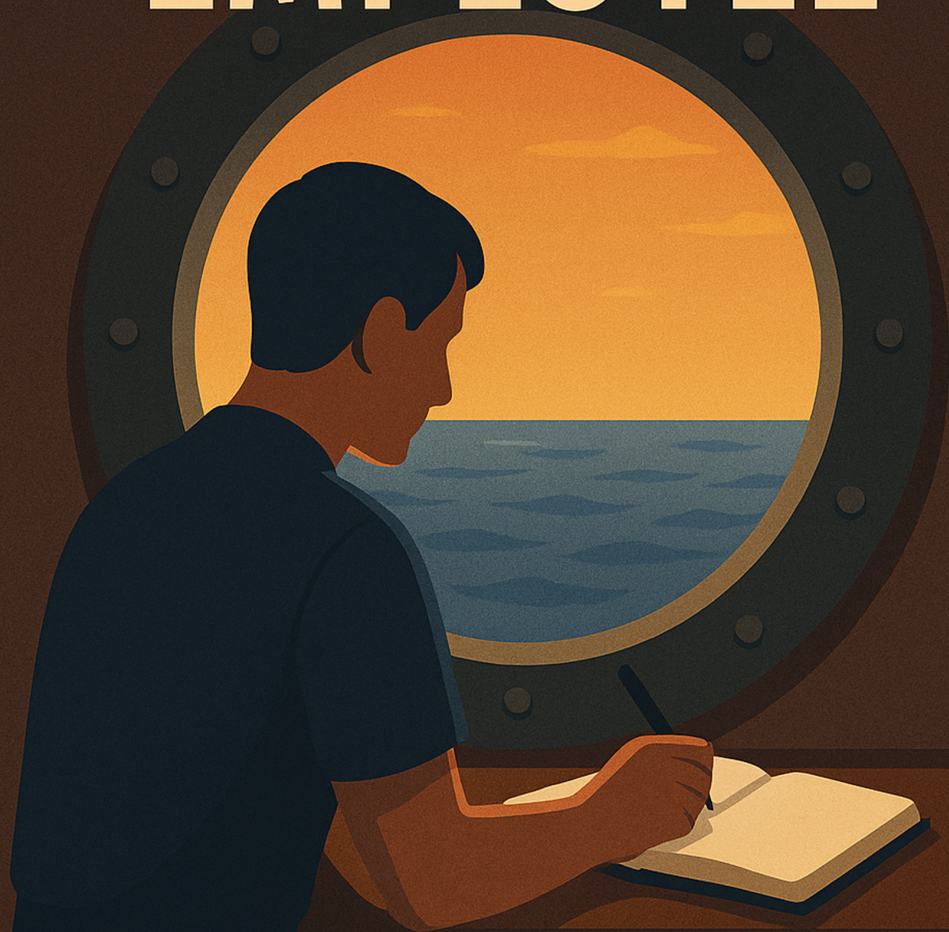


# DIARY OF A CRUISE SHIP EMPLOYEE



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## July 7th

It's summer, and all my friends are sunbathing somewhere. Half naked in the sun and surrounded by water and sand, I sunbathe too, but I also have some cement next to me. I work on a construction site. I'm healthy and thankful for that guy, but working extremely hard from dawn till dusk to make a living while seeing all the beautiful vacation photos of my friends flooding my Facebook makes me feel a bit out of luck. There were even moments when I wanted to delete all my social media profiles, but I refrained, and today woke up wiser. "You fool, just go find another job," was the first thought that fell on my helmetless head this morning. Eager to make a change for the better, at that moment, I remembered the 'Work And See The World' poster that always caught my eye when walking down the city square. It's time to make up for all the summers I missed, and I've been missing them since I was 12. Coming from a relatively low-income family, I wasn't aware of what vacation was until I was 12 years old too. "There are openings on one of the biggest and best cruise lines in the world," a short and sweet girl who works in the agency said to me two hours after I came up with the idea. "How is your English?" she asked. "My English is okay," I replied, and our short conversation proved to be the opposite, so she suggested that I apply for an entry job as a pool attendant. And I was okay with that. All I need is to make a change and get to know the other side of the sun. Before going too far with this, I called a friend who has experience working in the cruise industry, and he told me all the pros and cons of working on cruise ships and strengthened my decision. It

will take time and money to get there, but the decision has been made.

## **September 29th**

Two weeks after the sudden wake-up and the preliminary interview with the girl from the agency, the main interview with a company representative took place, and I got the job. And now, after about 12000 email checks, I finally received the long-awaited employment letter this morning. I will work on one of the largest cruise ships in the world. Our home port for the entire Caribbean season will be Fort Lauderdale, Florida, from where we will depart on seven-day Eastern and Western Caribbean cruises before crossing the Atlantic Ocean in April and arriving in Europe.

To get to the ship, I have to take a bus to the capital city and one more to Bulgaria's capital Sofia, from where I will board a plane to Frankfurt and another to Fort Lauderdale. I couldn't be more excited about what the future holds for me. It will be a lot of work for sure, but there will probably be nice stuff as well. The only thing that makes me afraid now is that I have seen a plane only on TV and far in the sky, and hopefully, I won't get lost somewhere. The embarking on the ship is 35 days from today, and before that, I have to do a medical check-up and get a US C1/D visa. I will also touch my nose with the elbow if I need to.

## November 1st

It looks like whoever is in charge of the snow forgot to turn it off because it had been snowing for the past two days without a single break. This year, winter came earlier than usual, and that's terrible, at least for my current situation. Thinking of all the possible scenarios, I called the bus station yesterday, but they couldn't confirm if there would be a bus to the capital city. "Come on time, and we will see," was their answer. I got the same response from the bus station in the capital, and for a moment, I saw the sun above the construction site laughing at me.

Still, in my mind, I was already applying sunscreen on female passengers and, when necessary, on the male passengers on the ship using a roller, and last night, I went to bed quite sure that everything would be okay. After only three hours of sleep, I woke up this morning overexcited. But when I saw my mother crying while she was preparing my favorite meal for the farewell, I couldn't stop asking myself why I needed this adventure to the unknown.

Anyway, I collected myself, and after lunch, I started packing my stuff, including the four t-shirts I bought the day before yesterday when it started snowing for the first time this year. Of course, finding t-shirts at this time of the year was difficult, and everybody asked me whether I was serious. "I just try to get some at a discounted price for the next summer," was my answer, trying not to hurt them by saying where I was going.

Just in case, last night I spoke with a friend, who promised to drive me to the airport in Sofia if needed, but luckily, once

I got to the bus station, I found out that I wouldn't need to bother him. Happy with the first small win, I bought the ticket, hugged my parents, sister, and brother-in-law, and entered the bus. My mother started crying again when she saw the bus leaving the station, which broke me completely. I always thought she was taking things too much to heart, but this time, I understood her. Four hours later, my cousin welcomed me to the capital, and we spent three hours together before the travel to Sofia.

## **November 2nd**

After dinner with my cousin, he brought me to the station, and I took the bus that got me closer to my dream. The ride to Sofia was a bit uncomfortable, and what was supposed to be five hours of travel turned into a seven-hour driver's fight with the slippery road. The time before my first flight shortened significantly, but I was still in the game, and that was the most important.

On the final consultation with the agency, the girl there told me to be careful with the taxi drivers in Sofia and negotiate the price first. "The maximum amount you should pay from the bus station to the airport is €10," she said. With that in mind, I asked a few drivers and made a deal for €10, although they asked for €15 to €20 when they saw that I was a foreigner in a hurry. Still, after 15 minutes of the driver's monolog about how life in Bulgaria sucks, we arrived at the airport, and he asked for €15. What an as\*hole that driver was. I could have told him to \*\*\*\* off, but I still gave him €15, hoping he would invest in some air freshener so the next victims would have to stand the conversation only.

When I arrived at the airport, I had only 1 hour and 20 minutes until the first flight but running like a headless chicken, I finished the procedures on time and put my butt in a plane seat for the first time in my life. The airplane was packed, and among the others, there was a baby behind me crying for the whole two-and-a-half hours. I can't say that it was music to my ears, but I was doing the same s\*\*t at his age, so I didn't have the right to be upset. Once we arrived in Frankfurt, I set my clock one hour back and, checking the timetable; I found out that my next plane was scheduled to depart from another terminal, and I would have to take the airport train to get there.

"I'm getting lost here. That's for sure," was my first thought when I realized how big the airport was. The fear was real, but I soon discovered that the airport was so perfectly organized that even a 150-year-old first-time traveler could easily navigate through. The next plane to Fort Lauderdale was in six hours, and fast forward, after an exhausting ten-and-a-half-hour flight, I was finally on American soil. Arriving at my final destination after 35 hours was a great relief, but while waiting for passport control, an airport policeman asked me to go with him to a room with a few other 'suspicious' people. Maybe the policeman who brought me there couldn't assess a person well, but he is a guy with good manners, and after one hour of checking my documents, he released me, apologizing for the inconvenience. As I was told before, a woman holding a paper with my name was waiting for me at the exit and brought me to the hotel to spend the night before embarking on the ship tomorrow.

## November 3rd

Today I'm starting a new chapter and couldn't afford to be late, so I woke up an hour earlier than necessary. After breakfast—the company gave us a \$50 voucher for two meals, including the dinner last night—at 7:30, all of us, about 40 crew members, met outside the hotel where the bus was waiting for us. Not aware I would handle hundreds of suitcases for the rest of the day, I put mine in the van following the bus, and we headed to the ship. The atmosphere on the bus was well-balanced, and while the more experienced returning crew members were calm, the rest of the crew, including me, were quite excited. After ten minutes of riding, we saw the huge, mesmerizing object in the distance. "Your home away from home," said the driver over the microphone. The HR manager was the first to meet us in the cruise terminal's waiting area, and after the warm welcome, she brought us to a venue where I put my signature on a few pieces of paper without reading what was written there. Now, I don't know if I signed to donate a kidney, signed that I was willing to work for free, or gave rights to the company to use me as a prostitute in near, more liberal times. Or signed for all of them, and much more. I'm not sure if what I signed will be good for me, but at least the girl checking the documents had fun and a 'believe it or not' moment. "I know. My signature looks like an 87-year-old snail," I tried to be funny. "That's the right description. I hope that only your signature looks like that," she said, winked, and left me with even more doubts for such a short time on the ship.

After finishing with the documents, we met the heads of the departments, and the HR manager took us around the crew

areas, the uniform store where we got the uniforms, and the laundry, where they gave us a set of linen. Finally, I met the pool supervisor, who brought me to my cabin. "This will be your home for the next eight months. Leave the suitcase, have your lunch, rest a bit, and meet me at 1 o'clock on I-95, which is what we call the main crew corridor," he said. The cabin has two beds on top of each other and isn't bigger than 6-7 square meters, which should make my reproduction tool visually bigger in my partner's eyes, assuming I find one. At that moment, my roommate wasn't inside, but from the name tag on the table, I found out he was my countryman who works as a stateroom attendant. Whatever that means. And considering that I feel lost in space, having a countryman for a roommate is the best thing I could have asked for.

After one hour of staring at the ceiling and questioning myself again on why I needed this, I put on the uniform and met my supervisor on I-95 on deck two. "Today is the busiest day of the cruise, so you will start work now," he said to me. After introducing myself to a few of my new colleagues, I started working, and my job there was to bring the trolleys with luggage from the ship's entrance to the elevators, where other guys were taking them to the upper decks. Happy that I survived the first few hours, at 6 pm, I went for dinner at the vast crew restaurant. The line of people there was long, but the wait was worth it, and after filling my belly to the top, I headed to my cabin, hoping for a 15-minute rest. But, easier said than done. The ship is enormous, and while looking for my corridor, I got lost; my time was up, and I had to return to work. With the luggage done already, we spent the rest of the time cleaning the I-95: removing the garbage, packing the empty trolleys, and

mopping the floor. It was 9 pm when we finished working, and that was it for the first day.

After another ten minutes of searching for my cabin, I accepted that I was on unknown terrain and stopped a crew member passing by to ask where my cabin number was. "It's such a normal thing. You are new and will need a few days to get to know where everything is, including your cabin," he said, smiling, and brought me to my cabin. Opening the door, I heard probably the worst bathroom singing ever. But, at least he is my countryman, and that will hopefully make my life easier at the beginning. After 20-something minutes of showering, he came out, and we had a short welcoming conversation. "Our cabin is a few meters underwater, but it would have been the same on the other cruise lines as well. We are lucky to have an opportunity to work on this one because everything here, from the salary to the living conditions, is better," he said. He also said they sent me to his cabin because the company's policy is to put the new hires in the same cabin with a countryman so they could adapt more easily. After we shared what is decent from our lives, I unpacked my stuff, wrote these lines, set 15 alarms, and went to bed.

## **November 4th**

I was happy that I didn't fall on the floor during my first ever sleep on a bunk bed, but I wanted even more, and this morning I made sure to start the day on the right foot. After my morning routine, my roommate brought me to the meeting place for the pool attendants, where I met the entire team for the first time. "First, thank you, guys, for your

efforts on the last cruise. You did an amazing job. We had a few complaints from the management and the guests, but nothing too much. Next to me is your new colleague, whose name is Zuatko, Zwatko, Svatko, Zlatko, Zlatkooooo," my supervisor was struggling to pronounce my name. "This is his first time on a ship, and I expect all of you to support him." After the meeting, he told me that he had to go to the office and asked a colleague to show me the open deck and my section. As instructed, the guy from Indonesia showed me around the pool, the lockers where the equipment was, and the section of the open deck I would be in charge of. "They promoted the guy who worked here to stateroom attendant, and you will replace him. We are at the back of the ship, and this will be your section. Your job is to sweep and mop the floor, keep sun chairs in line, provide towels, and keep this place clean," he said to me. "My section is next to yours. We will have different break times, and I will take care of both sections when you rest. When you return from break, I will go, and you will take over. Today we have a full day at sea, and the open deck will be very busy, but it's okay; we will make it," he said, laughing.

Compared to my construction job, this one looked easy, but the beginning of my career at sea could have been better. I had spent only an hour in my section when a guest asked me where the gym was. "I'm sorry, ma'am, I just embarked yesterday, and I'm not yet familiar with the ship. Please let me ask my colleague, and I will be back to you," I said to her, in much better English now after spending the three months before I came on board in intensive learning.

Once I was done with the section, the supervisor asked me to go to the locker and help my colleagues prepare what they

call 'cold towels' for the guests. After rolling the towels dipped in icy water earlier, we put them on trays and shared them among the guests, who were happy to get one in the hot Caribbean sun. "That's why I cruise with this company." "This is exactly what I needed at this moment,"..... were some of their comments. I returned to the locker a few times to refill the tray, and when I finished with that, my supervisor told me I would have to go for one safety and one first aid training.

I went to the training room, hoping to rest a bit, but those two hours turned out to be an eternity and a fight with myself, trying not to fall asleep. After the training, I went for lunch and a one-and-a-half-hour break, which was supposed to be three hours. "I'm sorry, but with all the training, the first week will be like this," said my supervisor. Asking myself again why I needed this adventure, I jumped into bed, slept for one hour, put on my uniform, and showed up in my section for the afternoon shift.

With half of the team on break from 12 pm to 3 pm, the open deck wasn't in its best condition when I returned, but there was no time for complaints. I started with collecting the soiled towels from the sun chairs, putting clean ones, aligning the chairs that were in a mess, and moping the spilled drinks. I was busy this afternoon but still had a few short conversations with the guests. They had many questions and mostly wanted to know how it feels to work on a cruise ship. Indirectly, they were asking if the crew had a lot of s\*x, and they had other questions, to which I had no answers, so I again had to explain that I was new on the ship. Knowing myself as a person who would never stop till the work is done—it seems there will always be work to be

done—I saw the talks with the guests as an opportunity to rest a bit. Plus, "talking and engaging with the guests is highly expected from each of you," the supervisor said to us at the morning meeting. After the one-hour dinner break, I collected the soiled towels from the section and mopped the floor, which was it for today.

As we spoke earlier, at 9 pm, I met my supervisor, and he brought me to a computer in the crew area, where he created a username and password for me and showed me how to clock in and out every time I went for duty or break. After that, I went around the ship to get familiar with the guests' venues. I can't put myself again in a situation like today, not knowing the place where I work. The guests don't care if I'm new or have worked on the ship for ten years. They pay good money to cruise with us, and the last thing they want to hear from the crew is 'I don't know.' And they have questions, especially now, at the beginning of the cruise.

## **November 5th**

I try to keep up with writing this diary every day, but last night I got so drunk that I fell asleep on the floor in the toilet, so I didn't get the chance, and I'm writing this on the afternoon break on November 6th. Yesterday, we visited Cozumel, Mexico. Actually, the others visited Cozumel while I again spent half of my break on training. But there was no reason to worry. We will visit Cozumel more times during this Caribbean season, and there will be other opportunities.

In the morning, the supervisor sent my Indonesian colleague to assist the people in wheelchairs going outside, and I had to take care of his section too. "No worries. Cozumel is one of the most beautiful ports in the Caribbean, so our sections won't be that busy," he said to me after the morning meeting, and I didn't have to wait long to realize his prediction was wrong.

After 9 am, the guests started coming in good numbers and talking with a few of them; I found out that most had been to Cozumel before and preferred to stay and enjoy the ship. Still, the situation was under control, so I couldn't say I was sweating my \*\*\* this morning. And everything was okay until an officer passed by and gave me a strange look. A minute later, my supervisor told me on the radio that we weren't allowed to wear black sunglasses, which could make the guests feel uncomfortable. At first, I didn't think that way, but with a little effort, I imagined myself on a cruise with my wife in conversation with a pool attendant who wears sunglasses with black lenses. He is talking to me, but how do I know he isn't staring at my wife's b\*\*bs??? The officer was 100 % right. I took off my sunglasses, but on the way to my cabin to replace them, I recalled the days spent on the construction site, and I couldn't remember wearing sunglasses even once. Why would that be a problem now!?! I don't remember having a t-shirt on myself, too, while working under the hot sun, but here, that would be a straight red card (not carpet) for me.

After solving the problem with the sunglasses, another question popped up in my mind. What about the radio and the earphones we have as pool attendants?!?! For a moment, I again imagined myself going on a cruise, this time with my

side chick. Wouldn't I feel that somebody is following me and directly communicating with my wife, who thinks I'm on a business trip?!?! A few hundred towels later, it was time for more training; one more safety training and one environmental training, and they took half my break again. Back on duty, I found my section not very busy, but soon, the guests started returning from outside, and I spent the rest of the day running after them, folding towels, and collecting the soiled ones.

In the evening, walking down the I-95 with my roommate, we saw a crew sale, so we bought one bottle of vodka each. "To keep the fridge busy," he said. But, talking about life on the way to our cabin, my roommate remembered that time flies and, afraid that the bottles could expire, organized a party in our cabin. He brought a few countrymen, and we had a few neighbors, too—a guy from India, two girls from the Philippines, a girl from China, and her boyfriend from the Philippines. In the beginning, we enjoyed it, and then the enjoyment went out of control. My roommate got smashed first, and I also ended up extremely drunk. If my liver could talk, it would have asked for transplantation in a new home.

## **November 6th**

The noise from the bathroom next to my cabin woke me up this morning. And it wouldn't if I wasn't in my bathroom sleeping and hugging the toilet bowl. Glad that my roommate didn't flush me down the drain by mistake, I took a cold shower, woke up my roommate, put on my uniform, and went for another, this time, not-so-promising day. The first one I scared with my appearance this morning was my

colleague from Ukraine, whom I met in the crew restaurant. Although we've known each other for only a few days, we are already like brothers, and he felt free to tell me that I looked wasted. "No chance," I replied, and we burst into laughter. The second person I met was my supervisor on the way to the meeting point, who, refusing to believe his eyes, told me to go and take another shower. So, I showered again and looked in the mirror.

"Can you avoid doing stupid things and getting kicked from the ship? At least for one month. Return the money you invested in coming here first," I said to myself.

It was still early, and I had only one guest in my section, but he proved that sometimes, one is enough. "Looking good today," he said after we greeted each other. "Thank you, sir. Enjoy your day," I replied, and even though it was 8 am and cloudy outside, I went down to my cabin to take the sunglasses. I was still drunk and wasn't sure if my section was up to the standard, but I did my best with that and went to the training room.

