

Chapter 33

Navigating the Limits of a Smile

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Setting the (Back) Stage

With a weathered emery board, Cassie Donners' smoothed a jagged edge of one red fingernail before grabbing a new pair of nylon thigh highs and carefully tugging them up her long tanned legs. As she had done every Monday evening for the last three weeks, 24-year-old Cassie was prepping for the Welcome Cocktail Party, the first formal night of the trans-Panama Canal cruise on the *Radiant Spirit*, one of the largest ships of the Spirit Cruise Line. Her roommate and fellow junior assistant cruise director, Sally, was currently occupying the tiny bathroom in their cabin, so Cassie made do with the closet mirror to fluff her highlighted, shoulder-length blonde hair and apply mascara to the long lashes lining her amber eyes.

As Cassie donned her starched "creams"—fitted ivory-colored polyester suits issued by Spirit—she thought about the whirlwind world upon which she had embarked just three weeks ago. Cassie had interviewed for the cruise staff position a month after graduating from a small college in Oklahoma. She was hoping to improve her communication skills, acquire international experience, and visit exotic locales before settling down into a *real* job.

During her land-based one-day training with Spirit, Cassie was introduced to the central responsibilities of the position. As a junior assistant cruise director, Cassie would be part of the ship's five-person

cruise staff team—the smallest but perhaps most visible departmental team on the ship. Cruise staff, whose job it was to keep the ship's 1,600 passengers entertained at sea, were required to wear uniforms and name badges whenever they were in passenger areas and thus could be on duty for up to 15 hours a day. A typical day at sea included refereeing table tennis and shuffleboard tournaments, calling bingo, creating and orchestrating trivia quiz games, running swimming pool Olympics, teaching line-dance classes, leading karaoke sing-alongs and other theme nights, performing on the main stage, and, most important, interacting with passengers. Cassie really looked forward to this last activity. She had always considered herself to be a people person and had especially enjoyed college classes that included small group activities.

Besides these basic duties, land-based management also provided Cassie with a training manual that outlined ship policies and procedures. Among other things, the training manual admonished, "Do everything you can to meet a passenger's request." Indeed, the manual warned that "discourteous work performance and/or service to passengers" warranted an official warning to the crew member, and three warnings constituted grounds for dismissal. And if crew members had any troubles fulfilling their service requirements? The Spirit complaints procedure indicated that a staff member who felt he or she had a "genuine grievance" should report it to his or her direct supervisor.

Indeed, the land-based director of passenger programs advised Cassie that the ship management was run military style, saying, "If you have any questions or complaints, talk to the cruise director, and then he'll contact us at headquarters if necessary. We just have too many employees on too many ships for you all to be calling us directly." Cassie nodded her head in eager concurrence. She could not imagine that she would have anything to complain about on a cruise ship! The director also warned Cassie, "Remember, you're never off-duty, especially when you're in a passenger area. On a cruise ship, you're basically public property."

Cassie shook off the warning, smiled warmly, and reassured the director, drawling sweetly, "I can take it. In fact, I'll love it." At the time, Cassie never could have imagined the extent this *public property* mentality would take on the ship.

Cassie's tour of duty began in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, a turnaround port for many Alaskan itineraries. Now into her

third week, the ship had just begun to make its way down the west coast and into the Mexican Riviera. During her six-month contract, the ship would take Cassie from Alaska, to several Mexican ports of call, to parts of Central and South America, through the Panama Canal and throughout the Caribbean. She was assigned to the *Radiant Spirit*, a 70,000-ton floating paradise. At 14 stories, it would be the largest high-rise she had ever lived in, or upon. The job environment was also different from her past experience. She was one of only five Americans working on the ship, and most of the employees were men. Cassie estimated a 6-to-1 ratio of males to females. As a blonde American female, Cassie felt different and special.

