor - Herausgeber(in); Redakteur(in)

5 awkward silence - betretenes Schweigen

"I'm sure she's not interested, Pete," says Edward.

"Oh, but I am. Mrs Heath is lovely, but she only talks about scandal and **gossip**¹."

"See, Edward, we can continue to argue!" Michael jokes. "You see, we all have very different ideas about what the perfect murder is. Peter thinks that for a film there must be something visual about the murder **weapon**². For me the important things are the character and the motive."

"And for me," Edward says as he **refills**³ Eleanor's glass, "the important thing is the **twist**⁴."

"The twist?"

"You know, the surprise at the end of the story, the thing you don't expect."

Eleanor smiles and takes a drink. The Statue of Liberty is still visible in the distance, but they will soon be alone on the dark ocean.

"You know, I think you're all correct. In fact, I have an idea for a story: an idea I think about **occasionally**⁵."

"Really?" says Peter, "Well you must tell us."

"Maybe," she says with another shy smile, "but you first: what's your idea for the perfect murder weapon?"

Peter laughs. "Okay, well, it's not my idea, and it's old, but I think it's great for a film. It's an **icicle**⁶."

The other two men laugh. "He always says this," Edward informs Eleanor.

"Because it's perfect. After the murderer kills the victim, they just watch the weapon melt. No fingerprints, no **evidence**⁷. What do you think, Eleanor?"

- 1 gossip - Tratsch
- 2 weapon - Waffe
- 3 to refill sb.'s glass - jdm. nachschenken
- 4 twist - Wendung
- 5 occasionally - gelegentlich
- 6 icicle - Eiszapfen
- 7 evidence - Beweis

She smiles, "It's very clever... but... well, I prefer fire."

"Fire?"

"Yes, fire kills, and it **destroys**¹ the evidence. And also a fire can look like an accident. The icicle never can."

"Ha, she's right!" laughs Michael. "So what about characters and motive?" he continues.

"A beautiful, young couple who are happy and in love."

"What, and he kills her?"

"No, she kills him."

"Let me guess: they're rich, she wants his money?"

Eleanor takes another drink. "No. She's the rich one."

"So what's the motive?" Michael asks.

"Wait a minute," interrupts Peter. "You say she kills him. With fire? How? She locks him in a room in a burning house?"

"No, because then he might escape. She drugs him with **sleeping pills**² during dinner. She always goes for a run in the evening, but this time she waits until he falls asleep in a chair in the lounge, and she puts a candle to the curtains. Then she goes for her run and makes sure that many people see her."

Peter nods his head, "Interesting, but a **coroner**³ will find **traces**⁴ of sleeping pills in the blood. They'll know."

"No, not with this type of pill. At a certain temperature it completely burns away. Only a small trace of it can be **detected**⁵. And if they are detected, **so what**⁶? They are his pills."

Peter laughs this time. "Excellent!"

"Very clever," Edward agrees, "but unfortunately the wife is always a **suspect**⁷ in a murder."

- 1 to destroy - vernichten
- 2 sleeping pill - Schlaftablette
- 3 coroner - Gerichtsmediziner
- 4 trace - Spur
- 5 to detect - entdecken
- 6 So what? - Na und?
- 7 suspect - Verdächtige(r)

"Normally, yes," says Eleanor, and all three men notice how her smile **fades**¹ a little, "but she has a plan for that. You see, she runs until she hears the **fire engines**². Then she returns to the house. There are people there already, neighbours, and this is just what she wants. They try to stop her, but she runs into the burning building. No one follows her. They can't: they know it's too dangerous. And so she goes to her husband as the flames **spread**³ over his body, and she watches. And while she watches, she lets the flames touch her, too. They reach out, and they burn her back and her neck and her hair. And at this point she screams and runs from the building and falls to the floor." Eleanor stops speaking, and for a moment there is silence at the table.

"My God," says Edward, "she lets the flames burn her."

Michael takes a moment to think about it and then nods. "It's perfect. The perfect way to avoid **suspicion**⁴."

"Everyone thinks it's an accident and that she is **heartbroken**⁵," says Peter.

"Yes," Eleanor says, and for a moment more there is silence again.

Then the band starts to play a waltz, and Eleanor looks at Edward. "I don't suppose you dance, Edward?"

And the writer goes a little red. "Actually, I do. Would you like to join me?"

Eleanor smiles, and they both stand up. She **adjusts**⁶ the white scarf around her neck.

"But what about the woman's motive?" Michael asks.

Eleanor smiles. "Yes, that's the difficult part. And I'm afraid I just don't know. I suppose sometimes a person just... enjoys murder."

- 1 to fade - schwinden
- 2 fire engine - Feuerwehrauto
- 3 to spread - sich ausbreiten
- 4 suspicion - Verdacht
- 5 heartbroken - untröstlich
- 6 to adjust - zurechtrücken

And as Eleanor and Edward move away to the dance floor, Peter and Michael see her adjust the scarf around her neck one last time. And in the low, romantic light of the ballroom they both think they see something strange on her back and neck. Something which makes them stop and look at each other.

But no, it cannot be what they think it is.

It cannot be burnt skin under the elegant white scarf.

Can it?



→ Die QM2, Queen Mary the Second, ist der einzige transatlantische Ozeandampfer, der derzeit die Reise von Southampton nach New York antritt. Diese Reise führt über den oft stürmischen Nordatlantik - die gleiche Strecke, auf der einst die "unsinkbare" Titanic ihr Ende fand.

Die QM2 ist ein luxuriöses und romantisches Schiff, mit dem schon Adlige, Prominente und einige der reichsten und erfolgreichsten Persönlichkeiten der Welt gereist sind. Natürlich sind auch einfachere Menschen willkommen, die nicht im Rampenlicht stehen und dieses wunderbare, meisterhafte Schiff genießen möchten.