The first training for today was on safety, and the second training focused on how the crew should behave with the guests, how to talk with them, how to take a complaint, how much distance to keep during a conversation, and how to pose when the guests ask for a photo—always with both hands visible, so nobody can say the crew member was touching their behind. At least, I think that could be the reason. After the training, I went to my cabin, wrote about yesterday, and was about to go to bed when the cabin phone rang. A guy who introduced himself as a payroll purser asked me to go to his office to sign something. I kindly

explained that I was on break, but he told me I would have to go immediately and that we would be done in a few minutes because there was nobody else. But, of course, I got lost again, and it took me 10 minutes to find the payroll office, where three people were already waiting in line. I signed the papers, but my break was almost over, and I had time just to put on my uniform. With a few more questions if I was okay, and with a promise to myself that I would never drink that much again, I finished this long day.

## **November 7th**

Today was my fifth day on the ship, and it was time for my first crew safety drill. Following the directions on my safety card and asking around, after the signal, I somehow got to my station, where they called our names, and when they sounded the second signal, we headed to the lifeboats. After the drill, I went for 'drug and alcohol policy' training, for which I was the ideal candidate after breaking all the alcohol policies two days ago. The training was like the previous ones I had attended—the officer was talking, and half of the present crew was listening. Tired, the rest were either sleeping or about to fall asleep. Again, I was part of the rest, trying hard not to fall asleep, but the feeling that everybody was looking at me was even more uncomfortable. Fortunately, I had no other training today, so I was free to go outside for my afternoon break and leave my first footprint on Caribbean soil.

Going around Roatan, Honduras, I found a nice bar where I drank a good local beer, and from there, I went to a market to buy some stuff that I had forgotten to take from home.

That didn't take too much from my break, so I still rested before returning to duty.

Following the 'safety first' phrase that the officer used multiple times during the training, I had reserved the evening for studying the booklet for tomorrow's safety test. However, the safety booklet was small, and the night was long, so I decided to go to the crew bar first. With the lesson from the last party learned and the fresh alcohol policies training in mind, tonight I drank only one beer and two cans of Coca-Cola. I returned to the cabin before midnight and was ready to read the material for the test at least once, but as I opened the booklet, my eyes closed, and I fell asleep, hoping that what I remembered from the training would be enough.

## **November 8th**

This morning, the supervisor gave us cards to put on each chair that warn the guests that their stuff will be removed and brought to the lost and found section if they are left unattended for more than 40 minutes. "It's a hard time for us, but as you can see, some guests come before breakfast just to put magazines on ten chairs for the whole family, who show up around midday. The problem appears when the open deck gets full, and those coming after 10:30 am can't find a free sun chair. They see lots of them reserved and blame us," said my colleague from Indonesia.

So, as suggested, I set up my section, put cards on each chair, and went for the safety test. I thought I was done cheating on tests when I finished my formal education, but

here I was, striking again. To pass the test, I would need at least 80 % of the questions answered correctly, but even if I fail, it won't be the end of the world. I will just have to repeat the safety training with the crew members joining the ship on the next turnaround day and retake the test.

## **November 9th**

Today's day at sea wasn't a joke, and in all the running, I forgot the uniform I was supposed to pick up before 5 pm when the laundry was closing. Frequently checking the time isn't part of my nature, but this afternoon, I did that often and remembered I hadn't picked up my uniform only eight minutes before 5 pm. It was exactly 4:55 when I got there, but despite being on time, the door was closed. Fuming, I went to the laundry supervisor, and he called his guy, who was already on break. Feeling guilty, he came in less than a minute, gave me the uniform, and got a 'banana,' which is a lesson the crew members get from the supervisors when they do something wrong.

Happy that I wouldn't need to wear a sweated t-shirt tomorrow morning, I went to my cabin to leave the uniform. There, I also ate the chocolate I bought in Roatan, drank one liter of water, peed half of it, and returned to my section. Today is the last day of the cruise, so, in the evening, we finished one hour earlier than usual and took another break before starting with the guests' luggage that we were supposed to put in the trolleys on I-95 before the disembarkation in the morning. After the break, I first checked the board on I-95 and saw my name on the top of the list with crew members who passed the safety test.

Looking at the board proudly, I told myself that I wasn't only the most beautiful guy in the cruise industry but also the smartest one, and proceeded to the middle of the ship, where I met the rest of the housekeeping team. There, we received short training on how to lift the luggage without getting hurt, signed the attendance paper, and the stateroom attendants started bringing the luggage from the decks. It wasn't easy, but we were enough and even had time for jokes and funny pool stories from the cruise. In less than two hours, at 11 pm, we were done with the luggage operation and went straight to the crew mess, where we got some soda and pizza.

## **November 10th**

Today was my first full turnaround day, and I got to experience the pain in the rear that my colleagues had complained about. In short, on the (dis)embarkation day, the guests from the previous cruise leave the ship before 8 am, and from 11 am, another group embarks on our ship expecting to have a lifetime vacation. In those three hours, all the crew members must work as a team to reset the ship, accommodate almost 3000 new people, bring nearly the same number of suitcases to their rooms, and, as I was told, 20 trucks of supplies have to be delivered to the freezers and other storage rooms on the ship.

Earlier in the morning meeting, the supervisor gave us additional duties, and after I finished with my section, I went to help with the luggage that was coming on the ship. I did a few hours of luggage on the first day I arrived on the ship when I was bringing the trolleys from the entrance to the

elevators, but this time, I was sent to help inside the elevator. My partner was a guy from Guyana, and our job was to bring the trolleys to the upper decks and put the suitcases on the port or starboard side according to the tag on them. In the beginning, the trolleys were coming at a normal pace, and our job wasn't difficult until they faced some technical issues outside and stopped the operation for half an hour. Running out of time, once they fixed the problem, they started bringing the trolleys much faster, soon blocking the whole I-95. Clearing all that luggage in the shortest time possible was challenging, but we made it somehow, and every guest got their suitcase on time.

In the meantime, at about 3 pm, the last guest embarked on the ship, and just before the captain announced the guest's safety drill, the supervisor told me to return to the pool. When I got there, the open deck was full of guests, and designated crew members in yellow vests were directing them to their stations. We were only four pool attendants, but with a bit more running than usual, we cleaned the open deck and packed all the chairs by the glass on both sides of the top deck so the guests could enjoy the view during the sail away. At 4 pm, we finished with the luggage, and I went for a break that was supposed to be one hour, but because the crew mess was opening for dinner at 5 pm, my supervisor told me to return at 5:30. Back on duty, the ship was already sailing; the musicians were doing their job, and the guests seemed to be having a good time. In a few quick conversations with them, I concluded that this is another group of beautiful people who deserve a great cruise vacation experience, and I will do my best for that to happen.

## November 12th

More colleagues previously told me not to be surprised by any guest's action or any question they might ask. "You will get many believe it or not, kind of questions. Be ready," the colleague from Indonesia told me yesterday, and a male guest opened the season this morning. It was about 8:30 when I was putting towels in the bins, and he approached me silently, scared me to death, and asked me on which side of the ship the sun would be today so he would know where to reserve a chair. I gave him one more chance by asking what the question was, but he repeated himself, so I sent him to ask my supervisor, who was close.

Today I did my laundry for the first time since coming on the ship. Last night, I spoke with my roommate, and he said I could wash my personal clothes in the crew laundry myself, or I could buy a one-dollar ticket and bring them to another crew laundry, where an assigned crew member would wash them for me. "Instead of waiting for a free machine and going to the laundry ten times, I will buy the ticket and let someone wash them for me," was my logical thought. Bringing the clothes there was one of the easiest decisions I ever made, but the result was difficult to accept; my most expensive and beautiful t-shirt looked like an exhausted reproduction tool. When I asked the guy what had happened to the t-shirt, he told me he didn't know anything because some of his colleagues had done my laundry. Devastated by the outcome, I dropped a tear from my left eye and learned a lesson. The next time, I will learn how to do the laundry myself. And once at home, I will master the dishwasher and learn how to cook. That way, I will become

more independent and confident in my future marriage, so if my wife dumps me one day, I can survive on my own.

## **November 13th**

Today we visited the island of St. Thomas, and the ship was almost empty during the day. But that still didn't give me a chance for what people here call 'mamagayo' (the time a crew member spends in the cabin or hiding somewhere while on duty). So, after setting up my section, I joined the Indonesian guy in cleaning the glass. And for the time we were doing that, we finally had a chance to have a normal conversation. He talked proudly about his birthplace, Bali, but also told me about his previous working experience. "I was working on a fishing boat in Japan for three years," he said. "Extremely dangerous job. I almost died a few times." "How much were they paying?" I asked. "\$150," he said. "A day?" "Nooooooo. \$150 a month. In Indonesia, that was still good money. But, one day, I spoke with a relative who works for this cruise line, and he convinced me to apply for this job. And luckily, here I am. With the money I make now, I'm the richest person in my village," he said, laughing.

Feeling fresh after the relaxing morning, I went outside with my colleague from Haiti during the break. The atmosphere outside the ship was fantastic; the weather was perfect, a group of local musicians dressed in traditional clothes was singing, and a few stilt walkers were there for nice photos. Exploring around would always be my first choice, but we weren't in a walking mood today, so we went to Senor Frog's Bar and Grill across the street. And that was the craziest experience I have ever had when it comes to places like that.

At the entrance, they put shaped balloons around our heads, and going inside; we realized that the place was extreme. Everybody was singing and dancing; a drinking competition was going on, and a few drunk guests were simulating s\*x.

## **November 14th**

Having six ships docked in the port tells enough about St. Maarten, the place we visited today. The island is especially famous among the male crew members working on the ships because of the dozen strip clubs, where, the colleague from Mauritius would say, the crew is giving some rest to their hands. "By the way, do you know the difference between our job and a dead stripper? Our job still sucks!" he said and laughed uncontrollably. "It would be funny if it weren't tragic," I replied. The Mauritian colleague is an interesting person who came on the ship the same day with me, and since he found out about the strip clubs in St. Maarten, he hasn't stopped talking about them.

Among the other attractions in St. Maarten, there is the famous Maho Beach, where planes fly just above the people's heads before landing, and I'll surely visit it during one of our next stops.

This morning, I woke up earlier to call home because I wanted to go outside for the afternoon break. Calling in the evening would work better for me, but Macedonia is in a different time zone, and by the time I finish working in the evening, it's 3 am there. That's why I call home when I'm on afternoon break or as I did today, I call in the morning if I want to go outside. For my first visit to St. Maarten today, I

decided to go to the downtown public beach, where I enjoyed the beautiful weather, the warm sand and water, the cold beers, and the fantastic view of the six ships in the distance.

## **November 16th**

Today's morning meeting started with an unpleasant situation that my Ukrainian colleague created by arguing with the supervisor in the presence of everybody. The guy was wrong, but the supervisor didn't overreact and just called him aside after the meeting to tell him that next time, he should talk with him first before making drama in public and undermining his authority.

Today was the last day of the cruise, and everything was good until about 11 am when the open deck filled up with people, and along with the other duties, we started bringing spare chairs from the locker for the guests. When they come to us complaining that there isn't a free sun chair, we could tell them to keep searching for one, but we always go that extra mile. What motivates me are their happy faces after I give them a good service, but I also made \$20 in tips today.

In the evening, we had another smooth luggage operation, and again we had lots of fun, especially when the colleague from the Philippines threw a suitcase on the trolley, and something inside started vibrating. We could just be guessing what the object that was activated was. Still, the highlight tonight was my first sail in rough weather. And while the others, used to the rocking, had fun looking at how I walked, a girl in a medical uniform stopped and asked me

if everything was okay. I was honest enough to say, "I'm okay, thank you," but I could have been wiser and asked for seasickness pills.

Today I received my first salary, but I can't say much about something that isn't much at all. Still, I just started my ship career, and with hard work and the right attitude, I will soon get in a position to earn more.

## **November 17th**

Today was another turnaround day, and as a part of the rotation, it was my turn to help the guests in wheelchairs embark on the ship. So, after getting my section ready for the new group of guests, I went to the cruise terminal, brought six guests in wheelchairs on board the ship in four hours, and got a \$35 tip. Happy with the tip and even happier that I didn't drop anybody on the steep gangway, I went for a short one-hour break, slept fast, and woke up feeling fresh like Santa Claus in July.

Back in my section, just when I started collecting the soiled towels from the sun chairs, I recognized a woman I pushed in a wheelchair today walking around. Confused, I was ready to greet her, but she was faster and, with a big smile, asked me if I remembered her. "Of course, ma'am; I brought you in a wheelchair today on the ship," I said. "Thank you, darling. Now I feel much better," she said, with no f\*\*\*s given. I don't remember the day I was born, but I remember very well what happened a few hours ago. And for sure, this was the same woman that was so thankful that the company provides help for people with disabilities. Anyway, I

thanked God and left her to enjoy the 'miracle.' In conversation with the colleague from Indonesia later, I told him about the guest, and he wasn't surprised. "Nothing new," he said. "Instead of waiting in line, they come in a wheelchair or ask for one, which gives them access to the fast line, and in ten minutes, they are on the ship together with their family. Very disrespectful to the other passengers and us in charge of the wheelchairs, but fortunately, there aren't many of them," he said.

Opening the small safe on the first day I came on the ship, I found a calling card left by the guy living here before me. It was a nice gesture from him, but yesterday, I finished the 105 minutes left, and when I asked my roommate where I could buy another, he advised me to call home on WhatsApp when I go outside on the ports. "The internet on the ship is expensive, so whenever you have a chance, you can go outside, sit in one of the bars with a strong internet signal, order a \$1.50 Coca-Cola and use the Wi-Fi to call home, and check the news. In case we are at sea, or you can't go outside in some port, you can connect to the ship's internet, which is still cheaper than the calling card, and open pages that you can read offline while talking to your family," he said. His advice was gold, so I thanked him and connected to the internet for the first time this morning.

## **November 19th**

"The ratings from the previous period arrived last night. We are the best ship in the fleet, and the management will organize a crew appreciation lunch today in the crew mess," said the supervisor at the meeting this morning. The food for

the crew is quite good, but today, they added more food choices, decorated the healthy section with carved fruits and ice sculptures, and we had most of the officers serving us. As somebody who isn't a big fan of carved fruits and ice sculptures, I took just enough of what was new on today's menu and joined my Haitian colleague, who was with two girls. A few tables from us were a dozen of my countrymen, but starting today, I decided to pretend I don't see them when in the crew mess. They are great people, but their habit of talking about problems at work, even when eating, is something I can't listen to anymore. We work all day long, and that's enough. The Haitian colleague and the girls were okay with me joining them, but not long after that, I got the first shock, seeing the colleague putting sugar and salt in the milk. For the next 30 seconds, I was quiet trying to digest what I had just witnessed. "It's common in Haiti to drink milk with sugar and salt simultaneously. It's the best thing ever," he said when he saw how confused I was. "I have no doubt," I replied. And I didn't even recover from the milk when I saw a guy that seemed Mexican putting ice cream in bread. One of the girls also noticed it and told me, "It's like buying a car and, in the next few days, recognizing every single one on the road that's the same as yours. Those cars were around before, but you never paid attention to them. So, expect to discover all kinds of eating habits for the next few days in the crew mess," she said, and we had a good laugh.

## **November 20th**

Last night I was so tired that I forgot to clock out and went straight to my cabin to rest after I finished working. Still, it

was my first mistake of that kind during my three weeks on the ship, so the supervisor didn't create drama this morning. He just came to the meeting, told us what the Chief Housekeeper told him to tell us, and before the meeting ended, he asked me to sign a paper where I gave him the approval to fix the mistake I made without me being present in the office. "Zlatko, what happened? You didn't clock out last night, and according to the system, you worked 20 hours in the last 24. You started making money while you sleep," he said, laughing. "Carolina," I replied, and everybody burst into laughter. Carolina is St. Maarten's most famous strip club among the crew members, and if the next 'girl' I meet on the ship is like the one from Thailand today, for sure, I will visit Carolina soon.

This morning, we docked at the end of the Costa Maya, Mexico pier, but the long walk to the land was worth it. The part of Costa Maya, which is close to the dock, is a big shopping village where tourists can buy all kinds of stuff, from souvenirs to liqueurs and traditional clothes. There are also more groups of musicians taking care of the atmosphere, a large pool, bars, restaurants, a separate pool with dolphins, and a network of hanging bridges above the place with lots of exotic birds. I just started my cruise career, but I'm not sure I will see many other places as beautiful and vibrant as this one.

As expected, my section wasn't busy when I returned to duty, so I finally had more time to talk with the Thai 'girl' who works as a bar server on the open deck. We always joked; she seemed nice and also didn't look like somebody who would complain that I had the top bed. This afternoon

she was bored too, so I used the opportunity to start a conversation and asked her if we were friends.

"No doubt about that," she answered. "So, you know, friends go out from time to time to drink coffee. We can go for one whenever you have time," I said, unaware of the thunder that hit me a moment later. "Don't tell me stories. I know you want to fix me," she said. "You are right. But I don't think you are only a sexual object; you are special in many ways," I told her. "Yes, I'm special. I'm a shemale and have installed a huge \*\*\*\*. Do you want to see it?" she asked me, half-serious. Knowing that the probability of that was high and that I could easily get myself in big trouble, I told her I was late for my flight to Germany and left her confused. "If they confuse you, confuse them too," was the saying. Or something like that.

## **November 23rd**

Today was the last day of the cruise and the day when I got my first haircut on the ship. And it's the worst one I have ever had. Even worse than the ones I was getting from my father with an appropriate-sized bowl until I was five years old. My haircut was in the oven, and it started cooking in the morning when I complained to the Mauritian colleague about how big my hair was and how I expected some guest to report me at any moment. "I know how to cut hair, and I already started doing haircuts on the ship as a side job. I can cut yours during the afternoon break," he said, and I accepted without doubting his competence.

The situation was so bad that we didn't lose time, and one minute after the clock out, we were in front of his cabin. With hairstyles, there is no room for too much discussion. There is only one style among the male crew on the ship, and looking at their heads, it's easily noticeable that they all look like duplicates. Still, my colleague followed the protocol and asked me about my preferences. "Short on the sides and a little hair on the top. You know, ship style," I answered. Full of enthusiasm, he took a chair and the equipment from his cabin, put a small magnetic mirror on the wall, and started cutting my hair. He wasn't very skilled with the scissors, and his clipper sounded like a heavy-duty truck while pinching my hair, but because of his confidence, I thought he knew what he was doing. The last nail in the coffin was the strong light in the corridor that made me look perfect, and I didn't notice that the short hair on the left side was much lower than the short hair on the opposite side.

After the haircut, I took a shower, slept a bit, and returned to my section, convinced that I was the best-looking version of myself ever. My self-confidence grew even more, when two guests in a row told me I had an excellent haircut. I also got a few strange looks, but those didn't bother me because I knew not everybody understood what a good haircut was. After about 15 minutes, the bar supervisor, who was collecting empty glasses, saw me. "F\*\*\*\*\*g s\*\*t. That's the ugliest haircut I have ever seen," he said. I thought he was joking, but I still went to the toilet to check.

Looking in the mirror, I almost fainted and ran to the cabin to take my uniform cap that still couldn't cover the damage fully, so I had to wear it like a rapper would in his early pre-school days. Back on the open deck, I met the Mauritian

colleague and, with a calm voice, told him to remove the phone and other valuable stuff from his pockets because, in half an hour, I would come back and throw him in the water. However, my fury disappeared minutes after when I reminded myself that I would have forgotten a good haircut soon, compared with the worst haircut in my life that I will laugh about years after today. Still, when I met him later in the evening, I asked him why he told me he knew how to cut hair. He apologized, saying that he had just started doing haircuts, but the main reason was that he was under constant stress. "When I was at home, I used to smoke weed all the time, but I had to stop before coming on the ship and clean myself before the medical check-up. Now, after two and a half months without weed, I need it like never before. I want to resign and go home, but I need the money, so I have to get used to this way of living. I have two marijuana plants back home, and I called my mother this morning to remind her to water them. She sent me this picture; look at them, they are doing great," he said, and I went to another hairdresser to fix my hair before we started with the luggage operation. Recalling his shaky hands when he was explaining how beautiful and big his two plants were, and happy that he didn't cut my ear, I went to sleep. At the end of the day, I'm still positive, and I'm sure my first s\*x on the ship will be better than my first laundry and haircut.