Cassie pondered her uniqueness as she ran a brush through the tangles of her sea breeze-tousled hair. Her eyes drifted from her own reflection in the closet mirror to the alarm clock, and upon seeing the time, Cassie suddenly realized she needed to hurry up. She was surprised Sally was still in the bathroom. Sally, also a junior assistant director, was taking a break from graduate school. And it was Sally who was usually the more responsible one. The two had become quite close over the last three weeks. In fact, because they looked so much alike, fellow crew members had begun to call them the "little blonde American twins." Cassie checked the clock again. They were going to be the late and yelled-at little twins if Sally didn't hurry up. Cassie yelled through the bathroom door, "Hey, Sally, we only have five minutes before the Welcome Cocktail Party. Get your butt in gear!"

Sally emerged from the tiny bathroom with hair dripping wet. "Get your own butt in gear," she said with a smirk.

Cassie paused for a second, seriously considering Sally's comment. Peering at her backside in the closet mirror, Cassie conceded, "You know, you're right. I should get my butt in gear. It's just gotten bigger and bigger since I've been on this ship." It was one of the many self-deprecating comments Cassie would make about herself every day.

Sally shook her head and said, "Shut up, shut up. If you're fat, what does that make me, a beached whale?" Both weighed less than 120 pounds. Cassie was curvier, Sally a bit more athletic.

Cassie rolled the waistband of her skirt up a couple of times, a maneuver that loosened the skirt around her hips and thus masked the curviness of her supposedly big butt. Rolling the waistband also raised the skirt's hem several inches—something most of the female

cruise staff agreed made the uniform appear more modern. She smiled at her reflection in the mirror; "Ahh, much better."

Meanwhile, Sally frantically turned over dirty clothes littering the 10- by 12-foot windowless cabin and muttered under her breath, "Where is my rhinestone hair comb? I just need to put my hair up and I'll be ready."

Ignoring her, Cassie said, "Listen, I'm assigned to trail Blake tonight to supposedly learn more about swanning, so I'll just go on ahead." *Swanning* was cruise staff speak for floating around and making conversation. As assistant cruise director Blake had informed Cassie upon her maiden voyage, "Our job is our personality." That was just fine with her.

Rushing around with rhinestone comb in hand, Sally said, "That's cool, go on. Blake will make some sarcastic comment if you aren't exactly on time, so I'll just meet you there." Cassie began to leave, but just before the door shut, Sally yelled out, "Wait, Cassie! Where's your service pin?" Cassie caught the door with one cream-colored two-inch-heeled pump.

"Shoot! I always forget that darn thing." Cassie was still getting used to the cruise ship's dress standards, which, among other things, required all crew members to wear a small lapel pin etched with the ship's customer service credo. Supervisors could write up a crew member who was caught in a passenger area without the pin.

Also as part of the program, two copies of Spirit's service credo were affixed to the inside of crew members' cabin doors and bathroom doors. The credo included mandates such as "We never say no," "We smile, we are onstage," "Never express negative opinions, argue, or be discourteous with passengers," and "We are ambassadors of our cruise ship when at work and at play." In addition, backstage crew areas of the ship were plastered with posters reading "Always greet passengers; say 'Hello, ma'am,' 'Good morning, sir,'" and "We always are cheerful and say 'Please' and 'Thank you.'" Crew members largely echoed these mandates in their own talk; one staff member warned Sally on her first day of work, "When you wake up in the morning, turn your smile on. Don't turn it back off again until you go to sleep."

As cruise staff understood it, management basically wanted crew members to be at the beck and call of passengers for their every request. Most staff complied without complaint. As Blake liked to remind the staff, "Passengers pay our salaries." Indeed, cruise staff's main evaluation technique was through passenger comment cards:

Cruise director Tim kept a detailed record of the number of passenger comments each employee received, subtracting negative ones from positive ones, and used this as a basis for cruise staff evaluation and promotion. As such, staff engaged in a number of activities to ensure they received good comments. Paul, the deputy cruise director, performed cartwheels—literally—at all his activities in the hope that passengers would remember to name him in the comment cards. Sally eventually cut her hair to distinguish herself from Cassie and thus potentially be named more often in the comment cards.

Cassie frantically poked the service pin through her cream blazer. “Ta-ta, I’m off to the party. See you at dinner if not before!”

Facing the Audience

Cassie pushed open the swinging doors that separated the crew area from the onstage passenger area, and on cue a smile spread across her face. She walked up the stairs to the ship’s grand atrium, the open showcase area of the ship, spanning decks five through seven. Scanning the chandelier-lit space, she spotted Blake, the Donny Osmond look-alike assistant cruise director she was assigned to trail. He stood surrounded by female passengers, flashing a smile, his helmet of brown hair slick with mousse. Blake was a 30-year-old high school dropout, ex-car salesman, and chess wiz. He had worked more than two years for Spirit and seemed to gain pleasure in telling Cassie what to do.

Seabreeze Jazz, one of the ship’s six bands, accompanied the evening with piano and guitar. Passengers dressed in evening gowns and tuxedos stood huddled in groups, furiously sucking down cocktails provided free of charge during the half-hour party. Cassie sidled up to Blake and the group, trying to decide whether the women were a group of divorcées, widows, or wives with tardy husbands. In his sing-song voice, Blake announced, “Ladies, ladies, let me introduce you to *Radiant Spirit’s* newest employee. And this,” he motioned grandly, “is Cassie.” Cassie smiled.

A woman wearing lots of sparkly eye makeup turned to Cassie and said, “So, where are you from . . . England, I bet.”

Cassie gently corrected her, saying, “Actually, I’m from the United States—Oklahoma.” Cassie continued, “So how are you ladies enjoy-

ing the cruise so far?” Swanning was easier if you got the passengers to talk.

Another woman, this one wearing a large emerald choker that perfectly complemented her green-sequined dress, said, “Wow, I didn’t think there were any American crew members on this ship.” Cassie began to explain how the ship employed few Americans, largely because most Americans would not put up with working for six to eight months without a day off. Suddenly, Cassie felt Blake’s disapproving stare, and she abruptly stopped.

He changed the subject with a flash of his teeth, querying, “So, did you all have a nice time in Cabo San Lucas today?”

Without hesitation, Sparkly Eye Shadow jumped in and said, “Actually, I’ve been there three times before, so instead I went to the bridge tournament here on the ship. Do you play bridge, honey?” She winked at Cassie.

“Uh, no . . . but my mom and grandmother do.” Then she added with great enthusiasm, “I can play Go Fish!” Immediately she recoiled. Cassie thought she sounded as stupid as Blake, but no one else seemed to mind.

The ship suddenly lurched. The room lost balance en masse, and a gentleman from an adjoining group stumbled into the ladies’ space, taking center stage. He adjusted his black satin cummerbund, appreciating the instant audience, and declared, “And I’ve only had one drink so far, ha, ha, ha. Maybe I’ll be able to stand straight after I’m drunk!” The ladies and Cassie giggled. A pained expression broke through Blake’s smiley mask. Cassie would soon learn that passengers continually made this same *original* joke, all seeming to believe they were the first to think it up.

At last, the dinner bell rang. Passengers quickly gulped the remainder of their drinks and scurried toward the elevators to go up the one flight to dinner. Blake and Cassie headed for the stairs, ready to meet other cruise staffers in the officers’ mess for dinner of their own. On their way, a couple stopped and asked them which way it was to dinner. In unison they explained that the dining room was “up one deck and back to the aft of the ship,” but the couple still seemed confused. The woman, with a gray beehive, pointed to the elevator and tentatively asked, “Does this elevator go to the *back* of the ship?” Cassie stopped, thought for a second, and realized she had no idea how to answer this question.

Blake obviously didn't care, and with another toothy grin said, "Yeah, honey, on the *Radiant* we have special high-tech diagonal elevators." Cassie laughed nervously, trying to cover up her embarrassment at Blake's sarcasm.