## **November 24th**

It's my fourth turnaround day, and I started feeling like a b\*\*\*h because of the rotation system with the additional duties. As a part of that rotation, this time, I was sent with my Ukrainian colleague to sanitize the corridors and rooms

where we had guests with gastrointestinal illnesses on the previous cruise. Anyway, my feeling is one thing, but the supervisor's idea to rotate us makes a lot of sense, considering that for some of the additional duties, we get tips, and for some, we don't. Other special duties we have on turnaround days are guest luggage, wheelchair assistance, cleaning reported cabins infested with bed bugs, and helping the stateroom attendant in charge of cleaning the biggest suites.

Preparing for the big event tonight called 'start doing your sh\*t,' yesterday I bought detergent from the crew shop, and once I finished working for today, I went to the laundry to wash my personal clothes for the first time by myself. I only needed the right person to show me how to operate the machines. Today was exhausting for everybody, and the place was quiet. Among the few crew members was one of the colleagues from the Philippines, but of course, I went to the most beautiful girl there for my taste and asked her if she could tell me how the machines work. She was nice enough to spend five minutes of her life on me, and thanking her from the bottom of my heart, I started the washing machine, hoping nothing bad would happen to my clothes this time. After the girl left, my colleague said to me, "You made a good choice about whom to ask. I work on ships for ten years, and I'm telling you, I've seen marriages that started in the laundry, let alone relationships." he said to me, simulating s\*x sounds.

## **November 25th**

The last time in Nassau, I was too tired to go outside, and today, I decided to make up for that and went outside with my Haitian colleague for the afternoon break. Looking at how impressive the Atlantis resort was from the top of the ship, we didn't have doubts about what we should visit, so, once on break, we took a taxi and went there. The resort includes a hotel, casino, and everything else possible, and the only problem we had today was the short three-hour break, which wasn't enough to see everything. The resort is a vast place, and exploring around, it didn't take us too long to realize the place was exceptional, and everything was custom made—all the tall pillars, statues, furniture, ceilings, bridges, caves, pool with stingrays, tunnel with glass ceiling under the aquarium, waterfalls, and so on.

Every time I went to the crew bar during this one month on the ship, my supervisor was there, but I was leaving earlier and didn't know he was one of the people closing the place in the morning. Talking with my Haitian colleague on the way back to the ship, he told me that our supervisor drinks a lot and that he is lucky he still has his job. He is often late for the morning meetings, and it was obvious he drinks, but I didn't know his problem was that serious.

## **November 26th**

In the beginning, I was sh\*\*\*ing my pants, but now, I don't think there is a better place for me than a cruise ship, and I feel sorry I didn't find this opportunity earlier. Here, we live in a tiny area with people from 70 different nationalities,

learn about each other, visit beautiful places, some crew members \*\*\*\* each other, and in the worst cases, we make about four or five times more money than we would back home. But, despite all the advantages, working on a cruise ship isn't for everyone. And, unfortunately, I see young people who have never worked a day in their lives making huge mistakes by coming to 'work' on the ship only after seeing the photos their friends, who already work there, are posting on social media. The thing is, all those photos are from the most beautiful places around the world, and no crew member has ever posted a photo showing how they collect the soiled dishes in the restaurant or clean the toilets. Obviously without consulting with anybody, a countryman joined the ship on the last turnaround day to work as an Assistant Cook. And since then, he hasn't stopped talking about how difficult it is and how he expected to go out to every port for ten hours. The break for most of the crew is three hours, which isn't enough time for everything to be seen. Still, we visit every place more times during the season, and with good planning, everybody can visit every attraction in every port. But, despite telling him that, he decided to resign and go home as soon as possible. Thinking of his home sweet home, he was already there in his mind, but when another countryman told him he would need to pay for the plane ticket, he got upset. "I don't have a single dollar in my pocket. I even took a loan to come here," he said. My friendly advice for him was to stay for some time and see how it would go, but the only advice he accepted was from his colleague—violate some company policy and get a free ticket home the same day. Say No More.

Because my section is more on the back of the ship, I didn't notice he had gone to the main pool this morning, taken a

few towels, put on sunscreen, and laid down on a sun chair. Even the senior officers aren't allowed to do that, especially on a sea day when we struggle to accommodate all the guests. Whether he came up with that idea or whether it was his colleague's idea, that plan was good, but he was new on the ship, and nobody recognized him at first— neither the colleague who works in that section nor the security guard. When my countryman saw that his initial plan didn't work, he started jumping into the pool, which is strongly prohibited. Trying to explain the rules to him, the security guard was shocked to find out he was talking to a crew member. They immediately fired my countryman, and he is flying home tomorrow. He got the free ticket, but with that mindset, he won't get far in life.

## **November 28th**

After visiting the downtown public beach last time, this morning, I spoke with the colleagues from my shift, and we decided to go to one of the numerous strip clubs in St. Maarten for the afternoon break. With another four ships docked, the port was busy, with a crowded strip club, too, and only a few unoccupied tables. Finally in a position to fix a girl without being told she had installed pen\*s, we sat down, ordered beers, and after ten minutes, the girls came to our table. Fast forward, the girl I was with was gorgeous, but the experience wasn't even close to what I expected. It was my first time paying for this kind of service, and I don't think I will ever do that again. The feeling of being with a girl I have been chasing for three months can't be compared to this one. The saddest thing in the club was the 'Please Don't Buy Drinks For The Girls' poster on the wall. The girls

aren't allowed to drink while working, but obviously, they have difficulty doing their job sober, so they had to put that poster by the bar.

## **November 29th**

My salary may be small, but I work outside, breathe fresh air, and meet many guests from whom I learn. And there is a lot to learn from them. They are the ones who made it in life, and I always love to hear about their journey. But interested in knowing about the ship life, they are also more in a questioning and listening mood, so we often have uncomfortable situations when we both ask questions, and nobody wants to answer, but only to listen. The luxury of spending that much time in conversations with them would be impossible if I worked inside the ship.

On the Lido deck, as we call it, along with the pool, we have a restaurant and a bar, and the crew there is wonderful. Except for the 'girl' from Thailand, I cooperate well with the rest of them, and often, when they are busy, I help them collect dishes and glasses from my section, and they always ask me if I want something. Of course, I'm not allowed to do that, but sometimes, I sneak some soda, cookies, a sandwich, or all of them, as I did before I went for a break this afternoon.

Another forbidden thing I did today was watch the evening show in the theater. Talking with the guests, I found out that they enjoy the shows in the theater, and most say they are world-class. With that in mind, I decided to use the perfect timing, and after I finished working at 9 pm, I went to the

theater. The only problem is that regular crew members aren't allowed to be there, so I had to hide and watch from a dark corner on deck five. Today's entertainer was a magician who performed in a full house, and everybody was happy at the end of the show. I used to go to theaters and circuses a lot in the past, and I was always impressed by the courage of the people to perform in front of a big audience, let alone here on a rocking ship.

## **November 30th**

When I was applying for the job, the girl from the agency told me she had been working on the same cruise line before as a utility supervisor and that, with my education, I could apply for that position after six months on the ship. It's still early, but today I went to one of the utility supervisors to find out more about the job. My enthusiasm was high, but after speaking with the guy, I realized his job was one of the worst on the ship, and his salary didn't match the difficulties of the work. He told me that every time we visit a US port, there is massive pressure on the crew working in the food and beverage department, especially on him as the person responsible for the cleanliness of the places where the food is cooked and served.

"Tomorrow, we will be in Fort Lauderdale, and maybe the USPH (United States Public Health) will visit us. While we are in US waters for the Caribbean season, USPH will come on the ship once to inspect, mainly where we serve and prepare food and drinks. That means all the galleys, restaurants, pantries, and bars. For every food stain, the ship gets negative points. A not perfectly clean drain is another

negative point. Food on the wrong shelf is also a negative point. It takes only a few negative points for the ship to fail the inspection and to be docked for days of deep cleaning, which is a pure disaster for the company. And if that happens, I'll be fired first. The USPH could visit us tomorrow, but they will probably come on one of our last cruises in the US before heading to Europe. That means months of drama for all of us working in the food and beverage department. Trust me; you don't need this job. Maybe the girl from the agency spent one contract on a ship that wasn't going to the US and had internal inspections only, which is nothing compared to USPH. And if you avoid USPH in the first contract, you won't be that lucky in the next one for sure," said the guy.

Anyway, I have five more months before I become eligible to apply for another job position, and after everything I've heard and seen this month, I'm not sure I will. Yes, people make \$3000 to \$5000 monthly, but it looks like those amounts of money can't compensate for the pressure they face every day.

## **December 1st**

Today's turnaround day was everything but easy. It started with the regular s\*\*t, and after that, the supervisor sent me and my Mauritian colleague to take care of the bed bugs from the reported guest rooms. Not having a choice, we did our job correctly, but working with a steam machine while wearing a coverall and sweating like a pig for two hours wasn't the job I dreamed of as a kid. Listening to the colleague talking about his love for marijuana was a bonus.

Anyway, we killed the tribe of bed bugs successfully, and on the positive side, I learned about 'torching up,' 'getting stoned,' and other useful stuff related to the green plant.

Today we didn't leave the port on time because aside from the regular supplies, we also brought the decoration for the following holidays. And that was a lot of decoration consisting of Christmas trees, lights, Santa Clauses, and so on.

My sudden transformation into a serial killer didn't give me sleep tonight. Yes, they are bed bugs, but they didn't fall from the sky. They are somebody's sons, daughters, sisters, or mothers. Next time my supervisor sends me to kill bed bugs, I will tell him to \*\*\*\* off!

## **December 4th**

Today we docked in Costa Maya again, and this time, I borrowed a bicycle from the crew welfare and went to Playa Mahahual. As a huge biking lover, I'm fortunate to have a dozen bikes on the ship that I could use freely at any port, and I will do that often for sure. Playa Mahahual is a beautiful beach only 5 km from the pier, and the only issue there is the seaweed, which they have partially solved by putting a net around the swimming area. The place is full of bars and restaurants, vendors selling every kind of stuff, and people doing massages. The last ones were persistent in offering their services today, but my supervisor and the guests massage me every day for ten hours, so I didn't want to spend money on that. The last time we visited Costa Maya, a guest told me that Mexico is the place where the

first vanilla bean was born and that tasting vanilla there is a must. I don't think he, or whoever told him that has such a good memory, but I trusted him about the taste and bought a bottle of pure vanilla—at least, they said it was pure.

Returning to the ship, I was surprised to see the most beautiful girl from the spa with a suitcase in her hand. She is the girlfriend of a countryman, and we were at the same table a few days ago in the crew bar, but she didn't say anything about going home. Surprised by her sudden leaving, I asked her what she was doing with the suitcase, but she wasn't in a talking mood and told me I would find out later. Today was just a regular port day, and my first thought was that she had resigned from her contract or was going to transfer to another ship, but later on, I met her boyfriend in the crew mess, and he told me they fired her because of falsely reported GI. "She did that a few times. She would drink a lot in the crew bar and, in the morning, would report vomiting or diarrhea in the ship's hospital and get a day off. This time they gave her an alcohol test, and of course, she didn't pass. I knew this would happen sooner or later and begged her to stop drinking that much, but she didn't want to listen. She is a nice girl, and I'm so sorry for her," he said. I wasn't very close with the girl, but I got to know her from the pool, where she was coming from time to time to promote some beauty products, and I had the same impression.

Another day full of activities was behind, and thinking of whether I brought the bicycle to Playa Mahahual or whether the bicycle brought me there, I went to sleep.

## December 5th

Today, my Mauritian colleague convinced me to go to the gym for the first time in my life. "I had also never been to the gym before I came on the ship, but I miss smoking weed, and when there is nothing to do, I think about my plants. The evenings are the worst, and that's why I run on the treadmill every day till I fall asleep," he said on our way there. Whenever I pass on I-95 in the evening, I see crew members going to the gym fully equipped, and I always have difficulty understanding them. They work all day long, have no Sundays or holidays off, and still work out every day. "Don't they have enough gym working all day long???" I would always ask myself.

But judging others always hits back, and today I went myself. And what I was doing there was the same thing I'm doing at home—riding a bicycle. If my friends could see me on the static bike, they would get enough joking material for the next five years. While I was in the gym wondering what the \*\*\*\* I was doing there, next to me was a girl from Serbia on a mission. I didn't know her personally, but I had seen her on I-95 a few times wearing an assistant waitress's uniform, and she was always greeting me and everybody she passed by.

My colleague mentioned the girl when we entered the gym and told me she was doing the punching thing every day, imagining the boxing bag as someone who made her upset during the day. Knowing that and trying to be funny, I pointed to the boxing bag and asked her, "Who is that?" "Oh, that's the waiter I work with. He is such an as\*\*\*\*e. The maître d' is the same bull\*\*\*\*t, but I will take care of him

tomorrow. I work with so many idiots, but the more idiots, the better my physical health. The mental one is gone after the first contract on the ship. Working in a restaurant is traumatic, and this is my way to release the stress," she said.

Another person was also very upset tonight. Coming to the cabin, my roommate slammed the door and asked if I knew some good shampoo for hair loss that he could recommend to a guest in his section. "There is a toilet in one of the rooms where I spend half an hour every day cleaning hair that's all around. It's amazing that somebody could lose that much hair and still look like a lion," the roommate said, obviously upset.

## **December 6th**

Today's sea day was nothing different from the previous ones—a lot of running in the section, explaining my ship life to the curious guests, and listening to their stories. In addition to that, my 12 sleeping t-shirts, 12 pairs of socks, and 12 pairs of underpants were again for washing, and instead of getting more sleep after the exhausting day, I spent an additional three hours getting my laundry done. I made a mistake today, but next time, I will put my clothes for washing before I start working in the morning, return to put them in the dryer, and pick them up on the next break or when I finish working in the evening.

## December 7th

The atmosphere on the open deck this morning was great, and the guests were enjoying the beautiful weather, with a few hundred clouds protecting them from burning. By noon, the pool was full of people, but the weather changed an hour later, and heavy rain started pouring. Almost all the guests left the open deck at the speed of light, and only a few stayed, obviously enjoying the rain. With the wet shoes as the only concern, I could say that I enjoyed the shower too, but once I started collecting the wet towels, a physically beautiful couple approached and tried to make me feel guilty for the weather. They were different characters, and while the woman was pretty loud, the man seemed pretty ashamed. "This is unacceptable. We booked this cruise after viewing an ad on TV, and on the ad, the weather was gorgeous, not even cloudy. This isn't what we paid for with our hard-earned money. I will go now to the guest relations desk," she shouted. Staying silent in the rain for a few seconds, I reminded myself of my close and not-that-close family encouraging me to get a wife. "What if I get married to a woman like this?!?" was the only thought I had at that moment. After a few seconds of silence, I told them how sorry I was for the rain and expressed my hopes that the sun would come up again shortly because we are in the Caribbean, where rainfall is rare and usually lasts only minutes.

My past working experience is entirely different from what I encounter now. Previously I was working in a group of only a few people, and not only that they didn't have dramatic complaints, but in one situation, a colleague completely cut off his index finger on his left hand with an

electric saw and threw it to a dog because he was too busy to go to a hospital and get it sewed up. Now I face large groups of people, and there is every kind possible. I have a hard time understanding some of them, so I have to find books on human psychology and read them when possible. I may need more time, but doing my job here isn't enough.

## **December 8th**

Another turnaround day, and this time, after finishing my section, the supervisor sent me to help the stateroom attendant in charge of cleaning the biggest suites on the ship. "Thank you for coming to help. Today is my busiest day, and it's impossible to get everything done alone. I'm in charge of six suites—one more like this and four smaller ones. The thing with the turnaround day is that my guests pay lots of money, so those from the previous cruise are allowed to stay on the ship until 9 am, and the new guests in my section embark first at 11 am. So the time to get everything ready is very short," the Indian, 170ish tall, black-haired, brown-eyed, and half-bald guy told me. After he explained my duties, we started, and everything went smoothly until he told me the guests are paying around \$40 000 for a seven-day cruise in the biggest suites. Two people. And eventually, a few kids. The amount hit me like a train and caused me emotional damage, but soon after that, I stopped blaming myself. "I'm not poor. It's just the suites that are too expensive," was my thought.

Feeling better, I focused and helped the guy finish the job on time. The suites are enormous and consist of a few rooms, a few toilets, a jacuzzi, a living room with a piano,

and a broad balcony with another jacuzzi and sun chairs. I don't know if they are worth the money, but I know it's not my business and will never be. Happy with how I did my job; aside from the thank you, the guy also gave me a \$50 tip. "I will talk with the Chief Housekeeper. I need you here on every turnaround day," he said.

## **December 9th**

My section this morning was quiet, and it was time for a few chats with the guests. Because not everybody is in the mood to talk, when I want to start a conversation, I ask them if everything is okay and if they need something. And most of them are waiting for that opportunity to find out more about the 'mysterious' life of the ship's crew. Out of three duos I spoke with this morning; the highlight was an elderly couple with 92 cruises behind them, all with our company. "We have been in Nassau many times, so now we just try to enjoy the ship," they said and shared a few funny anecdotes from their cruises. They were interesting people, and I had many questions for them, but anyway, I just thanked them for their loyalty to our cruise line and let them enjoy the beautiful weather.

For the afternoon break, I went with the colleague from Nepal to Junkanoo Beach, which is public and only a ten-minute walking distance from the ship. Because of the vicinity and the number of ships docked, the place was overcrowded, but we still enjoyed the one-hour stay there. After the beach, we continued to a nearby restaurant with reasonable prices and excellent service.

Because I always wanted to know the part of the world he comes from, I asked him to tell me more about his country and traditions. Trying to refrain from going too far, among other things, he told me that Nepal is a country with 20 million people from many nationalities, celebrating the new year on nine different days throughout the year. Another interesting thing he said was that they have an astrologer who determines the length of the child's birth name and the first letter according to the date, time, and alignment of the stars. On my question about his previous work experiences, he said he worked in Dubai for five years as a pool boy. Salary—\$250 a month. "Once I found out that there was an agency in Dubai that sends people on cruise ships, I applied, and in two months, I was here," he said with a broad smile.

After the first haircut on the ship, which, at the same time, was the worst ever, yesterday I gathered more information, and this morning, I asked the cleaner from the crew area team, who cuts hair as a side job, if he could cut mine. "Of course. Let's do it at 9 pm, right after we finish working," he said, and I was perfectly fine with that. So, at 9 o'clock, I met him on the I-95, and we continued to the crew hair salon, which is a place that anyone could use on a first-come basis. But the crew hair salon is also where the verbal fights between the crew members in the evening are regular. We are more than 1000 crew members on the ship, which means a lot of hair to be cut, and there is only one person in the Spa who does haircuts for the guests and the crew when there is time for that. Price—ten times higher than the haircut done by a regular crew member. That's how a dozen crew members do haircuts as a side job in front of their cabins, inside the cabins, or under the crew staircases. And there are always at least two of them who want to provide a better

experience for their customers and do their haircut in the crew hair salon, on a comfortable chair, and with a big mirror in front of them. That wasn't an exception tonight, and when we entered the salon, the place had already been set up, and there was nobody inside. "The idiot didn't learn the lesson," the guy said with an angry voice. "There is a utility cleaner who also does haircuts as a side job, but even though he works until 10 pm, he comes here on his break at 7 pm to put his stuff all around so nobody else can use this place. I reported him a week ago, and he stopped doing that, but as you can see, he did the same again," the guy said, wrapping all the stuff in the cutting cape and putting everything outside in the corridor. He did my haircut in 20 minutes, and I don't have any idea what happened next, but I hope they only ended up exchanging a couple of curse words.

## **December 12th**

There is something special about St. Maarten, and I wouldn't miss going out there for anything. Today I went to one of the coffee shops across the downtown beach, and just sitting there gave me the same amount of pleasure as fixing the newest captain's girlfriend from the Casino would. Enjoying the beautiful weather and drinking cold beers, I used the time correctly and called my friends and family using the almost free Wi-Fi. The calls were a dozen, but despite the insistence, I didn't accept any video ones. It's snowing back home, so it would be very indecent to brag about being on one of the most beautiful islands in the world while the people I love are freezing.