Feeling a little sorry for the woman, she began to explain away Blake's tone to Beehive by giving her more detailed directions. But before she could finish, Blake grabbed her arm and whispered in her ear, "They'll get it. We're out of here." Cassie consoled herself; he was the expert. Cassie was ready to turn off her smile and relax, and at this point the passengers had already wandered into the elevator.

Blake and Cassie made their way to the backstage crew galley, finally out of sight of passengers. As they walked through the long hallway to the aft of the ship, various male crew members whistled and made comments in Italian as the duo passed. Blake yelled back, "Hey, you never whistle at me when I'm alone."

One of them teased in accented English, "That is because we are not whistling at you." Then, directing his gaze on Cassie, he continued, "Ooh, la, la, look at those legs!"

Cassie was becoming increasingly aware that she served as a sex object for the male crew members and the male passengers. While she usually enjoyed being the center of attention, she was not used to blatant innuendo. She leaned over to Blake, saying, "I don't know whether to be flattered or insulted."

Blake replied, "Well, you don't have any control over it, so I'd just learn to live with it."

In the officers' mess, Blake and Cassie met up with the other cruise staff. Compared with the menu of macaroni and cheese that Cassie was used to at college, the meal was a delectable delight—escargot swimming in garlic butter, French onion soup with a thick gooey layer of mozzarella cheese, and hazelnut soufflé with hot amaretto cream sauce. As she spooned in the last of her dessert, Cassie declared, "I swear, I'm going to get sooo fat on this ship!" As usual, the others ignored her. Instead, they began one of their favorite backstage rituals—swapping stories of stupid passenger questions. Cassie was proud to have one of her own to share. "You know, a couple just asked us if our elevators go to the back of the ship. It's like, 'give me a break!'"

The Ups and Downs of Customer Service

Two months into her contract, Cassie had heard an uncountable number of stupid questions. She had become adept at dealing with them, and almost as good as Blake at ignoring or subtly deflecting passenger criticisms and complaints. However, her probationary review was quickly approaching, and she knew that she needed to keep a clean record, or better yet, receive a lot of positive passenger comments in order to receive a favorable review and be eligible for promotion at the end of her contract. It also made sense to make nice with the cruise director, Tim, someone with whom Cassie had not hit it off very well. Tim, a 45-year-old Los Angeleno, considered Cassie to be a dumb blonde, a part she herself admitted playing when it helped to get her way. As she explained to Sally, "Sometimes it's just easier to smile and laugh off stuff like you don't get it." Cassie continued, "But, that doesn't make me dumb. For goodness sake, I have a college degree—something Tim doesn't have. I may not be part of his little group of friends, but I don't want to have to be a brown-noser to get there."

Sally said, "Believe me, I don't like Tim much either. At the same time, though, keep in mind that it may be easier in the long run just to kiss up to him." Cassie sighed. Maybe she *would* suck it up for the next couple of weeks, at least until she got through her probationary review.

Three hours later, Cassie and the rest of the cruise staff raced around backstage preparing for Cruise Fun Night. Tim, already onstage, boomed over the show-lounge microphone, "Welcome to Cruise Fun Night, the show where *you* are the show!" The lounge was packed with nearly 800 passengers. Cassie and Sally were double-checking the prizes for the fun night games when Jean, the ship's exercise manager, limped over, having sprained her ankle earlier in the day while teaching aerobics. "Hey, guys, I'm not going to be able to do the balloon game tonight because of my ankle. Can one of you do it?"

A grimace spread across Sally's face. "Hey, I'm willing to be Naughty Nursie and stuff two balloons in my blouse for the cruise staff skit, but I'm not up to the balloon game."

Jean said, "You think I *like* getting jumped on by passengers week after week?"

Dan, a new assistant cruise director in training, approached the threesome and asked, "Hey, what's this about getting jumped on?"