Back on the ship, the guests in my section were happy, and I was also happy in the company of the girl who works as a supervisor in the Lido restaurant. Talking about stuff I wasn't interested in at that moment, we heard disco music coming from the ship next to us. That beautiful vessel has a similar itinerary to ours, and we had already met several times, so we knew the scenario—every time they leave the port, they organize a party by the pool where thousands of their guests dance and have fun. We both felt we were on the wrong ship, but hey, we had Latino night in the crew bar later. The girl is beautiful, and while she was talking, I imagined handcuffing myself to her and throwing the key in the water. Still, just before we took a shower together in the evening, her phone rang, and she apologized, saying she had to go.

Once the girl left, the inevitable happened. A guest came to ask me why we don't have that kind of sail-away parties on our ship. "With all due respect, Sir, 99% of our guests are above 70 years. You can see them covering their ears with their hands," I said. "Sounds reasonable," he agreed with me. "Then, can I come tonight to the bar for the crew and have some fun?" he rhetorically asked, laughing. "You have the most fabulous job in the world. Make sure you have as much fun as possible and always be on the edge of being kicked off the ship. You will create memories, but you better have some crazy ones," he said and woke me up a second time in only ten minutes.

## **December 13th**

Maybe they hated the electronic music from the other ship yesterday, but the guests seemed very happy dancing to the music from the 60s, 70s, and 80s tonight at the party we organized for them by the pool. For a good number of our guests, the pool party with appropriate for them music is the highlight of their cruise, so we always try to organize it at the highest level possible.

As always, the event started at 9 pm, and today it was my turn to be on standby for two hours. Standing in the portside corner, I didn't enjoy the music, but I must say, the entertainer's performance was extraordinary, and everybody was happy at the end of the party. I was especially impressed by the professionalism of the dancers, who, aside from doing their job perfectly well, finished the show with a jump into the pool, making the crowd of seniors go wild. Enjoying the view of the girls coming out of the pool would have matched my character, but instead, I felt angry with whoever came up with the scenario for the end of the show; I gave each dancer a towel and went to clock out.

## **December 14th**

On this cruise, there's a couple from the USA that's very easy to fall in love with. What they do the whole time is go around the ship and make friends with the crew and other guests. And I was lucky to meet them this morning. Everything they said was worth writing down, but somewhere in the conversation, the husband said something that I always repeat when talking with other people about

the USA. "The world thinks we aren't very intelligent because we don't know geography. But what's the purpose of filling our heads with every kind of information when we all have phones? If I need to know what the capital of Congo is, I will find out in a few seconds. We are more interested in making money, going on a cruise a few times a year, and enjoying life. Letting the world think we are stupid while on a cruise is enjoyable, too," he said, laughing. The guest quoted me on this. We could all agree that it's not all about the money, but once you take what you need from the store, you must pay. Of course, you can try to exchange your knowledge of geography for the stuff you need, but wait to see what will happen. And while some people tend to educate themselves on finances, others, full of encyclopedic knowledge, will forget everything once they face the cruel reality of life.

## **December 15th**

As the Indian stateroom attendant said on the last turnaround day, he spoke with the Chief Housekeeper, and my supervisor sent me again to help him in the suites. Life is beautiful, but he didn't seem to appreciate that this morning, and going to his section, I found him nervous. "It's 8:30, but nobody has left yet. Yes, they are allowed to stay until 9 am, but usually, somebody leaves their suite earlier, so until I finish that one, somebody else would leave, and so on," he said with a desperate voice. Anyway, his nervousness disappeared when the first couple who left gave him \$600 in tips, which is a small fortune in his country.

## December 17th

My supervisor values my hard work, and we developed a good relationship in this one and half months. We often talk when the open deck isn't busy, and in our conversation this morning, he opened up and told me about the problems in his private life, the verbal fights with his girlfriend on the ship, and the issues with his job. "My life here isn't easy. I think I was happier when I was in your shoes and was responsible only for my mistakes. Now, somebody from our team makes some foolishness, and the Chief Housekeeper comes after me. I make much more money now, but I'm not sure it's worth it. Still, that's the smaller headache I have. Back home, I have problems with my former wife, who got full custody of my two kids, and that's why I drink. I know I could be fired anytime, but I can't stop. Honestly, I'm not even sure I want to stop. My sober life is too ugly," he said.

Today was our fourth or fifth visit to Cozumel since I came on the ship, and it was time to leave my first footstep there. Opposite mine is a cabin with two girls from the Philippines, one of whom is my colleague's wife. She came on the ship recently, and for the time she is waiting to get a permanent couples cabin, she is staying in my colleague's. Knowing that the three of them always go outside together, last night, I asked my colleague if I could join them today, and he was okay with that. The girls had nothing against it too, and today we took a taxi to Paradise Beach, which is about 10 km from the pier.

We were charged a fee at the entrance, but the beach was excellent, and going there was the right thing. As part of the resort, there is a pool with a bar in the middle and another

bar in front of the beach, with two beautiful parrots as hosts. Not interested in the water or the inflatable toys inside, we took the best sun chairs in the shadow, ordered drinks, and that was enough for a beautiful and relaxing afternoon. I also exchanged a few words with the girl and found out that she's a bit aggressive, but I'm not perfect either, so maybe we will make a good couple.

## **December 19th**

Walking down the I-95 after I finished working for today, I met the girl from the Philippines, and we agreed to go to the crew bar. Life was good with me at that moment, and the only thing blocking the way to my happiness was my crumpled t-shirt. Compared to the women who are naturally beautiful and have tons of stuff they can additionally upgrade themselves with, the maximum a man can do is take a shower and put on some nice clothes. Knowing this, I took a shower and went to the laundry to iron my second most beautiful t-shirt. And when it comes to me, there's always a 'but.' With more than enough time that I had, instead of asking someone how the iron works, I started doing it myself, thinking that there aren't many things in the world easier than ironing a t-shirt. A moment later, my second most beautiful t-shirt was gone forever. So, I put on my third most beautiful t-shirt and went to the crew bar to stay sober and see if some chemistry between the girl and I would be born in the dark because, in the daylight, there was only biology between us, representing two different sexes.

What I realized by the end of the night is that not only are our cabins opposite of each other, but her character is the

opposite of mine—very loud, wild, and aggressive. But it's well known that opposites attract each other, and as the night passed, it became obvious that she was interested in me. Because I'm not a guy who enjoys struggling to be understood in a bar, I asked her, and we went to talk on the open deck, where we stayed until 2 am. Long night short, if I exclude the stories about her cats, I enjoyed the time with her tonight.

## **December 20th**

My duties in the section are clear, and I spend most of my time there collecting the soiled towels, filling the bins with clean ones, mopping the floor, and lining up the sun chairs. But I also provide other services to the guests, and here, I mainly think of serving them drinks. And I don't do that because of the 'Never say it's not my job' company policy, but because:

1. The guests are the ones paying my salary!
2. They are beautiful people who are difficult to say no to!
3. They order from me only after failing to see a bar server around and would always give a few dollars as a tip, aware that I have nothing to do with the bar department.

I never had a problem doing that when I had time, but yesterday, the bar server in charge of my section did a bad favor to himself, and starting today, he is employed full-time. He doesn't like the sun and his job too much, and when the section isn't too crowded, he spends a lot of time in the

bar pantry or his cabin. Yesterday, a woman asked me if I could bring her a Mojito, and after I got it, she asked for a replacement. Returning a drink isn't something that happens often, but when that's the case, I would usually go to the bar's pantry, drink some refreshing soda or water, and I would ask the first bartender who comes to make another drink for the guest.

While drinking a can of sprite yesterday, the bar server in charge of my section saw me and, with a raised voice, told me I shouldn't drink in the pantry and to go to the bar counter the next time I replace a drink. And that advice came from the guy who always drinks alcohol in the pantry while on duty and was supposed to serve the guest who returned the Mojito. Not wanting to destroy my day, after he finished lecturing me, I just said that I had made a mistake and went to the Assistant Bar Manager who was around. "I don't have a problem serving drinks to the guests from time to time, but I've started doing that too often, and I need you to open an account for me so I can get the service charge. I think it will be fair," I said, not knowing that everybody serving drinks should have an account. In the next 10 minutes, my account was up and running, and I started going to the guests and looking at their empty glasses while talking with them. Naturally, after the conversation, most of them asked if I could bring them another drink. So, I began making side money from the drinks, but my goal was to force the guy to start doing his job. And I didn't wait long for that. This morning, he discovered that I had created a bar account and started getting the service charge, so he spent the whole day in the section making sure I won't take any orders from him.

## December 22nd

There is a Christmas school break in the USA, and many guests used the opportunity to bring their families on this cruise, which will be special for them. Christmas is just around the corner, and with the ship beautifully decorated, the holiday spirit is present all around. No matter what, for the crew, this will be just another cruise and another holiday spent far from their families. And while most will accept the current situation knowing there are many opportunities to come and be celebrated with the people they love, a small number of crew members, including the Ukrainian colleague, resigned from their contracts and left the ship today.

My mother worries all the time about everything, let alone me being in the middle of the sea. That's why I call home every day to tell her I'm okay, even when I'm not. Seeing that, today, my roommate told me he had the same problem in the past. "My mother was like yours until my 19th birthday when, together with my friends, I went for a car tour around the Balkan countries. I didn't tell her I was going and didn't call her for those 14 days. Since then, she has been taking 12 medicines a day, but she is very cool now," he said, with mixed feelings. When he touched on that topic, I asked him what he does from time to time with the phone, going around the cabin 'filming.' Of course, I knew what he was doing, but he was rude, so I was too. "I trained my mother, but I have a huge problem with my wife. We worked together on ships in the past, but two years ago, she injured her back while carrying the heavy trays in the restaurant, and that ended her ship career. So, I've been alone here on the ship for the last three contracts, but my

freedom is only on paper. Now I have to buy an unlimited internet package every month and be online 24/7. She video calls me anytime I'm off duty, and I have to answer the call the same second and show her around the cabin," he said. "She is jealous because she thinks I'm cheating on her. And not that she is wrong. The only problem is that I have to cheat on her while on duty, which isn't easy. I don't say that's okay, but, at the same time, I'm the only one providing for the family, and she just goes to the ATM twice a month to withdraw the money I send. Before she injured her back, she caught me with another girl, and we almost divorced. I tried to explain to her nicely that I worked very hard and needed to have some fun as well, but she was very upset, and from that moment, she has been like this," he said, annoyed why his wife didn't like him cheating on her.

## **December 25th**

With a midnight mass in the theater, last night we started the Christmas celebration. Today, the atmosphere was great; we organized many events, the crew members wore Santa hats, and Christmas songs were played around the ship. There was also a special menu in the restaurants, and because we have kids on the ship, we had Santa giving them presents by the stunning Christmas tree in the ship's atrium. The open deck was also busy, but I still didn't have too much work because the guests were taking fewer towels than regular, plus I saw a lot of them cleaning after themselves. Their empathy for the crew was obvious, and they again proved how great people they were. The Christmas spirit is also present in the crew areas, where many crew members have decorated their cabin doors, Christmas movies are played in

the crew training room, many food options from the guests' restaurants were added to the crew mess, and the management organized a bingo for the crew, in which of course, I was far from getting something.

At 1 pm, when the open deck was full of people, I saw a guy passing by fast, dressed in long sleeves and pants, with sunglasses and a backpack. Considering the weather conditions, that combination didn't seem usual, so I went to the nearest public phone and called the security office. The phone was busy for two minutes, and when I finally got the security officer on call, he just asked me for my name and the location, thanked me, and told me they would check for the guy.

After all the activities, together with the countrymen, we finished the day in the crew bar, which was too small to accommodate everybody, so we were like canned sardines there.

## **December 26th**

Leaving the cabin this morning, I met the girl from the Philippines, and we decided to go outside in St. Maarten together. It looked like a promising day ahead, and I was excited the whole morning, but that excitement started fading away when, once on break, I had to wait more than half an hour for her to get ready. My idea for today was to go for a short walk down the promenade and sit somewhere for lunch, but she insisted we go to the downtown public beach.

I was okay with that, but on our way there, she spotted two regular cats enjoying their life. And that was until we came, and for the next 15 minutes, she didn't stop asking them questions about everyday life. I know others who love cats, but this was my first time seeing somebody talk with them like humans. We had already lost a lot of time, and I was about to forget that, but, as they say in the infomercials, "and that's not all." Talking with the unfortunate cats wasn't enough for her, and just before we got to the beach, she entered a fancy pet shop where she spent another 20 minutes buying toys for her cats back home. "To surprise them," she said. Seeing that we were running out of time, we went to the closest bar, where I almost drowned from the beer in a rush to finish faster, so we could return to the ship on time.

My other plan was to invite her tonight somewhere around the ship and have a relaxing evening, but our afternoon together was relaxing enough, so in the evening, I decided to cut my hair, which had again grown big. In addition to that, I'm not very skilled in maintaining my hairstyle, and when I looked in the mirror last period, I wished I was bald. Still, seeing my head shaved could destroy the vacation of many of my guests, so that isn't an option while I'm on the ship. That's why, tonight, I went to the guy from the crew area housekeeping team who did a great job last time and ended the day with another good haircut.

## **December 28th**

Today was the last day of the cruise, and this evening was my turn to fold towels for tomorrow's turnaround day instead of lifting heavy suitcases full of necessary and

unnecessary stuff, such as books that had been collecting dust for years, linen brought from home and even stolen from the ship, weird clothes, heavy rain 'just in case' gear, sofa beds, bathtubs, and other things guests bring along with them. Folding towels is a thing I enjoy doing because it's relaxing, but this time, I folded them in a rush and asked the girl from the Philippines to come with me to the crew bar.

The last day of the cruise is the most difficult one after the turnaround day, so on these days, it's rare to see other people in the crew bar than my roommate, the entertainment staff, and the crew going home the following morning. At the time we went there, it was still early, and with all the signing-off crew members waiting for their luggage to be checked by the security and the entertainment staff finishing their last duties for the cruise, the bar was still empty.

So, the place was ours, and we had a wonderful time dancing like nobody was watching. And everything was great until she took out her phone, smiled, hugged it for twenty seconds, and showed me a picture of her 'babies,' as she called her cats. Despite my love for the animals, I was already fed up with her cats, but I stayed strong because of my higher goals tonight. After about an hour, we couldn't wait any longer and went to her cabin to play the 'hide the sausage' game. She was doing a great job, and I had bliss, but I didn't expect her to be a big leather whip fan. Despite the pain, I could have survived the whipping, but she started making cat sounds at one point, and that was it. Half-naked, I just took my clothes and ran to my cabin opposite hers, which was still enough to provide fun for the hairdresser doing a side job in the same corridor and his customers.

## December 29th

Today's turnaround day marked the start of the New Year's cruise, which is just another one for the crew members who are expected to deliver a once-in-a-lifetime holiday vacation for the beautiful people that arrived on the ship today.

As always, this morning, the supervisor gave us the instructions, but when he started assigning us the additional tasks for the day, my colleague from India interrupted him, requesting to be a helper in the suites today. And that was understandable, considering that the stateroom attendant gives \$50 to his helper on the turnaround day. But all my colleagues had already rotated in the suites, and the stateroom attendant wants only me there, so the supervisor's answer was negative. There are no rotations and rules when it comes to the quality of work and the high-paying guests' satisfaction. So, after I finished my section in the morning, I went to the suites and found that half of the guests were back-to-back, which made our life easier today. We just changed the linen in half the suites and did the regular cleaning in the rest, where he changed the linen yesterday.

Today, the captain's wife embarked on the ship too. Talking with the colleague from Mauritius who is informed about everything, he told me that the captain divorced his previous wife after meeting this one last year while she was working as a Spa manager on the same ship. "I don't know what his wife thinks, but in my opinion, the captain is a nice, cool dude. And they look like a lovely couple despite their age difference of more than 20 years. He is very active in hanging out with the female crew, but it looks like the male crew will get a chance these few days. It must have been

challenging for him to get to the captain position, but now he is reaping the fruits. Twenty years younger wife comes on the ship for a seven-day cruise, and he spends the rest of the time with the most beautiful girls here. And there isn't much data about girls rejecting the captain. I just wish him to be strong this week, to keep his positive attitude, and the time will fly," my colleague said, and although I disagreed with the lovely couple part, we had a good laugh. Before, I thought that it wasn't my business what the captain was doing with his life, but recently, I lost all respect for him when I found out that the girl with dental braces, who I liked, was often leaving his apartment after midnight and realized that the old fart was eating from my plate.

## **December 30th**

What a stressful night this was, just hours before the new year celebration. After finishing my shift at 9 pm, I went straight to the theater to watch the show, and an hour later, I regretted that decision. The dancers' performance was stunning; the guests were happy, and I saw again why many are mentioning the entertainment program as a highlight of their cruise. The show was almost over, and I was about to leave before the guests when the night housekeeping supervisor came to me, scared me in the dark corner where I thought I was invisible, and asked me if I could help him with a wheelchair because he was short of one guy at that moment. Say No More.

The theater is on three decks. There is the stage with seats on deck three, and there are seats on decks four and five, where we also have marked spots for wheelchairs. And next

to the stage is a handicapped elevator for those who want to watch the performances from the first row. As the night shift supervisor told me, today, we had three people in wheelchairs on deck three, and they needed assistance to get on deck five. So, after the show was over, and after the two colleagues went one by one, it was my turn, so I brought the woman inside the small elevator and pressed deck five. That was the simplest task in my life, but the next moment, we got stuck between decks three and four.

Getting stuck in the elevator was on my 'do it while you are able' list, but the desired scenario was different from this one. What was supposed to be an easy job turned into a nightmare. The woman started panicking, and I spent the next 45 minutes trying to calm her down. This cruise line is considered one of the most luxurious in the business, and this event from the shoreside management will surely be taken as the end of the world. Aware of that, only a minute after calling the guest relations desk, many officers came to see what was happening, together with the electricians, who jumped straight to fixing the problem.

Despite telling the guest that they had sent the best people and we would be out any moment soon, she didn't stop screaming, saying that she would die there. And considering that she was at least 80 years old, the chances of doing that in my hands were high. She also told me she has over 60 cruises, and I wasn't surprised when, among the first things, she said she wanted a free cruise because of the inconvenience. The woman obviously knew the business.

After precisely 45 minutes, they finally opened the door, and when I saw the officers' faces, I knew she was staying with

us for the next cruise too. Maybe in the captain's apartment. A few of the officers apologized to me because of the stress, but the most important thing is that we are both good, she physically and me mentally.

## **December 31st**

This morning I woke up feeling better after the stress I went through last night. Yes, I was stuck in the elevator with the woman, but we had a happy ending, and fortunately, she will get in another year in a few hours instead of going to a better place.

Warming up for the new year's celebration, for the afternoon break, I went with the countrymen to the No Name Bar and Grill in Cozumel, which was founded by a former cruise ship employee and serves as an unofficial crew bar outside the ship. The music they play depends on where the guests are coming from, so today, we mainly enjoyed Balkan music while we were eating the tasty food ordered from the menu, which they also have adjusted to the ship's crew, and all the options there are named by job positions on the ships. So, their salads are named 'Safety officer,' 'Sloth technician,' and 'Gift shop manager.' 'The purser,' 'The electrician,' and 'The dancer' are the names of the burgers. The tacos are named '1st officer,' '2nd officer,' '3rd officer,' and so on. 'The Dancer,' a chicken burger, caught my eye, and I asked the waiter to bring one dancer for me, hoping that somehow the one I liked on the ship would come from the kitchen. Anyway, we enjoyed the beers more, got wrecked, and returned fifteen minutes late for duty. Not good, considering

the number of things I had to do until the start of the celebration.

Happy that we successfully found our home away from home and that the security at the entrance didn't send us for an alcohol test, I took a cold shower and showed up for duty wearing my sunglasses that were partially masking my condition. The first person I met on the open deck was my supervisor, and he wasn't happy seeing me in that condition, but as a heavy drinker himself, he didn't say anything.

The weather forecast for the evening was good, which meant the celebration would be on the open deck. Because it's our area, together with my colleagues, we did all the preparations, not only by the main pool, which is where the guests were celebrating but also on the top deck at the front of the ship, where the exhausted people on the ship called crew members were trying to do the same. Of course, I focused on the top deck, which was closed to the guests, and I was far from their eyes. Because there was a lot to be done, tonight, I finished working at 9:30, and after a quick nap and another cold shower, I joined the rest of the crew in the celebration.

There, everybody was already drunk; the DJ was earning every cent of his salary; the food was good, and the drinks were sliding. If my liver could speak tonight, it would probably have said, "\*\*\*\* off." But, for me, it was more important what another organ would say if not appropriately treated, and after the firework, I stuck to the girl from the Philippines and didn't move until we went to her cabin to finish what we started a few days ago.

reason for the guys to have fun at my expense. Still better than an alcohol test on the ship and a free ticket home. Life was beautiful at that moment, and the only thing that was making me uncomfortable were the few strange looks from the people around, so, to prevent a situation where some concerned person would call the police, I spent the rest of the time there with my t-shirt on.

Back on the ship, my section was busy, and after another few hundred 'Happy new year' and 'Thank you! Same to you!' I took a shower and fell asleep when my oval-shaped head touched the pillow.

### **January 3rd**

Today was the third day and the third chance for a good start to the new year, so after I clocked out in the evening, I visited the gym for the second time in my life. But opening the door, I realized, once again, that I had nothing to do with the place. The weights looked heavy, the treadmill and the stair climber were endless, and the leg press looked dangerous, let alone the bench press. The static bike was occupied, and thinking of what I could do; I recalled people I had previously seen doing a plank and decided to try it myself. "That's easy," I thought. Once in a plank position, a girl from India did the same in front of me. "Let me show you how to do a proper plank," she said, standing in a plank position, with her b\*\*bs smiling at me from her v-neck t-shirt. Confused, I thanked God for the view and stared at them, unable to pay attention to what she was saying. Although every muscle of my body was hurting, I couldn't afford to show weakness and somehow survived those two

and a half to three minutes. "Nice to meet you. My name is Nitya. I'm here every day, and you can ask me about any exercise," she said. At that moment, the only exercise I had in mind was the most popular one, but I didn't know the girl and was afraid that she could report me for sexual harassment, so I only thanked her for her help.

Returning to my cabin, I met the friend from India who works as a bartender in the bar behind my section, and he told me that the girl is a frequent visitor of the officers' cabins. "In today's India, girls are more liberal than they were in the past when India was, by far, the most conservative country in the world," he said, with a facial expression that told me he was happy that times had changed and was, most probably, also benefiting from that.

\*Added by the author before the publishing: Recently, I read a book by a countryman who started a business in India in 2015 that connects hotels with unmarried couples. Creating that kind of business in conservative India was craziness, and he faced many problems doing that when there wasn't a single hotel that would allow a couple to stay there without showing their marriage certificate. Despite the initial resistance from society, his business grew, and more others of that kind were established in the following years.

## **January 6th**

After the morning routine, this afternoon, I went to Cabbage Beach, Nassau, with the countryman who works in the IT department. Following the recovery plan, whose primary purpose is to fix the damage we did to ourselves during the

new year's celebration, we borrowed bicycles from the crew welfare and enjoyed the ride to another place from my bucket list. The beach was just what I was looking for; not many people around, white and soft sand, and turquoise water. But, like everywhere in the Caribbean, the locals were passing by every few minutes trying to rent us an umbrella and sun chairs and sell us all kinds of stuff. Talking with one of them, he said that with four to five ships visiting Nassau every day, the relatively small island's population should be at least middle class, but, unfortunately, all the money from tourism goes into a few pockets. It was clear that what he told us wasn't a sales pitch, and feeling sad to see him trying to make a living by begging people; we bought a ten dollars rum bottle each.

Back on the ship, we were surprised in the same way that road services in my country are surprised by the snow in the winter. Trying to pass the security scan, the officer told us that we couldn't bring alcohol from outside onto the ship and told us to leave the bottles there. 'Company policy,' he said. There was nothing we could do about it, and he put stickers on the bottles with our names and told us we would get them at the end of our contracts when leaving the ship. I think the security team will have fun tonight with our rum, but anyway, just out of curiosity, I set a reminder for my sign-off day.

## **January 8th**

Today we were docked in St. Thomas, and it was time for another safety drill for the crew in the morning. It would have been great if they were held on sea days so we could

rest a bit, but that's impossible, and the crew drills are always in the most attractive ports we visit when there aren't many guests around the ship. As usual, when they sounded the emergency signal at 10:15, we went to our muster stations, and after they called our names and sounded the 'abandon ship' signal, we proceeded to the lifeboats. For the afternoon break, the older colleague from the Philippines and I visited one of the most beautiful beaches in St. Thomas and, overall, in the Caribbean-Magens Bay. I could say it's the best beach I have been to so far, but the colleague wasn't too amazed and didn't get in the water at all.

"There are better beaches where I live," he said. He is an okay guy married to a South African girl who takes care of their baby. Talking about his experience, he said, "It's challenging to be married to somebody from another country, but we love each other, and I never regret marrying her. I plan to complete three more contracts on the ships and bring her and my son to the Philippines. My country is beautiful, the weather is nice, and life isn't expensive. In some restaurants, you can eat three times a day for \$5. And if everything goes well, I will open a restaurant myself. Maybe next to my house, which is only 20 meters from the beach," he said.

## **January 10th**

More times during this cruise, I remembered the guest I got stuck with in the handicapped elevator. A day after the incident, my supervisor told me that the woman and her husband got a free cruise because of the inconvenience and that they would be with us on this cruise too, but not seen

her at all in these ten days; I thought that my supervisor was guessing. But, while collecting soiled towels this afternoon, I saw the colleague from India on the lower deck getting ready the jacuzzi's chair lift for the same woman. "She goes for another one," I thought, seeing the guy struggling to get her into the water.

A cruise ship is an excellent place for work, but there is a catch; you could easily lose your job if you aren't careful. And that happened to a security officer today. The physically small colleague from Indonesia had a job interview for a security guard position in the evening, and half an hour later, he returned to his section sad and happy at the same time. "When the idiot asked if I had previous experience in the job, I told him I worked as a nightclub security guard in my country. On that, he laughed and asked if that was some nightclub for midgets and continued laughing. That made me so upset that I went straight to the HR manager, told her what had happened, and she called him to the office. This stupid mistake was one of the many he made in this contract, so after five minutes inside, he was fired. Now he can laugh as much as he wants," my colleague said.

The good thing about the ship is that the crew is very well protected, and every kind of discrimination results in immediate dismissal.

## **January 12th**

This morning, a stateroom attendant who cleans cabins on deck seven fell sick, and knowing my experience in cleaning

suites, the Chief Housekeeper asked me if I could replace him. That job is by far the worst on the ship, and at first, I wanted to tell him to keep looking, but I agreed and went to the section. Because today was a turnaround day, my job was to bring the 15 rooms into their primary state before the new guests embarked, and saying that I was struggling would be an understatement. I was throwing out the garbage, changing the linen, dusting, vacuuming the rooms, and cleaning the balconies and the bathrooms. Still, I got the rooms ready on time, went for a one-hour break, and once I returned to the section, I started delivering the luggage to the guests.

When I was done with that, I went from room to room to meet the guests and introduce myself. They all seemed like nice and positive people, but during the break, my roommate told me to be careful because there are always one or two rooms with guests that are pure trouble. "And most importantly, don't take any tips today. Some of the guests will usually give you a few dollars on the first day, expecting that you will be their slave for the rest of the cruise," was his final advice. The rest of the day was also busy and fun. A guest didn't know how to run the shower's hot water; a couple told me their life story; a young guest was interested in getting a job on the ship and last but not least, a guest told me the remote control in her room was missing, and I had to find her another one. I paid a lot of attention in the morning to ensure everything was in place, but the probability of something getting missing or forgotten in that rush was still big.

## January 13th

As if yesterday's long turnaround day wasn't enough, after clocking out, I went with a few countrymen to the crew bar and stayed there until 1 am. Initially, I wanted to go before midnight, but my roommate said, "I know you're stepping up to a stateroom attendant and want to do it right, but you aren't going to do a heart surgery; you are going to clean toilets tomorrow." That was a very reasonable argument, so I stayed and drank one more beer and then two more. Needless to say, my roommate and I were late for duty in the morning, and I showed up in my section looking like a zombie.

Leaning against the wall while waiting for the guests to go for breakfast so I could clean their rooms, I fell asleep, but luckily, the colleague from the next section saw me and woke me up. The situation wasn't ideal, so I went to the crew mess for more coffee and then to a toilet, where I washed my face and, looking into the mirror, spoke to myself with a raised voice. I may have gotten a better result with a hydrant and a hose, but I decided to wait an hour to see how I would feel. The only good thing this morning was that the guests in my section are mostly older and had seen everything, so they weren't surprised by my look. On the contrary, they seemed glad to see imperfection on a ship where everything is so well organized that they don't feel they naturally belong there.

In the evening, I got a complaint from the same guest who asked for a remote control yesterday, and this time, she told me that there were no amenities in her bathroom. I had been in that room three times since yesterday, and the possibility

of me forgetting to put the extras was zero. Listening to the woman, I understood what my roommate was talking about when he said there's always at least one room that gives a headache.

## **January 14th**

Another day, and another complaint from the same room. There were so many things to do on the ship, but again, she chose to complain, saying that her magazine was missing from the bathroom. I told her I only throw away stuff in the garbage bin, but she insisted that her magazine was on the shelf. On the first day, I was suspicious; yesterday, I was sure of the greatest part; but now, her intention was too obvious. Telling her to stop acting crazy wasn't an option, so I called the Assistant Chief Housekeeper in charge of my deck and asked him what to do with the guest. "I know those kinds very well. But they are always right, and it doesn't matter what; they must be happy, especially in this company. Please go to the main galley and bring them a cheesecake as an apology," he said. With faith that she would enjoy the cake and, from now on, would concentrate more on having fun instead of making up complaints, I brought the cake to her cabin. On that, she told me this cruise line was the best and that she would keep cruising with us. She pays thousands of dollars to come on the ship, leaves the cabin only to eat, and spends the rest of the time making up complaints to get a \$50 cheesecake. They should introduce a Nobel prize in logic and give it to her.

The only issue I had this morning, other than the woman, was my empty candy box, and my idea was to go out this

afternoon in Cozumel and refill it. But, tired of running in the section and from the very special guest, I decided to rest, and I asked the countryman from IT with whom I was supposed to go outside to buy my favorite candies for me.

As instructed by the Assistant Chief Housekeeper, in the evening, I decorated the room of a beautiful couple celebrating their anniversary, clocked out, and went to my countryman's cabin to take the candies, unaware they would be gone in the next few hours. Thanking him for the favor, I gave him the money and some sweets, and returning to my cabin; I met a neighbor who was shocked by the number of candies I was bringing in the clear plastic bag. Because he looked like he hadn't tasted anything sweet for years, I told him to wait for me, and after leaving the stuff in my cabin, I opened a bag with mixed chocolates. The next moment, my colleague from India, who stays a few cabins down the corridor, passed by and asked me what was happening. "I just became a father, bro. It's a boy," I said and regretted it a few minutes later. The thing escalated fast. Other crew members were stopping to congratulate me, and it became too late to tell them I was joking. At least five people were around at all times, the atmosphere was great, and since I didn't have a choice, I opened my bottle of vodka and the roommate's beers that were in the fridge.

Surprised by how cheap the complaining guest sold herself today and hoping she would change her mind about cruising with us again, I went to sleep.

## January 15th

This morning I was shocked when the couple who celebrated their anniversary last night gave me a 100-dollar tip, happy with how I decorated their room. I wished them many more anniversaries and told them I get a salary for my job, but they insisted, so I took the money. It's my biggest tip so far, and I plan to use it to buy a rubber doll if I don't find a girlfriend soon.

I was thinking about the color of the doll when I received a call from the Assistant Chief Housekeeper, who told me to go to the meeting point. "We have just found out that on board the ship, we have people from some online magazine who rank cruise lines. We don't know how many they are, how they look, or in which room they are staying," he said. Anyway, we didn't get any additional instructions and were just told to keep being professional. Still, this was my first time in a situation like this, so I started suspecting every guest in my section, especially the woman complaining since the beginning of the cruise. By the way, she didn't complain today, and it looks like the cake yesterday bought me some peace.

Tonight was a formal night, so the stateroom attendant from the neighbor section made animal towels for me as well, and I put one in each room in the evening. As a thank you, I cleaned two of his rooms, so he got more time to fold the towels, which wasn't easy to be done for 30 rooms.

## January 16th

There were many positive reactions about the towel animals from the last night, but I felt uncomfortable getting compliments for something I didn't do. I was happy to see them happy, but what I was waiting for was the reaction from the guest complaining during the first three days. I hoped I would finally see a smile on her face, but not only did she not react to the towel, but she struck again. On her way to breakfast with her husband, she stopped and told me a sound coming from her bathroom the entire night prevented them from sleeping. When I asked her whether they called the guest relations desk to report the sound, she said they waited for me because they don't trust anybody else on the ship. At that moment, I looked at them with the eyes of a parent and reported the problem that I wasn't sure was real.

Returning from the afternoon break, I discovered she had created another drama. The stateroom attendant who was in charge of my rooms this afternoon told me that the maintenance guy went to check for the noise when I was on break. "I knocked ten times, and when nobody answered, I opened the door for the maintenance guy. Sitting on the sofa, your favorite guest started screaming and blaming us for disturbing her. A minute later, she came out and, in Budha style, told us not to worry because the noise wasn't there anymore," he said. What happened wasn't my fault, but I still apologized to the colleague for the inconvenience and checked again the number of days left from this cruise.

The cherry on top today was an extremely upset guest dressed in short pants, which came to me in the evening and

said he wasn't allowed to enter the main dining room and that our cruise line was BS! In his opinion, he was right, but he was also hungry, so he put on his pants and returned to the dining room.

## **January 17th**

My health was okay until a guest told me today that there was no laundry pricing list in her room and asked for one. I knew exactly where they were in the locker, but I didn't know that the prices for washing and ironing clothes were to the sky. They were so pumped that, at first, I thought I was in a time machine, and what I had in hand was a laundry pricing list from the future when the dollar would be the same as a dime's today. Shocked, I handed the paper to the woman, and she noticed I wasn't the same person who said to her, "Yes, ma'am, your laundry pricing list is on the way," only a minute earlier. "Are you okay?" she asked. Hoping she would be fine after seeing the prices, I thanked her for the care and continued with my life, which won't be the same after realizing that my mother would need a full day of hard work in the factory where she works just to get a pair of pants washed and ironed on the ship. Next time I call, I will tell her how lucky she is for never being a guest on a cruise ship.

Among the 30 guests in my section, there is an elderly couple, and while talking with them this morning, I realized they had no opportunity to enjoy the ship because of the husband's condition, who is in a wheelchair. The wife, who is in her late 60s, isn't in good health either and obviously couldn't push him around. So, after our conversation, I

decided to show them the ship during my three hours afternoon break. They were convincing me to use my break time to rest, but I didn't give up, and soon as I clocked out returned to their room. We started the tour with a visit to the theater, whose doors were closed because of a dancers' rehearsal, but I spoke with the guy who works as dancers' coordinator, and he let us stay and watch them rehearse. He even offered to pick the guests up for tonight's show, making them cry.

After the theater, we went to the other public areas and ended the tour on the open deck by the pool, where I bought them drinks. I also arranged for them to see the crew areas on the ship, and after finishing the drinks, I went to rest before returning to the section, and the Chief Housekeeper sent a guy to assist them with the crew area tour, which, as they said, was their big desire.

As he promised, the dancers' coordinator picked up the guests half an hour before the evening show, making them even happier. My action today was fulfilling my mission on earth, and tonight I went to bed with the best feeling possible. Nothing gives me more satisfaction and joy than helping others. I always do that and will continue for the rest of my life.

## **January 18th**

What my supervisor was doing to himself was difficult to watch, but today he touched the bottom. On this cruise, we have the Fleet Chief Housekeeper on the ship, and last night

the Assistant Chief Housekeeper told us that first thing today, we must go to the theater for a department meeting.

So, this morning, the pool team went to the theater with the crew area and public area cleaners, stateroom attendants, night shift cleaners, and almost all the managers. It was still early, and although we were over 200 people, the atmosphere in the theater was funeral-like, and the Fleet Chief Housekeeper seemed to be the only person in the room in full power at that moment. Just before she started talking, ten minutes late and still not recovered from the party last night, my supervisor broke the silence by slamming the heavy theater entrance door. He's a good guy, has more knowledge than the Chief Housekeeper, and everybody loves him. But with today's behavior, I think he lost any opportunity for a promotion to Assistant Chief Housekeeper in the near future. There was no new information at the meeting, which took 40 minutes of my life, but after hearing the word 'service,' a few times in the first few minutes, I started counting and counted that word 52 times in the 30-minute speech without hearing 'salary increase' even once.

From the theater, I went straight to the section where the couple I had surprised yesterday was waiting for me in the corridor. They thanked me once again for what I did for them and gave me a long hug. They also tried to give me an envelope, but what I did had nothing to do with money, so I refused to take it.

Today was the last day of the cruise, and along with the many thank-yous from the guests, I also got \$320 in tips. That's good money, but the pressure there is too high, and I'm not convinced it's worth applying for that position.

## January 20th

Another cruise began yesterday, and I was about to return to the pool. But as the Assistant Chief Housekeeper told me, the stateroom attendant was returning to the section today, so I stayed there for one more day. That's why today's morning meeting was my first with the pool team after almost ten days, and I was confused when leaving the elevator; I received long applause accompanied by whistling from my colleagues. I had already forgotten the joke, but they hadn't and attacked me like I was an electronic store during black Friday, congratulating me on becoming a father. Thinking about how much alcohol my colleagues could drink, I decided to save what could have been saved, apologized, saying that I was still too excited, and brought them the rest of the candies I had in the cabin.

I was tired today, but seeing my candy box empty again wasn't giving me peace, and for the afternoon break went outside alone to refill it. I planned to return to the ship as soon as possible and rest a bit, but somewhere downtown, I, unfortunately, met the countryman who works in the Italian restaurant on the ship. Checking the map on his phone, he said he was going to a casino and asked if I wanted to go with him. Out of curiosity, I agreed with that despite being against casinos and not understanding why people waste money there. The last time I went to the theater, the cruise director came on the stage to thank the guests for coming and said, "I hope you enjoyed the show. Have a wonderful night, and don't forget that the casino will open in ten minutes, and you are welcome to leave your donations." The crowd burst into laughter, and I couldn't believe what I heard.

Thanks to the map, we found the nearest casino, but it didn't take long before I regretted my decision to go there. In half an hour, he lost \$400 and told me I could play too, even for \$5. "I apologize, brother, but I'm leaving now. It looks like I bring you bad luck," I told him and left. Trying to understand how someone who does one of the toughest jobs on the ship could allow himself to lose that amount of money in half an hour, I went to the candy store and bought enough candy for the next two weeks. Or for one day if I come up with another stupid idea like the last time.

Yesterday was a big day for the male crew. The 'old fart' captain left the ship for a vacation, so finally, the rest of us will have the opportunity to get something. Of course, if the new captain, who also looks like an old fart, isn't the same maniac.

## **January 22nd**

No matter what and where in the world you work, you always start the same way. First, your supervisor introduces you to your new colleagues, then shows you the workplace and teaches you how to do your job correctly. Most of the time, he has better ideas about how things should be done, but he must follow what's in the book. But, sometimes, the supervisor is too busy, and he sends your colleague to do his job, and in 100 % of the cases, the colleague will tell you all the shortcuts and things that will make your life easier.

That's what happened to me on the first day when the supervisor sent the guy from Indonesia to show me the section and everything that comes with the job. Among the

many shortcuts, he also told me how the crew members cheat when it comes to crew safety drills. "The drill starts between 10:15 and 10:30, but we always go to pick up our life vests from the cabins when they sound the first signal from the bridge at 10 o'clock. At that time, almost all the guests are outside, and the supervisors are busy with their emergency duties, so not taking a break first is considered a sin here," he said then.