Sally explained. "See these balloons here?" She pointed to two industrial-size paper bags, each stuffed with eight balloons, and continued, "They're for the balloon game. Earlier in the day, Cassie and I blew 'em up. And we blow them up in a special way—first as big as we can, and then we let out a lot of air. That makes them really stretchy and difficult to break. Well, during the show, we get eight female and eight male passengers to volunteer for the game. We line them up on opposite sides of the stage and give each of them a balloon. The passengers have to stick the balloon between their legs and kind of jump or skip over to either Blake or Jean—whoever is of the opposite sex—and break the balloon by sitting down and bouncing it between their butt and Blake or Jean's lap. Whichever team gets done first wins, and the thing is, it usually takes a while. Because the balloons are so stretchy, they usually have to bounce five or six times before the balloon pops!"

Dan grinned, beginning to understand as the mental picture formed in his mind.

Cassie added, "And what Sally failed to mention is that Tim tells the passengers that they have to sit forward, *straddling* you to break the balloon. It's *totally* disgusting."

Blake walked by and interrupted. "It's only disgusting if you get peed on, like I did two weeks ago. Now *that's* gross."

Cassie's face contorted in disgust. "I'm sorry, but I just don't want 30-year-old, dirty old men jumping up and down on me simulating sex."

Neither did Sally, and she was smart enough to convince Cassie to play the game. "Come on, Cassie, you'll be great at it. The passengers love you. Anyway, I have to hand out balloons and prizes to the contestants." It was a lame excuse, and both of them knew it. Sally added, "Anyway, you're going up for your probationary review soon . . . this could win you some points with the passengers and with Tim."

Cassie exclaimed, "I just wish they had put this in the job description!"

"Yeah, right, would you have signed up for this job if they had?" Sally muttered, "If only my feminist friends back at graduate school could see me now."

With a deep sigh, Cassie agreed to be bounced upon. When it came time for the balloon game, Cassie and Blake took their positions on opposite balloon game chairs and braced themselves for what was to come. The audience screamed with laughter as the lineup of male

and female passengers ran across the stage and frantically bounced on their laps, trying to break the balloons. Cassie's face was crimson. Her hands gripped the seat, and with every bounce a slight wince leaked through her ear-to-ear smile. Finally she could stand it no longer. For the last four men in line, Cassie did not allow them to bounce up and down more than twice before she herself pricked and popped their balloon with her fingernail. The game, which usually lasted at least four minutes, continued for only two. Tim, emceeding the evening, grabbed the microphone and merrily announced that the male passengers were the winners in this *Battle of the Sexes*. When he turned from the audience toward Cassie, though, his eyes were narrow in anger. In her haste to rid her lap of bouncing men, Cassie had ruined the game. She knew it, and it was clear now that Tim knew it too.

The show continued without ado, and the passengers gave a standing ovation. The cruise staff, sweaty, tired, and satisfied with the show, trotted backstage.

Cassie and Sally were peeling off their costumes when Tim approached them. "What the hell were you thinking, Cassie?" he barked in her face.

"What are you talking about, Tim?" Cassie whipped her head around but tried to sound nonconfrontational.

"That balloon game was freakin' ruined. If you can't do it right, why the heck did you do it? Are you so stupid that you didn't see you were popping the balloons twice as quickly as Blake's? Are you blind? Stupid? Or both?"

Cassie's eyes began to blaze. Sally silently pleaded for her to just leave it all alone. "Let's go, Cassie," she whispered.

Negotiating the Dark Side

The next evening, Sally and Cassie prepared for the Fifties Sock Hop theme night, dressed in denim blue miniskirts and cheap white T-shirts with "Spirit Sock Hop" silk-screened across the front. Sally was "Bambi" for the night; Blake was "Rocco"; Cassie was "Trixie." Passengers were beginning to wander into the ship's disco, the home of this and various other theme nights the cruise staff held to keep passengers awake and buying revenue-producing drinks. Engineered entertainment. They came to watch. The cruise staff's job was to get 10% of the passengers involved, so that the other 90% would have some-

thing to watch. The disco's glitter globe cast shadowy illuminations upon about 30 passengers sitting at tables and a handful of couples who were dancing the swing on the sunken dance floor.