So, since the first drill, I started doing what everybody else was doing, and it was working well until today when our supervisor passed by on the open deck and didn't find any of us around. Seeing that everyone had left the sections earlier, he gathered us later and, with an angry voice, told us we would have a short meeting. On a scale of 0 to 10, I could say he was upset from 12 to 12 and a half. There was no question about whether he was right, but he overreacted, and in only three minutes of screaming, I think at least 25 strands of his hair turned white. Let alone the invisible processes within his body—not good for his health.

Today I bought a laptop from St. Thomas, where you can find every kind of quality duty-free electronics. Because my knowledge of computers is low, I also brought my countryman who works in IT with me, so I don't get fixed. But, as they say, nobody can fix you the way you can fix yourself. As somebody who isn't making a living in the online space and doesn't need a computer with high performance, I left the ship ready to spend \$400 on a laptop, but I still ended up buying an \$800 one.

Back in the section, I had mixed feelings, and while I was happy to have a laptop finally, the next moment, I was sad

calculating how many towels I had to fold in my section to afford that piece of electronic. A few hours later, I finished working for the day and ran to my cabin to turn on the laptop for the first time. Having in mind my friend's words that I could do it myself, I unpacked the computer and started feeling excited about all the opportunities that the device was about to bring into my life—from writing this diary in electronic form instead of paper like every other human on earth that writes a diary, to watching adult movies on a regular screen instead of a phone where I'm missing a lot of details. Still, a minute after the unpacking, I realized I needed to do some setup, and that got me frustrated, so I had to call my countryman again. This laptop is just another *déjà vu* for me; I will buy something I want, use it for some time, or as in this case, I won't use it at all, and the magic would be gone. These lessons will keep coming until I realize that nothing outside of me, especially the things I can buy, can give me permanent happiness.

## **January 23rd**

Today, the colleague from Indonesia invited me to a party in his cabin, and I was more than happy to spend some time with him and his countrymen. The Indonesians are skinny, so opening the door, I wasn't surprised to see 14 of them fitting into the small cabin. Three were sitting on the top bed, three on the bottom one, one was on the toilet bowl smoking a cigarette, two were on chairs, and five Indonesians were sitting on the floor. Hanging out with a white guy seemed amusing to them, and we spent most of the time exchanging some fun facts about our countries. They also brought a lot of food, which I liked, but I couldn't

say the same for their traditional chili sauce, sambal, that they add to all their meals. I'm not a fan of spicy food, and I wasn't initially interested in trying the sambal, but out of curiosity, I put on the chicken I was eating. Although the sauce was medium hot, the next moment, I was burning like the local supermarket in my hometown before its insurance expired. Five liters of water later, I felt better, but I was still not sure if the taste of the sambal would disappear from my mouth in the next 20 days.

During these three months on the ship, I work and live with people from many nationalities, and undoubtedly the Indonesians are the best people for me. And as time passes, I'm more convinced that I will get married to an Indonesian girl. They are beautiful, nice, and humble, and there is no doubt that the donkey is flying if you ask them.

## **January 26th**

A big drama happened on the open deck today. It was another turnaround day, and after my duties in the suites and the one-hour lunch break, I returned to my section to find out that a brand-new guest had pooped inside the main pool. Because we have nothing to do with the inside of the pool, the supervisor called the sailors, who closed it, and after we left the port, they emptied, sanitized, and refilled the pool. Those were five difficult hours for us working on the open deck in which we were trying to calm down the guests who were protesting why the pool was that long out of function. But, there wasn't any official information, and I couldn't share with them my colleagues' guess that we weren't allowed to discharge the water when docked in the port,

regardless of how reasonable that sounded. I was 100 % with the guests and their complaints, but sometimes, I felt they were competing for a scooter on who will be more creative in the comments. I forgot some nuggets, but I would rate the ones I remember as follow:

1. I am not allowed to bring my dog on the ship, but some people are allowed to poop in the pool!
2. At least the cruise director and the captain should be here to entertain us!
3. The water's temperature was perfect. Who guarantees the temperature will be the same after the pool is refilled?
4. My cruise is ruined already. There is nothing that can fix this!

Still, I think the scooter should go to a guest who told my colleague from Indonesia that since he had nothing to do, he fell asleep with his sunglasses on his chest, burned in the sun, and with the tattooed sunglasses, he wouldn't be able to take a normal beach photo for the rest of the cruise. What a start to the cruise this was!

## **January 28th**

On the last turnaround day, a girl from Mexico joined our team, and she was assigned to stay by the pool and ensure everybody respect the rules. That job isn't physical, but the guests are on vacation and don't give a sh\*t about the rules, so it takes a lot of patience to stay there all day long without

kicking somebody's \*\*\*. The easiest way is pretending not to see them breaking the rules, but that always brings us negative reactions from the other guests around. So, babysitting is in the job description for whoever works there.

This morning, the girl went for safety training, and the supervisor asked me to cover her section for an hour. Not having a choice, I went there, and the place didn't disappoint. After fifteen minutes of standing like a statue, a small kid started jumping in the pool, supported by the father, who was amazed by his son's performance. After the second jump, I told the father nicely that jumping in the pool wasn't allowed, but he started jumping himself. A guest observing the situation told me that the father was a famous baseball player in the past, but the rules were for everybody. Despite the warning, he kept jumping in the pool, but instead of calling security, I went to the guy again and told him to stop or I would kick him out of the pool. Obviously tired of people kissing his \*\*\*, he seemed happy to face a slightly different approach, and not only did he stop jumping, but we also spoke for ten minutes, and he thanked me a few times, I guess, for bringing him down to earth.

## **January 30th**

This morning my section was almost empty, so I had enough time to provide personalized service for a group of four beautiful ladies. I was bringing them towels and drinks, was telling them my best jokes, and was so much in the role that I was about to ask them if they needed me to apply sunscreen on them. That would be a free ticket home for me, and I was

'fortunate' that my supervisor, apologizing for interrupting our conversation, asked me for a favor. "I convinced a girl from the Spa, so I need you to stay on I-95 and call me if my girlfriend is coming to the cabin," he said to me. I was a bit jealous of his active s\*x life, but I was on the clock anyway and stood there for 20 minutes. Yes, I have tons of adult movies on my laptop, but I preferred to be in his place at that moment.

Usually, I wait for things to fall from the sky, but being a bodyguard of my supervisor while he was enjoying himself with the girl made me think, and I decided to find out more about the girl that joined our team on the last turnaround day. She is a good-looking female from Mexico, but knowing myself as somebody who could easily ask straight for that thing and be dismissed from the ship if reported, I decided first to investigate the colleague from Mauritius who knows everything about everybody. Not surprisingly, talking with him, I discovered that he is already in an advanced research phase. He was kind enough to give me her Instagram profile, and there was a lot to see. She is a model featured on magazines' front pages, and I almost fell off the chair when I saw her in a bikini. "She could have asked for a much smaller uniform size," was my first thought. When we finished working for today, I started a conversation with her, and she said she was having a hard time getting used to life on the ship and would probably resign and go home the next turnaround day. Trying to have a normal conversation without asking for that thing, I told her that what she was going through was a normal thing that everyone experiences when coming on the ship for the first time, but she was pretty sure the ship wasn't a place for her. The thing with the countries from where the ship's crew is

coming is that they are so poor that getting a colleague on the ship who is a model, singer, actor, or any famous person in their third-world country, isn't rare.

## **February 1st**

This morning a guest came to me and, thinking she was doing the right thing, told me, "I have heard that the gratuities aren't going to the right place, so I went to the guest relations desk and canceled them. Instead, I want to give that money personally to the crew," she said, and tried to give me \$5. I realized she didn't know anything about the gratuities, so I told her the truth even though I wasn't allowed to. "With all due respect, ma'am, the gratuities aren't a tip for the crew; they are the salaries of service crew members on the ship. And you don't see at least half of them who work behind the scenes to make your cruise a memorable experience," I said to her. Feeling guilty, she said she didn't know that and went to the guest relations desk to pay them.

The fault here is in our cruise line because they don't inform the guests that the gratuities they pay are the salary of the crew, and on top of that, they give them a chance to cancel those \$10 to \$15 a day. On the other hand, operating a cruise ship is expensive but affordable for the masses because of the cheap labor the cruise lines find in third-world countries. And half of that labor is paid directly from the gratuities. If the crew came from western countries like the USA, UK, or Australia, and the guests didn't need to pay the gratuities, the cruises would cost them much more than they cost them

now. That's how the cruise lines created a perfect system where everybody is happy:

1. For a relatively affordable price, the guests get a once-in-a-lifetime experience, visiting beautiful places, getting food in a few restaurants that are included in the price they pay for the cruise, enjoying different shows in the theater every night, open-and-closed pool, room cleaned twice a day, tons of fun activities, excellent service from the highly trained crew, and so on.

2. The money the crew makes on the ship has a pretty high value in their countries, and considering that the only must expense for them on the ship is to buy soap and toothpaste, they usually save most of what they make. They also have the chance to see the most beautiful places on earth and enjoy many other benefits of working on a cruise ship.

3. The cruise lines make good money, mainly because they pay less for labor.

Today was the last day of the cruise, and another group of crew members was getting ready to leave the ship and go on vacation. And one of them was the Chinese girl's boyfriend. There were only a few hours till his sign-off, but she couldn't wait. After we finished with the guests' luggage, she knocked on my door, looking for an adrenalin rush. "Let's do it," she said to me. "My boyfriend just went for a security check of his suitcase. The line is long, and he will be there for at least one hour." Being with a Chinese girl was one of my goals in life, so I got extremely horny and gave my best in representing my country internationally. Luckily, my roommate, who is her boyfriend's best friend, was at the

crew bar to celebrate the end of the cruise. I was thinking with the wrong head tonight and felt sorry for her boyfriend, but it's a cruise ship, and we all know that loyalty is an extinct word from the crew's dictionary.

As she said, the girl from Mexico resigned from her contract, leaving the ship this morning. Obviously, coming to work on a cruise ship was too big of a bite for her after working as a model back home.

## **February 2nd**

A big group of guests from Australia embarked today, and after talking to a few of them, I finally understood the importance of the Australian-to-English mini dictionary, which had been on the I-95 board for the past two weeks. I didn't expect that I would struggle that much to understand them, but seeing them in five rings by the pool bar, drinking with the left hand and waving to the bartender for another drink with the right one, was expected. A few other crew members told me the same situation was in the other bars around the ship. Australians are famous worldwide for their drinking habits, and my first impression was that they aren't interested in anything other than drinking as much as possible.

Today, the countryman who works in the public area housekeeping team told me about his side job of cleaning crew cabins and asked me if I was interested in doing that. "I have one more month from this contract, and I want to relax and go home still functional. So, if you want, you can take two of my cabins," he told me when I met him this

morning. "Your salary on the pool is low, and making some extra money would be great for you. Plus, you don't \*\*\*\* regularly in the evening, so you have plenty of free time," said the voice in my head, and I accepted his idea.

Later in the evening, he introduced me to the people I'm supposed to clean for, and we agreed on the conditions. One of the cabins is with two waiters inside, and they want their cabin cleaned twice a week, and the other is the single cabin of the photo manager, who asked for every second-day service. It's too early to make plans, but if everything goes as expected, I will start with these two cabins and find more when I get the routine. This morning, one of the colleagues from the Philippines trio went on vacation, and from what I heard, the Chief Housekeeper told the supervisor that our team had enough people, so he wouldn't send a replacement. And in my opinion, his opinion is pure BS.

Another tough turnaround day was behind, but my hair was again difficult to control, so in the evening, I went to my hairdresser, who did a great job again. With a fresh haircut, I get on another cruise, another month, and more defeats—I meant victories—on a personal and professional plan.

### **February 3rd**

Returning to my section after the lunch break, I saw an older couple laughing loudly while leaving the Lido restaurant and seeing them with pockets full of nuts and crackers; I wasn't surprised when I heard them talking in my language. I don't know why, but I introduced myself, and in the next 15 minutes, I was there listening to their story about how

they moved to Australia 35 years ago and how much they missed my country. I hoped I had finished with them for the day when I saw them again in the afternoon, struggling to understand each other with a bar server. Astounded that their English was like my Japanese, I translated for them and left the place with big steps. They were lucky in the past when everyone could buy a ticket, get on a cargo ship and move to Australia, which, by all parameters, is the best country in the world to live in. How disrespectful some people are! If, for example, I want to move there today, with all my educational degrees and good English, it would still be almost impossible. Maybe that's why my level of tolerance for these people is very low.

Today I met the girl from China outside, and she asked me if I would like to go with her for a drink. Of course, going out with her at that moment would have been a bad idea, but she didn't give up and started pulling me in front of her boyfriend's curious countrymen, who were staring at us from the nearby restaurant. "Don't pay attention. People will talk anyway," she said and asked me to go to her cabin tonight. That would have definitely boosted my mood, but finally thinking with the right head, I told her that we went too far last time and that it won't happen again.

It is difficult to hide something on the ship; I found this out in the evening when my roommate gave me a lesson. "You could have waited for one more day, or even better, you could have found another girl!" he said. I knew he was right, but that's the ship life. We rarely use our brains when it comes to those things.

After the lesson, my roommate went to the crew bar, and only a minute later, she started unsuccessfully knocking on my cabin door and calling from the crew area's phones. I felt like the head of the biggest gay association, but I'm done with her.

## **February 4th**

After avoiding the Chinese girl for the last 48 hours, she found a hole in the system today, and I must say, she is smart. Last week, my supervisor gave me the metal key that works for all the housekeeping lockers and told my colleagues to ask me when they need something from there. The girl's colleague lost the other key, and because mine is the only one we have at the moment, she came to my section this afternoon telling me she needed paper towels for the toilets in her section. I was supposed to open the door for her, but because I was too busy, I gave her the key and requested she bring it back as soon as possible. But of course, she didn't, and when I met her in the evening, she told me the key was in her cabin and that I should go for it myself. I didn't respond, but after the shower, I went to her cabin, did it again for the second and last time, and told her that I hoped her boyfriend, for his good, would find out what kind of girl she was.

## **February 5th**

I'm not sure the rest of the guests feel the same, but I already fell in love with these Aussie people. This morning, it was my turn to pick up the papers with daily activities from the

guest relations desk and to get there, I had to pass through the guest's corridor on deck three. I often use that route, but when I opened the door to the corridor this time, I saw a lot of the rooms very well decorated, with a donut on the door handles. And it didn't matter how much I liked the idea; I did what I had to. When they checked the cameras, they realized that the art exhibition, which not everybody could understand, had been set up by the same guy who was doing pranks on the guests yesterday. Bringing the forgotten stuff to the guest relations lost and found desk in the evening, I saw a designated security guard by the artist's room, and he said the guy got banned from leaving his room for the rest of the cruise. Instead of giving him a gold medal, they locked him. Not fair!

Today was my first day of cleaning crew cabins as a side job. After finishing the regular work in the evening, I took chemicals, a vacuum cleaner, and linen and headed to the waiters' cabin. The only problem with this side job is that I don't have a master key that opens the crew cabin doors, so during the day, I met one of the waiters and the photo manager, who luckily agreed to leave their doors open. Otherwise, I would have had to go to their workplace first, borrow the keys, clean the cabins, and return them. After the few turnaround days in the suites and the cruise spent as a stateroom attendant, cleaning the cabins was relatively easy, so I did them fast without struggling.

After the lesson from the day before yesterday, my roommate continued today. And because the girl is like she is, I told him to stop bullsh\*tting me and call her boyfriend instead to explain to him what kind of girlfriend he has and save him from future suffering.

## February 6th

This morning the supervisor told me I was nominated for employee of the month and that in a few days, I would find out if the nomination would turn into something more than that. I have nothing against being recognized in that way for my dedication and hard work, but the greatest reward for me is seeing the guests' cheerful faces after I provide good service to them. Getting a piece of paper with my name and a photo with the captain has nothing to do with that. I guess the main reason for the nomination is the afternoon I spent with the couple I brought around the ship, but I also got some other good comments from the guests during the last month.

Returning to duty after the break, I found my section in a mess. Still, there was nothing to worry about. Two Aussies had found the squeegee and the mop, and while one guy was removing the water that the guests brought from the pool and the jacuzzis, the other was moping the floor after him. And considering the guests around enjoyed watching them, I let them play for a few minutes.

"The advertising is everything," my roommate told me when I returned to the cabin. "If it weren't, the horny couple I have in my section would have been left \*\*\*\*\* each other only. Instead, the first thing they did when they arrived on the ship was to put 15 pineapple stickers on their door, and since then, every hour has been rush hour there. I change their linen every day, but it's ok. The most important thing is that they enjoy their cruise," he said with a jealous tone.

## February 7th

I found two more cabins to clean within the last few days, and they are double occupancy, which is much better than the singles because of the problem I have with the keys. One of the cabins belongs to girls who work in the casino, and in the other cabin, which I was supposed to clean today, there are two waiters. In the evening, I put them first on my list, but contrary to our agreement, their door was closed when I got there. I was convinced they were on duty serving the dinner at that time, but still, before going to their restaurant for the key, I knocked on the door and was surprised when one of the guys opened. "I apologize, but if you could come to clean the cabin tomorrow, it would be great," he said, and I moved to the photo manager's cabin.

After completing the side job for tonight, I met the other waiter on I-95 and told him his roommate had asked me to clean their cabin tomorrow. "Please understand him. At the beginning of the second sitting, a guest called the maître d' and told him he didn't want to be served by a black person and asked for another waiter. Not only did the maître d' not replace him, but he asked the guest to leave and have dinner at some other restaurant," said the guy. Sadly, people don't know the basic numbers of the universe, which is a vast, maybe infinite space with trillions of galaxies, each consisting of billions of stars and planets. As the leading cosmologist, Carl Sagan, once said, "We live on a mote of dust, suspended on the sunbeam," and I don't think anyone who knows how small we are could see another human on Earth as anything other than a sibling.

## **February 8th**

Today was the last day of the cruise, and I thought the Aussies were tired of doing crazy stuff except drinking like there was no tomorrow, of course. But I didn't wait long before they denied me in the best way possible. As on every last sea day of the cruise, today we organized a pool volleyball game in which the ship's officers faced the guests. Even though I expected an easy win for the officers who play together every cruise and know the business very well, I forgot rule number 1—never underestimate the Aussies. Full of power and looking like they were in a pool full of alcohol instead of water, they won the game after a long battle and celebrated by throwing each other over the volleyball net. Three guys would lift somebody and throw him over the net in the water. Needless to say, the second part of the celebration was at the pool bar counter. This cruise was very busy, but I also had tons of fun, and there is one thing I'm sure about—I love these Aussies!

## **February 10th**

The colleague from Haiti had a medical day off today because of gastrointestinal illness or diarrhea, to be more precise, and with the Indonesian guy replacing him, I was left alone, covering both sections at the back of the ship. Everything was going smoothly when the place was empty, but soon, the sections got busy, and despite all the running, I could barely provide enough towels for everybody, let alone keep the place clean. The empty glasses and plates around were additional decor, but I couldn't blame the bar

servers and people from the restaurant for that because they were also very busy.

Soon, I lost control of the situation, and when the supervisor saw what was happening, he sent a girl from the housekeeping public area team to help me fold the towels. But I don't know if she wanted to be environmentally friendly and not release a lot of carbon into the atmosphere by working hard, or she was just plain lazy, but the reality is that she didn't help a lot. Still, she made up for that with her beauty and extreme positivity, and I have to spend more time with her and find out if she is the most positive girl I have ever met or, perhaps, she is just Kuku.

The ship is a closed space where viruses spread fast, so the GI here is the most unwanted thing after the fire. And that's because it takes a tiny percentage of the crew and the guests to get infected for the US authorities to park the ship, requiring days of deep cleaning. That means canceled cruises, nervous cruisers, lost revenue, and a 'not safe for cruising' reputation for the ship. If a crew member breaks a leg and goes to the ship's medical facility, he will most probably be given ibuprofen and will have to return to work because he has one more healthy leg. But if he mentions GI, that will be a straight day off.

With that in mind, some crew members report GI just to get a few days of rest when tired. I don't think the colleague is one of them, but many do that.