As the band finished, Blake took center stage. Unsuccessfully trying to appear fifties-ish in rolled-up jeans and a semitransparent Spirit tee, Blake grabbed the microphone and in a stupid tough-guy accent heralded the crowd into motion. "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Rocco, and those are my girls down there, Bambi and Trixie." Blake gestured to Cassie and Sally, who twirled and bowed on the dance floor. Blake continued, "Now, this is a fifties sock hop, and a sock hop can't be complete without a twist contest, so if you're already on the dance floor, stay there, and if you're not, come on down." Couples who minutes before happily danced the swing made a beeline for the dance floor exits.

Sally blocked one of the exits, literally sitting on one exit post and kicking her feet up to the other, and told passengers in wide-eyed innocence, "There's an invisible laser barrier here, and if you pass it, you'll blow up into a billion pieces." Two of the couples smiled at Sally's attempt at humor and agreed to participate in the game. Another couple turned and left through another exit.

Blake continued to explain the contest. "Now, this isn't just any twist contest, it's the balloon twist. Just watch Trixie and Bambi demonstrate." Cassie and Sally sprang onto the small disco stage, placed a balloon between their chests, and began to wiggle. Sally whispered to Cassie, "I've done this so many times that I am actually kinda *proud* of my balloon twisting abilities." Cassie rolled her eyes but kept smiling.

Blake continued, "Now the goal is to keep the balloon pressed between you and your partner, and you can't use your hands. If it falls to the floor, you're out. Now come on down, ladies and gentlemen. There's nothing to be afraid of." The room was still, silent. "Did I mention that we'll give a bottle of champagne to the winners?" Three more couples straggled to the floor, likely unaware that the champagne prize cost Spirit about 50 cents.

The contest began. A couple won. The cruise staff delivered the champagne with a cheer and continued with a hula-hoop contest. Blake closed the theme night with a beach party line dance, providing an opportunity for all the single women to come to the floor. Sally and Cassie danced along with the passengers, egging them on to spice it up with turns and hip shakes. Blake finally turned over the evening to

the disc jockey, and Sally and Cassie made their way up to the passenger bar, ready for a drink and a break.

A tall man who appeared to be in his mid-60s approached the bobby-socked duo. "Hi, gals. You sure were looking fine out there on the dance floor. Can I buy you a drink?"

After quickly examining the man with a long thin ponytail of gray hair, dressed in an expensive-looking black suit, Cassie and Sally responded in unison, "Sure." Passenger-bought drinks were one of the perks of the job, and staff were usually quick to take up offers. Drinking with passengers was a way to relax and swan at the same time. Cruise director Tim usually made the rounds of the various ship lounges throughout the evening to ensure that the cruise staff continued to "work" the passengers until at least 11 P.M. Sally glanced at the new watch she had bought in St. Thomas earlier that day. It was 10:30 P.M.—only a half hour to go.

The three of them gathered at a small table near the dance floor. Cassie and Sally quickly learned that the man's name was Fred. As he leaned in close to hear them over the beat of the music, they also learned that he had cigarette breath and sickeningly sweet cologne. After some small talk about his day in St. Thomas, Fred asked Cassie to dance. Female cruise staff were not technically required to dance with passengers. However, it usually made for positive comments in the comment cards, and quite simply it was sometimes less effortful to dance than to make conversation. Cassie agreed. The man, almost three times her age, triumphantly grabbed Cassie's hand. As he tugged her to the dance floor, Cassie looked back at Sally and mouthed the word "Gross."

In return, Sally mouthed "Yuck." Then she quickly looked around to make sure none of the passengers had noticed this interchange. No one had. Sally sank back into the chair, quietly sipping the \$8 glass of wine Fred had just purchased for her. She was relieved that he had chosen Cassie rather than her—a perk of being the more athletic and less curvy of the little blonde American twins.