## February 11th

Today I did something unworthy and could easily have lost my job. This was definitely my second and last time drinking expensive vodkas, wines, and their relatives and siblings, which cost us a fragment of what we would usually pay with my countrymen. And that was provided by the other countryman who is in charge of the storage room where all the beverages are kept. On top of his salary, which is one of the lowest on the ship, and his job, which is one of the most difficult, there is his supervisor, who was the strongest motivator for him to learn his job quickly and find all the holes in the system. Every day of his life on the ship was agony. Still, with time, he started paying less attention to his supervisor's provocations and focused more on selling alcohol to other crew members for discounted prices. It takes skill, but he became a professional, and on the enormous number of bottles he receives each week, he would sell a few dozen on his own and make some extra money.

Together with four more countrymen, this time we gathered in my cabin, and according to the unwritten rule, it was the host's duty to pick up the bottles from the garbage room. Performing the necessary and not-so-glamorous ritual, before I finished working in the evening, I brought the soiled towels and the garbage from my section to the garbage room first. And before that, my countryman had brought there his trolley full of cardboard with the bottles on the bottom—three for us and, because the operation would be impossible without them, one bottle for the guys working there. As per the strict rules, I first segregated my garbage properly, checked the trolley that was in the corner, left the one for

the guys there, and put the three bottles in the sack with soiled towels. Feeling like the latest reincarnation of Al Capone, I brought the dirty towels to the laundry and transferred the bottles to a sack with clean linen I took for myself. Despite feeling like the latest reincarnation of Al Capone, the truth is that I'm not good at those things, and while walking down the I-95, I heard a clinking sound coming from the sack. It was pure luck that nobody else was around then.

After cleaning the cabins, we gathered and finished the bottles within two hours, but despite being drunk, I still made a conscious decision that this was my last time doing this foolishness.

## **February 12th**

Costa Maya is one of the most beautiful places we visit this Caribbean season, and I wasn't surprised that my section was almost empty this morning. Going for lunch, I saw the same situation in the crew mess, but that didn't matter because, entering there, I noticed the girl who 'helped' me the other day in the section sitting with another girl. As with every girl I see, I was already in love with this one too, so I went straight to their table and asked if I could join them. They had nothing against my need, and I was about to sit when I realized I had forgotten to take some bread.

Once I returned to the table, the other girl, with the excuse that she was already full, left us and went to rest. Both shy as first graders, after 30 seconds of silence, we started talking at the same time. "Thank you for your help with the

towels," I said. "The pleasure is mine. And it was fun, by the way," she replied. Nothing was fun that day for me, but I agreed with her anyway. What was supposed to be a 15-minute lunch turned into a 40-minute monolog in which she told me everything about herself, her family tree, and critical political issues in her country. The highlight of her monolog was that she is from Peru, 32 years old, and everybody at home is in good health except her grandfather. I also managed to say a few words about myself, and having enough information to process for today; I told her I had to go.

## **February 14th**

A few days ago, my supervisor discovered first-hand how small the ship is when his girlfriend found out that he was cheating on her and ended their relationship. But, as somebody who doesn't want to lose time, he came to me today, asking for advice about his next adventure. "I loved my girlfriend, but unfortunately, she caught me cheating and dumped me. But, as they say, when one door closes, another one opens. Maybe you noticed the attractive mother and daughter on this cruise who spend a lot of time by the main pool. They are so beautiful, and trust me; you won't recognize which one is the mother and which is the daughter. We talk every day, and I want to invite them for dinner tonight. What do you think?" he asked. "It's up to you, but don't forget how easily you can get in trouble," I responded.

Considering that many people go on a cruise to earn money by suing companies for everything possible, my supervisor's

idea seemed extremely wrong. Hopefully, he won't end up as the waiter mentioned a few times during the training, and whose story was confirmed by a countryman who worked with him when he destroyed his life. After rejecting a female guest for the whole cruise, he didn't control his hormones to the end and went to her room on the last night of the cruise. After hiding his sausage in her, she screamed, ran out of the room, and reported him for raping her. Apart from the toilets and the rooms, the rest of the ship is covered with cameras, and checking them, they saw the waiter going to the guest's room at 1 am, so there wasn't any doubt that he was guilty. The guy was seduced, but how could he prove that?!?! He ended up in jail, and the guest sued the company. It doesn't matter how careless my supervisor is; he should be an example of behaving defensively with the guests. Still, instead of that, he is much closer to getting in the waiter's shoes tomorrow morning. Because of these things, the company puts every new and returning crew member through lots of training at the beginning of the contract, and that training isn't brainwashing but saving the company's \*\*\* and the \*\*\* of the crew.

## **February 15th**

This morning, my supervisor was late for the meeting again, but this time, I didn't know if he only ended up drunk last night or was sleeping with the guest and was waiting for the police. The tension was real, but after ten minutes, the elevator opened, and he showed up with a big banana smile on his face. Once he gave us the instructions, we all went to our sections, and he came to tell me about last night. "Yesterday, I spoke with the Chief Housekeeper, and after

getting his permission, I borrowed a suit from a countryman and took the guests to dinner. I spent \$700, but we had an amazing time, and it was a night to remember. At the end of the dinner, the daughter even gave me her number and email address," he said. I was glad he lost only \$700 and not his freedom, so I told him I was happy about that and started folding towels for the busy day ahead, not knowing that the big washing machine in the laundry had broken down.

The guys from the laundry were still using the smaller machines, but that wasn't enough, and we soon started struggling to provide enough towels for the guests. I don't want to blame anybody, but the root of the problem seemed to be the first guest who showed up in the pool this morning and took about seven or eight towels, which caused a chain reaction with the rest of the guests doing the same. The seed that became the root of the problem is the rule on this cruise line that says there isn't any rule when it comes to the number of towels a guest can take (from what I heard, on the majority of cruise lines, a guest is allowed to take only two towels per day)

The guests in my section were complaining, and, thinking of what to do, I went to the man's changing room to check if the guy there had some. But, instead of towels, I found something else. Opening the door, I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw a few guests taking photos of a perfect pen\*s-shaped towel placed where folded towels were supposed to be. I asked the guy what was going on, and he said he was tired of guests taking ten towels each, and that's why he made the 'decoration' with the last remaining towel. "If some guest reports me, I will be sent home, but you can see how much fun they have. Only one was upset and found

this inappropriate, but before leaving, he also asked me to take a photo of him with the towel," he said, laughing. I could have found one more towel and done the same for the people in my section, but with half of the guests there being females, I think we would have been on every news tonight.

## **February 16th**

Another beautiful day turned perfect when the girl from Peru stopped by in the afternoon on the way to her section. Today was turnaround day, and I didn't have time for conversations about the weather and other things which I had no control over, but in the name of her beauty and positivity, I forgot the mountain of things waiting to be done and was rewarded for that—we agreed to go outside tomorrow in Nassau.

After finishing the conversation, a woman in her 80's asked me if I was a couple with the girl. "Not yet, ma'am. We just decided to go outside for the first time tomorrow," I replied. "You two would make a good couple," she said and told me her love story. "You see that lucky bast\*rd?!?" she asked me, pointing to a man with a happy face, about 90 years old. "He was a 30-year-old virgin when we got married, but after a few months, he became a womanizer and started chasing every other girl. He is still staring at young women and sometimes even slaps their behind, so I have to be with him all the time explaining his behavior. He should be happy that nobody has killed him yet. We cruise all the time, but he has been sclerotic the last two years, and if you ask him where he is now, he wouldn't know if he is on a cruise, at home, or

in Vietnam's war," she finished her story. "I'm sorry to hear that, ma'am. Please enjoy your day, and let me know if there is something I can do for you," I said. It wasn't my job to judge their marriage, but for sure, they have gone through a lot, and I'm always fascinated to see couples who have spent that long together. Today, half of the people aren't getting married, lots are doing that in their late 30s, tons are getting divorced, and I don't know how many of these long-lasting marriages will be there in the future.

Today the Chief Housekeeper went on a well-deserved vacation. His replacement is a Chief Housekeeper from the USA, and from what people are saying, he is a nice guy who doesn't give a sh\*t about the job.

## **February 17th**

As we agreed with the girl from Peru, today we went out in Nassau and, walking around, decided to go to Senor Frog's, a restaurant present on almost every Caribbean island. After my previous visit to Senor Frog's in St. Thomas, I knew what to expect, but it was her first time, and she was shocked by the atmosphere there—the dancing competitions, servers pouring alcohol in the guests' mouths straight from bottles, and so on. After the first impression, she relaxed; we ordered a tasty Guacamole and cocktails and made sure we weren't only numbers there.

## February 18th

Nobody promised me anything, but since the nomination for employee of the month, some relevant people on the ship have told me I'm the most serious candidate for the award and that they will do their best to help me win. They were right, and today I received the employee of the month award for January. I had a few positive comments from the guests last month, but the biggest reason was the afternoon break I spent bringing the guest in the wheelchair and his wife around the ship. The feeling was good, but I don't think anybody should be recognized this way on a ship where everyone works hard. That's why, in the evening, I invited my colleagues to a party at the crew bar, where I bought the drinks.

While everybody was friendly and kind to me tonight, a guy who works as a dancer went further, and although we had never spoken before, he came to me and hugged me. "Okay, the guy is next-level friendly," was my thought, so I thanked him for his congratulations and continued enjoying my five minutes of fame. The crew bar soon got packed, and because I'm not a party animal, I only relaxed and observed. While observing, I saw the same 'friendly' dancer giving me a signal with his head, known among the crew as a call for action. At first, I thought he was signaling somebody behind me and didn't pay attention, but after looking in his direction two more times, I realized he wanted to fix me, to be fixed, or both. After some time of ignoring him, he came to me again and asked me if I wanted to go to his cabin and have some fun. On that, I told him I wasn't interested, and after a few more unsuccessful attempts and a \$250 offer, he gave up.

After failing with me, he started seducing the countryman next to me, but a few exchanged words later, he left our table. "This guy offered me \$250 to be with him tonight. But I asked him for \$500," my countryman told me, laughing. "He was okay with the amount but told me I would have to let him do whatever he wanted with me until morning for that money. He gave me one hour to decide," said my countryman, without laughing this time. My friend disappeared after midnight, and I don't know if he accepted the dancer's offer, but I know I had a lot of fun tonight, and I don't regret spending the \$200 I got with the award plus \$37 from my pocket.

## **February 20th**

This morning, the countryman who works as a waiter in the main dining room told me that the Spa manager was organizing another party tonight and asked if I wanted to go. In short, the Spa manager is a guy with a good job that provides him with many benefits, including a big, single cabin where he frequently gathers crew members. And because the ship is a small place, we all know the scenario of those gatherings—everyone drinks and talks to each other until the host turns off the lights, and the real party starts. Knowing myself as somebody who is forgotten by luck, and as we say in my country, 'If I put my hand in a bag full of \*\*\*\*\*, I will catch the single \*\*\*\* that's inside,' I just thanked my countryman for the invitation and advised him to keep his \*\*\* close to the walls; if he doesn't have other plans, of course.

The last time I was changing the linen for the girls who work in the casino, I found a piece of protection on the upper bed, and my first thought was that it was forgotten there, lucky to be still around instead of already being worn, and thrown as a piece of protection. There was still an optimistic voice in my head telling me that the girl was trying to send me a message, but quite sure that the protection was there accidentally; in the last few days, I had been behaving officially with her. For that time, we met a few times, and there wasn't any change in her mood either, but tonight, she decided to take the thing fully into her hands and her garage.

The issue with these two girls is that they are afraid that somebody can rob them if they leave the cabin door open for me to clean, and I always have to go to their workplace first to borrow the key. So, tonight I again first went to the one who sleeps on the upper bed. She gave me the key, but when I started vacuuming her cabin, I felt a presence, and when I turned and looked behind me, I saw her waving with a piece of protection in her hand. I was surprised that she found time for me among all the officers on the ship who were after her, but I didn't have time to think about her motives and hid my sausage inside her. "Maybe she just wanted to try a regular mortal or add a new flag on her map," was my thought while she was doing miracles.

What prevented me from enjoying myself fully tonight were the 20 or so photos of her and her boyfriend on the wall and even more of him alone. So many photos that I felt he was watching us from the first row. At one moment, even my performance declined. "Don't worry. Even if he finds out about this, he would be proud of me. Look at him," she said

when she detected the problem. I felt guilty a bit, but she isn't married, and I'm also not married, so I don't think I crossed the red line.

## **February 21st**

Last night the sailors washed the open deck, and this morning I didn't go for a meeting but went straight to the section to remove the remaining water from the jogging track so that nobody would break a hip. Actually, I was multitasking there—squeegeeing the water out of the jogging track and wondering why people wake up at 6 am to jog on their cruise vacation. I was thinking about what would happen if they didn't do it for a week or if it's that important for them—to wake up at eight and do their few laps. Or do it at sunset?!?! Or maybe I should stop judging people and only focus on what I'm paid to do. And beautiful things happen to me whenever I remind myself that I should mind my business only.

Free of unnecessary thoughts, I kept squeegeeing the water when I saw the girl from Peru coming my way, but making the mistake of trying to be funny early in the morning, I asked her to take her shoes off because we had just washed the floor. No doubts that I'm an idiot from time to time, but she smiled out of courtesy, and after we both agreed on how much fun we had in Nassau, I told her I had movies on my laptop and that we could watch one whenever she wasn't too busy.

"It's good you didn't come last night," said to me the countryman who invited me to the Spa manager's party.

"Everything was okay, but a minute after we went into a dark mode, he turned the lights back on and kicked us all out of his cabin screaming. It looked like something happened to him in the darkness," he said, laughing. Out of respect for the girl from the casino, I didn't want to brag about what happened last night, so I said nothing about my party. The feeling of being at the right place at the right time was unknown to me until today, but I know I will have to put more effort into keeping myself sexually active.

## **February 22nd**

This morning I found my section in a mess after the pool party last night and had to work hard to get everything in place before the guests started coming. The pool parties are organized once on each cruise, and they begin at 9 pm, which is the time we finish working, and there is only one of us standing by until 11 pm when the night shift housekeeping team takes over cleaning the open deck and putting the sun chairs back in place.

Everything was functioning well until today, but I was welcomed by garbage and glasses in my section this morning. Seeing that, the last permille of alcohol from the previous night evaporated from my blood. Anyway, it was my first time finding the section in that condition, so I collected the garbage and brought the glasses to the pantry without reporting the mess to my supervisor or the night shift supervisor.

My roommate's mood at the end of the cruise entirely depends on the tip he gets from his guests. And while

sometimes he enters the cabin slamming the door, occasionally, like today, he returns euphoric. Although I knew the reason, tonight I joked a little and asked him if he had just got permission from his wife to do whatever he wanted with his life. "That would have been great, but something equally good happened today. I got \$150 in tips from one room and almost the same from the rest of the guests," said my roommate, and started singing songs from my country that nobody else knows.

## **February 25th**

After mentioning the \*\*\*\*\* movie three times to the Peruvian girl in the last few days, I had already given up, but in the evening, we met by the computer, clocking out, and she told me she finally found time tonight. It would have been better if she had said that earlier today, but I couldn't afford to lose the momentum. Initially, we agreed to do that in my cabin, but once there, I realized that what my roommate told me would be a night out in the crew bar turned into a party in our cabin. So, I had to find another solution, and at first, I thought of watching the movie in some of the crew venues, but they were all busy and loud, so that wasn't an option. I was also thinking about going on the open deck, but that wasn't a good idea either because guests and officers pass there even at that time.

Then, I remembered that the guest gym was closing at 11, so I went to the guy from the night shift who's in charge of cleaning the Spa and asked him if he could go there after 2 am instead of 11 pm when it closes. Because nothing comes for free on the ship, he asked and got \$20, and I called the

girl the next moment. She was okay with the location, and I went to clean the cabins first.

For \*\*\*\*\* \$20, I expected a red carpet and two bean bags waiting for us, but instead, once in the gym, I went to the consultation room, took two chairs from there, and put them in the port side corner. Turning on my laptop, I asked her to choose from all four movies I had downloaded back home, but the movie was the last thing on our minds. So, we started one of them, and only 10 seconds later, we started kissing. After five minutes, we started the movie again and continued kissing. At the first opportunity, I will send a letter with an apology to the movie director and the cast, first, because of the illegal download and also because of ignoring the movie, which I'm sure is excellent. I just had another priority.

## **February 26th**

Our first day as a couple went great, and everybody noticed how happy we were going around with big banana smiles on our faces. The last time I felt that happy was when I started working in construction as a 12 years old boy, thinking about how much happiness the bicycle I planned to buy with the first salary would bring to my life (similar to the laptop when I bought the bike I got frustrated learning how to ride it and got a scar too).

Many times in my life, I have watched people witness on TV how their serial killer neighbor was the most loving and friendly person they knew and how surprised they were because of what he did. And two girls I clean for are exactly

like that—loving and friendly. That scares me a lot, and every time they call me honey, my alarm goes off. Today, my alarm almost exploded when they prepared a surprise for me, leaving 300 grams of chocolate on the table and a message thanking me for the service. Maybe these two are smarter and don't want to kill me just like that and spend the rest of their lives in prison. Maybe by giving me the giant chocolate, they want to get me addicted to sugar and kill me slowly?!?!?

After cleaning the cabins, I went with my girl to the crew bar, which is the place where she feels at home. I'm the opposite of her, and it takes me a lot of drinking to dance around and make moves that are out of this world, but tonight, I did that while I was sober. I don't know how I will show up in public tomorrow, but there is still time until tomorrow.

## **February 28th**

Tonight, the housekeeping management organized a so-called housekeeping appreciation party on the top deck at the front of the ship. And because it's our area, together with three more colleagues, I had to take all the tables, chairs, ice, and drinks up there. At the same time, we had a pool party for the guests, and the rest of the team was also working hard, removing all the sun chairs around the pool and setting up the place.

We were done with both venues at 9 pm sharp, and after the clock out, I headed to my cabin to get ready for the party. But, being ready included having a few pieces of protection

in my pocket, so, on the way to my cabin, I first went to the hospital's waiting room to take some. Fortunately or not, at that time, a nurse was filling up the dispenser, and confused, I told her that I was there to take painkillers. But, a lot of protection had gone through her hands, and obviously, she had developed an antenna that caught the testosterone wave. "Are you sure?" she asked. "Okay, please give me three protections," I said, smiling while thinking about the countless adult movies I have watched where nurses think and act outside the box.

After getting the protection, I took a shower, dressed as a village boy for church, and went to the party with the girl. After the irreversible damage I had done to my reputation a day before yesterday in the crew bar, this time, I had nothing to lose, and after one beer, I was on the stage dancing. An hour later, my flower started growing and hitting her legs, and when she felt it, she grabbed my hand and brought me to her section in the Spa. Because I wasn't planning on becoming a father yet, once there, I took the protection out of my pocket, but she told me to put it back because she had a contraceptive implant. "Touch here," she said, showing on her upper arm. What I touched was a small hard object under the skin, and at that moment, I realized she was a professional.

## **March 1st**

There was another pool party for the guests last night, and once again, I was welcomed by glasses and garbage in my section this morning. The first time it happened, I was nice enough not to report the guy from the night shift, but this

time, it was too much. A few minutes after the call, my supervisor came together with the night shift supervisor, who was also guilty of not checking the place in the morning. In disbelief at what he saw, he apologized for the mess and called his guy to come immediately to my section. He was already fuming, but as if that wasn't enough, the night cleaner came after ten minutes and refused to collect the garbage. "Tranquilo, guys. I will go home on the next turnaround day. I can't disturb myself with these things," he said. "Maybe you go home sooner. With swimming," I told him, and after informing them that I would not clean the mess again, I went to the laundry to pick up towels.

Even though I missed the opportunity to throw the guy in the water, I didn't miss the hurricane that hit me later. After the supervisor changed her duty today and we had different afternoon breaks, my girl decided to make up for that and sucked even the last atom of my power in the evening. Fortunately, our first time in my cabin didn't bother my roommate too much. He just put the headphones on and told us to \*\*\*\* off. A bigger issue was explaining to her why I was writing about the experience.