Once on the dance floor, Fred and Cassie began to move in rhythm with the beat of the disco music. Tired of feeling his sweaty grip, Cassie tried to break free of Fred's hand. She twirled out and away from him, but the moment she began dancing on her own, Fred somehow grabbed on again. Cassie resigned herself to being firmly anchored to Fred throughout the dance. As the song continued, Fred pulled Cassie closer and closer. Cassie pushed back and playfully

quipped, "Aren't you a little devil? I'd actually like to dance further back, like this." She pointed to four inches of space she had managed to squeeze between their bodies.

Fred smiled slowly, saying, "I know girls like you. You're just a tease, like when you were wiggling with that balloon between you and that other girl."

Cassie began to feel uneasy. "That was a performance," she thought. "That's not me—the *real* Cassie."

Fred pulled her close again and, brushing his lips to her ear, said, "Come on now, tell me, would you ever consider me if you came over to the dark side?"

The dark side? Cassie's heart began to race. She did not know whether to laugh or to run. She decided to play dumb. "Huh? What do you mean?"

He persisted, "You know, the dark side. Would you consider being with me?"

Cassie again said "Huh?" and pretended not to hear him by holding her hand to her ear. But while she was able to ignore his words, it was more difficult to ignore his gyrating body pressed against hers. The smell of his sweat was beginning to leak through his heavy cologne. Pushing back the anger that stung her eyes, Cassie thought to herself, "Don't act offended, or he will win this game." She endured the last 20 seconds of the dance, disentangled herself from Fred's embrace, and ran back to the table where Sally was sitting.

"Come on. We are leaving *now!*" Cassie pulled Sally into the hallway and then through the swinging doors into the crew elevator area. She leaned against the hallway wall, slid down into a huddled figure, and looked like she was about to cry. Perplexed, Sally slid down and sat next to her. "Cassie, what? What is it? What's wrong? I know he was ugly, but . . ."

Taking a ragged breath, Cassie interrupted, "He kept rubbing up against me and actually asked me if I wanted to come to the 'dark side.' What the hell? I swear these passengers think when they buy the cruise, they also buy us—that we should be entertaining them in all areas. I feel like a freakin' call girl!"

Attempting to get Cassie out of her funk, Sally cracked, "Call girl, huh? Yeah, I wonder how the passengers ever get that impression, with us running around in short skirts and you letting men jump on top of you and all."

Sally's last comment perturbed Cassie; she did not find it funny. She protested, "Geez, Sally, you think this is my fault?"

"No, no, no, I didn't mean that. Gosh, I don't know," Sally responded.

Cassie reflected, "It's weird, because he wasn't saying anything blatant, like 'Come to bed with me,' but I just felt so violated, like I had no control. I was trying not to say anything mean to him, but . . ."

"You were being offended in making sure he wasn't offended," Sally finished Cassie's thought.

Cassie nodded vigorously. "Exactly!"

Sally paused and then continued. "So are you going to do anything about it?"

Cassie shrugged her shoulders, bit her lower lip, and thought about her options. She had accepted a drink from and agreed to dance with the guy. Did this make her a tease? Did this make her responsible? At the same time, she was angry. Her amber eyes narrowing, she said to Sally with more certainty, "You know we do *not* have to touch these guys, we do *not* have to dance with them, and I should *not* have to deal with this."

Sally said, "Well, you could just march up to him and tell him that."

"Yeah, right, and he would just march up to the comment card drop box and write something nasty about me," Cassie said. "I definitely don't need that right before next week's probationary review. Anyway, I don't feel like seeing that guy again, let alone confronting him."

Sally continued, "Well, maybe you should talk to Tim . . ."

Cassie exclaimed, "Yeah, I'm sure he's going to be real understanding after last night's balloon fiasco!"

"Well, maybe you could go above his head?" Sally questioned uncertainly and then quickly recouped, answering her own question. "Actually, no, that probably wouldn't be good considering the rumors of other staff who've gone over their supervisors' heads."

Cassie agreed, "Yeah, there's no way I'm going to do that. Remember, we're not supposed to contact headquarters directly, and anyway, Tim would make my life hell." She bowed and shook her head. "I don't know, Sally, I just don't know." ♦