## **March 2nd**

This morning the stateroom attendant from India finished his contract, and another less cool and less everything Indian guy took his place. His warm smile, enriched with a gold front tooth, promised another smooth cooperation, but shortly after we started cleaning the first suite, he started screaming around, asking me to go faster, even though I was much faster than him. Maybe he was nervous because it was

his first day in the suites, but his BS character was noticeable from the International Space Station. He was so unbearable that after only half an hour, we started cursing each other and didn't stop until we finished the job. I exhausted myself this morning, but once I went on break, my horny girl knocked on the door and said she couldn't wait until tonight. My condition wasn't the greatest, but looking at the fire in her eyes, I rose from the ashes and jumped on her like a lion would jump on meat after being on a 14-day vegetarian diet.

### **March 3rd**

You have an excellent job as a sommelier; your salary is great, and you are a good guy. Then, you get into a relationship with a girl who wants to drink expensive wine. The key role, in this case, was a guy from the Czech Republic who was working in the most prestigious restaurant on the ship, which is also a place with costly wines in the showcase. Under the influence of his girlfriend and thinking nobody would soon order that same wine, he took a \$12000 bottle from the showcase a few days ago, drank it with his girlfriend, refilled it with some cheap wine, and sealed the bottle so professionally that, at first, nobody could notice he once opened it. But, unfortunately for him, yesterday, a guest asked for exactly that wine. And when somebody is ready to pay that much, he, of course, understands wine. After the guest reported and the security checked the camera, they saw the guy unlocking the showcase after he finished working, taking the bottle, and bringing it back a few hours later. What he did was wrong, they fired him right away, and today he left the ship. The bottle cost the guy much more than \$12000, but this was

also a lesson for the other crew members that those kinds of things are not worth it. Fortunately, I realized that when I smuggled the three bottles from the garbage room.

The first thing we did with my girl this morning was to deepen the relationship between our two beautiful countries. Our first morning exercise went great, but that came with a price, which I paid later. Because of the thin walls, my colleagues already knew the reason for my happiness, and they spent the entire morning competing on who would give more creative comments. After the not-so-busy morning in my section, for the afternoon break, we went to downtown Nassau where a couple from the ship recognized us and was amazed by our appearance. "You both look like Hollywood stars," said the man. "I'm so happy to see you guys enjoying your life," said the woman. The guests' general opinion is that cruise ships are places where the crew is locked and work as slaves with no human rights, and that's why they are always happy to see us outside on the ports in casual clothes.

In the afternoon, the girl from the crew welfare posted an offer on I-95 for an excursion in Yucatan, Cozumel, where the crew would have a chance to visit the Yucatan caves and underground rivers for a discounted price. I already knew her answer, but I still asked my girl if she wanted to go, and she gave me a big yes. Because the tour requires five hours, which is more than the break most of the crew members have, on the offer, they noted that whoever wants to go will be given additional time off.

## **March 6th**

It's been a few days since our first s\*x, and I don't know how long I can go like this. Aside from running in my section for ten hours every day, I often go outside on the ports, clean cabins in the evening, and exercise throughout the day. I'm becoming a victim in other people's eyes. Hero as well. If I continue like this, soon, they will have to build a monument of my reproduction tool called 'the fallen \*\*\*\*' and put it on I-95.

## **March 7th**

I would have resigned from my contract yesterday if I had known that the rain would play that dirty today. Working on the open deck isn't easy in the Caribbean, where, along with caring for tons of people at the same time and the ban on wearing sunglasses with black lenses, I also have to deal with the hot weather and intense sweating. So, some refreshing rain—not like the one we had today—from time to time is always very welcomed.

Today, we had another day at sea, and the open deck was getting full when it started raining at about 10 am. Because the dripping wet towels weren't getting into the trolleys by themselves, we collected them, and once we finished, the rain stopped. The trolleys weren't also getting to the laundry by themselves, so, one by one, we brought them down, took those with clean towels, and when we returned to refill the bins, the people started coming back.

At 11 am, I went for a one-hour break, and when I returned, my section was full of beautiful people. Everything was going smoothly, but at 12:45 pm, it started raining again, and we had to go through the same process once again, but this time, with a bonus. A guest, not giving a damn about the moment, came complaining to me about how disappointed she was with the weather. After the similar experience with the couple before, this time I was ready and told her not to worry about the rain because I would call the captain, who has lots of contacts that could help. Of course, she got upset with my answer, but she found what she was looking for.

Fed up with how the day was unrolling, I got almost naked once in the laundry and put the uniform in the nearest dryer. Considering that I had one wet uniform from the previous rain and the one from yesterday that was left for washing, the choice was to dry it on the spot or wait for my body temperature to do that and get a fever. While I waited, several laundry guys and other crew members found the view of my average body entertaining, but protecting my health was more important to me. The typical ten minutes of Caribbean rain happened two more times till the end of the day. The third time was when I was on the afternoon break, and one more time when I returned at 6 o'clock. Today was definitely not the best day for the pool team.

## **March 9th**

The supervisor from the Philippines miraculously made it to his sign-off day, and my countryman came today as his replacement. Tired of running after the cabin keys for my

side job, today I came up with a plan, and in the evening went to the Romanian guy whose job on the ship is to clean the cabins of the people in staff positions. As somebody with 50 cabins to clean on decks zero and one, he has a master key that opens every cabin on those two decks, and today I asked him if he is willing to report his key missing and give it to me. Of course, he won't have a problem getting another one, and I will also compensate him for the favor. Just asking for that was risky, but I have good communication with the guy, and fortunately, he was open for business. "Brother, you know I could get in trouble doing that, but for \$300, I would do it," he said. Knowing that I would easily make those 300 using a small portion of the time I lose running after the keys, this one was a no-brainer, so I agreed even before he ended the sentence. Now, everything depends on the security officer in charge of giving the master keys, and if he doesn't cancel the 'lost' key, I will probably be able to use it tomorrow.

## **March 10th**

Three weeks ago, a waitress approached me, saying a waiter I clean for recommended me, and asked if I could do the same for her and her roommate. It wasn't that I had a lot of free time in the evening, but I was greedy and agreed to clean her room once in three days. The place had been a second garbage room on the ship, but except for the mess, something else was welcoming me every time I went there—a big black dildo that was always on the front shelf. And as if that wasn't enough, today, I spent half an hour cleaning their bathroom sink that was stained with, most probably, a hair dye. I have very few hours left in the night

to rest, and spending almost one hour in their cabin made me so upset that I forgot my plans for a threesome; I left them a message that I won't clean their cabin anymore, put on a glove, took the dildo, and left it on the note.

## **March 11th**

This morning the Chief Housekeeper showed up at the meeting with a piece of paper in his hand and, after greeting everybody, started reading a good comment that had been left for me at the guest relations desk by a couple yesterday. Despite their importance, I'm not giving my best in my workplace in expectation of good comments from the guests or recognition from the management, but it's always good to know that my hard work and efforts are appreciated. On the other hand, almost everyone in the team works to his maximum, so I felt a bit uncomfortable because of the Chief Housekeeper's idea. The comment was written on one page, in which the guests explained what I did for them yesterday.

The couple that wrote the comment came to my section around 11:30 when every sun chair was occupied, but instead of cursing the cruise line as most people would, they came to me and used the power of asking for what they needed. Despite being very busy, I liked their approach, so I brought two sun chairs from the spare ones in the locker and found a nice spot for them. And at that moment, they felt the same way anybody would feel in that situation—VIP, in capital letters. "Why did you do this for us? You are very busy, anyway," the woman said and asked me if they could borrow a Monopoly set from the guest relations desk. I knew the guest relations had all those board games and

could have told them to go themselves, but I wanted to provide even better service. So, I asked the girl from the activity team who was getting ready to host a Zumba class, and she let me take one of the Monopoly sets in her locker, which is one deck below my section. Bringing the board game additionally impressed them, and mildly said, their reaction was euphoric. The husband even took all the money he had in his pocket mixed with receipts and begged me to take them. That was nice of him, but I thanked them and said I had a good salary and was doing my job. That was a one-and-a-half lie, and after the second attempt and removing the receipts, I accepted the \$62 from the guests, which is one of the biggest tips in my short career on the high seas.

Guests rarely write good comments, no matter how great of a service the crew provides. Most of them don't even know they can write a word for a crew member who went the extra mile to provide a better experience for them or for a crew member that has destroyed their vacation. The second kind knows how important a good comment for a crew member is, but they don't want to take a few minutes to write it because of their 'I already paid for the cruise' attitude. But some people would always take the time to write a few good words, which are pure gold for any crew member who wants to climb the career ladder on the ship. That's because every good comment goes into the system and supports a crew member's application for another job position on the ship.

In the afternoon, we were about to go with my girl on the organized crew tour to the Yucatan caves and the underground rivers, and I was excited about that opportunity. But my girl got excited about the other thing. A few minutes before the scheduled time, we met the rest of

the crew outside the ship, but while waiting for our names to be called, she got horny and told me to forget about the excursion. I wanted to believe she wasn't serious, but she would never joke about those things. Still, I didn't want to give up the tour, but she started creating drama, so I went to the guide and told him that my girlfriend had a terrible headache, so we had to cancel the tour. Not obligated to give us a refund for the last-minute cancelation; he was okay with that. I have a hard time getting her to go outside with me on the ports, but the next time she refuses, I will tell her that going out is good for my one-eyed friend's mental health.

Fortunately, at least the security officer in charge of the keys didn't cancel the 'lost' master key, and today was my first day using it. The Romanian guy reported his key card as lost the same evening we spoke, but afraid that they could uncover us, I didn't use it until today. The only thing I have to be careful with now is to keep it away from metal objects like coins that could easily demagnetize it.

## **March 14th**

Another day and another missed chance to be fired. After the busy morning, I was about to go for an afternoon break, and on my way down, I took the two trolleys with the soiled towels from my section to the laundry. I was already five minutes into my break, and once there, I surely wasn't happy to see the laundry's watertight door closed. Another problem was the corridor, which was full of trolleys from the pool, and this time, I was the winner who had to call the bridge for permission to open the door and put everything inside.

And I was about to make the call when a waiter from the guests' restaurants came with a trolley full of soiled tablecloths and said he had already called the bridge and we had permission. So, he opened the door, we got the trollies inside with the help of the laundry guys, and I finally went for a break. Worn out by my greedy girl, two and a half hours later, I was back on duty collecting the soiled towels when the Chief Housekeeper showed up on the open deck and came to my section. "We have to go to the captain's office tonight. Meet me at 6 pm at the forward crew elevator," he said and left without giving me a space to ask why.

As he said, we met at 6 pm sharp and went to the captain's office, where all the senior officers were gathered. And that meant I was on the so-called master hearing. At that moment, only God and the present officers knew why I was there, but seconds later, the waiter I met earlier today in the laundry showed up, and everything became clear.

Trying to be funny, the captain started his speech with a stupid joke, saying that we had to be fast with the hearing because other crew members were looking forward to sitting on the sofa. The officers found that funny (or they were just licking their boss' \*\*\*), but for the waiter and me, that 'joke' wasn't funny at all. "By opening the laundry's watertight door without permission today, you guys seriously violated the ship's safety protocols and risked the safety of all the passengers and crew," said the captain to us. That, of course, was pure BS because the ship wasn't in a storm, let alone damaged and leaking. It looked more like the senior officers who make \$15000 and more a month, justifying their salary by working something. I was surprised to hear that the guy

lied about getting permission from the bridge, but still, I decided to be patient and not tell the truth if not needed. After the captain finished his monologue, we apologized, saying we were sorry for what we did and promised not to repeat the mistake. "You should indeed be sorry, guys," he said and sent us outside to wait while deciding if they would send us home.

After five minutes of looking at the waiter sweating, the captain called us back and repeated that we had done a serious violation. Still, because of our clean background, they had decided to give us a written warning only. We apologized again, thanked them for their goodwill, and left the office. I didn't want to blame the guy, but if they had decided to fire me, I would have revealed exactly how it happened. And if that wouldn't have been enough, I would have thrown the old 'funny' fart captain into the sea. I got a warning for nothing, but at least the waiter was happy with the outcome and going back to my section, he was on my neck, hugging and thanking me.

## **March 16th**

As expected, today, on one of our last stops in the USA, we got a visit from the United States Public Health. The atmosphere was tense the last few months, and I think if they didn't come today, too, somebody would have exploded. The inspectors came on the ship early in the morning, and we knew it by hearing the false, coded public announcement from the bridge- 'Mr. William Davis, please go to the guest relation desk,' which alerted the crew, and everybody went to their workstations to ensure everything was in order. The

inspection went smoothly, and we got 97 out of 100 points, which is an excellent result considering how strict the inspectors are. They simply don't joke! A few findings in a few dozen galleys, pantries, bars, and restaurants, and our ship could have been docked. Fortunately, the drama is over, and we won't need to stress ourselves before each US port anymore.

As an additional duty for this turnaround day, the supervisor sent me to help the cleaners from the crew area with the guests' luggage. On these embarkation days, we have all the guests on the ship until three o'clock, and the last suitcase we deliver is around 4 pm. However, some guests don't want to wait, and they tell us they need their bags immediately because they have their medicines inside. Nobody puts their medications in a checked bag, but in a situation like that, we have no choice; we must almost stop the luggage operation and search for the specific suitcase.

And that kind of guest we had today. We lost 15 minutes because of him, which is a lot of time when it comes to turnaround day. That guy reminded me of the healthy woman I pushed in a wheelchair to the ship a few months ago, and the conclusion is that some people don't know what respect is.

In 99% of the cases, I'm not interested in other people's lives, but what the guy from Mauritius told me about the Haitian colleague who signed off today is something I wouldn't think of in a million years. And knowing how informed the Mauritian is, I have no reason to doubt the story. "Our colleague worked as a school director in his hometown for two years. As I was told, at that time, he stole a lot of money

and, unable to justify big spending back home, he resigned and came to work here so that he could find an excuse. But he forgot rule number 1 and told his best friend on the ship, who told a few other people, including me," he finished the story and left me thinking if I had told him something I shouldn't have.

## **March 17th**

On the last turnaround day, my previous supervisor went on a well-deserved vacation, and a guy from my country took his place. And now I know from experience that having a countryman as supervisor is wind in the back—when it comes to the other nationalities. For example, when the guy from the Philippines was a supervisor, he protected and promoted his countrymen, and that's also the case with the crew from Indonesia, India, and every other nationality on the ship. I don't think that's okay, but the opposite shouldn't be the case either.

Since his arrival on the ship, my new supervisor has been trying to show the Chief Housekeeper that he is a professional who doesn't care about nationality, and I'm the one paying the price by being his target from the first day. His creativity, when it comes to making my life difficult, is limitless. From blaming me for whatever goes wrong on the open deck to asking me every day to help my colleagues in their sections despite mine being much busier. Anyway, I will keep doing my best, and I hope he will stop playing dirty as soon as possible. Otherwise, I will be forced to find a solution that might be unpopular.

## March 19th

Yesterday was March 18th, my birthday—according to what my parents told me. On one side, yesterday, I woke up happy to be on this planet and proud that I was so athletic as a young spermatozoid to beat 100 million others in the race for my mother's egg, but on the other side, this was one more occasion I was going to celebrate without my loved ones; and that made me wonder again if this adventure was worth it.

Maybe I didn't start the day in the best mood, but my girlfriend took over from there and ensured that my birthday would be special. First, she surprised me with my favorite perfume and a big color photo of her average size b\*\*bs, and then we continued with a morning exercise.

After the good start to the day, I took a shower, put on my uniform, and went for breakfast. On the way to the crew mess, I saw my photo on I-95 together with those of the other crew members celebrating today; I wished myself the best and spent the rest of the day receiving birthday wishes and reminders to buy a drink. Despite all the kind words, I felt that people were busy enough with their stuff and nobody was giving a sh\*t about my birthday, but still, in the evening, I went to the crew bar with my girl, friends, and colleagues.

The atmosphere there was good, but the main celebration was in my cabin, where we moved to after midnight, and for what I was prepared with 30 beers, two bottles of vodka, one bottle of tequila for the Mexicans, and at least ten more liters of beer and spirits we brought from the crew bar later on.

We were so focused on drinking and got so drunk that we forgot about the neighbors who reported us, and at about 2 am, a security guard knocked on the door. As a host and birthday boy, I opened the door glowing like a lit-up Christmas tree, but at that point, I had forgotten my name, let alone why we were gathered. What I remember is that in the uncomfortable silence, some of the guys yelled, "It's his birthday!" and the security guard wished me all the best, said the party was over, and asked everybody to go to their cabins. Fortunately, he didn't ask for an alcohol test, so in appreciation, everybody except me, my girl, and my roommate left the cabin within ten seconds. Knowing the business, my roommate went to sleep with his earplugs on, and I had the worst s\*x ever.

## **March 20th**

As usual, the weather in St. Maarten today was beautiful, and I planned to finally visit the world-famous Maho beach, known by the airport that's just behind and where the planes fly only a few meters above the beach visitors' heads before landing. Excited about what was following, I didn't even feel the time passing this morning, and once on break, I put on my best beach outfit and ran to the gangway with my girl.

In my mind, I was already on the beach where my girl was taking a perfect photo of me touching the plane at the right angle, but touching my card to the security device, I heard the ugly port manning sound that meant I couldn't leave the ship today. And I think that sound cut two years of my life right on the spot. It would have been easier to accept my girl telling me that she doesn't have a contraceptive implant and

that I will become a father. But, despite my luck being a b\*tch, I have to admit that what happened today was entirely my fault.

I already knew that at every port, a certain number of crew members must stay on the ship and that the names are listed on I-95, but thinking it was something that happens to other crew members only, I never checked the board. But, while sitting on the chair in my cabin and wondering if I would ever recover from the shock, my girlfriend didn't even try to hide how happy she was that we couldn't go out. She doesn't care about any beach or other attractions in the places we visit but would rather stay on the ship at every port and use the afternoon break to do adult stuff with me. Maho Beach should have been my top priority, but I put myself in a situation to wait for the last visit this season. At least, I—hopefully—learned a valuable lesson today.

## **March 22nd**

Going on the lower deck this morning to take a mop head from the locker, a guest dressed as a professional athlete asked me where the jogging track was. Thinking that I was talking to a responsible for her health woman, I pointed to the stairs opposite the elevator and told her that the jogging track was one deck up. But she had another plan, and after thanking me for the help, she pressed the elevator button. "WTF," I said to myself, and once in my section, I saw her taking photos. I wasn't surprised, but she reminded me more of how today's society works. People aren't living for themselves anymore. They live to impress others. Looking at her, I recalled a beautiful sunny day when climbing a

mountain on my bicycle; a car with two attached bikes passed by me just before I reached the top. And once there, I saw the car and two girls taking photos of two guys posing with the bicycles in the air and the lake in the distance. I didn't feel my effort was wasted, but I sure felt sorry for them.

## **March 23rd**

After my first and last time working with the new guy in the suites, today was my third time in the rotation, and the supervisor sent me to help the guests in wheelchairs to embark on the ship. As per my count, today I assisted seven guests, all of whom were beautiful people, but the highlight of the day was an elderly couple with a great sense of humor. Looking at their cheerful faces when they entered the cruise terminal, I knew they were exceptional, and they confirmed that when I asked the woman if I could assist her. Without waiting for his wife to answer, the husband started their show, telling me, "Push her now, and I will push her later." "Are you sure?" the woman asked, and we had a good laugh. I was laughing uncontrollably in the 15 minutes I spent with them, and that didn't look nice in other people's eyes, but they were so funny complementing each other with jokes, that I didn't manage to control myself. It's just the beginning of the cruise, but it looks like these two people will be my favorite in the next seven days. Maybe in the entire contract, after the guest from Australia who put a donut on each door's handle in his corridor.

## March 25th

"Life is short, and I can't spend it working my \*\*\* off on a cruise ship while witnessing people enjoying their lives," is my logical thought every time I scrub the sun chairs in my section. Of course, I appreciate the opportunity to work on a big cruise ship, but I'm aware that I will have to move forward sooner or later. So, since I started scrubbing sunchairs under the hot sun, I have also started watching inspirational content on television, one of which was an interview with a psychologist. Knowing that making changes isn't human nature and that people would always choose the familiar, the psychologist gave practical advice that everybody should start with something small at the beginning, and once they get comfortable, make more significant changes that could improve the quality of their life. Say No More!

It's the end of the month, and because we have a lot of overtime hours, the management gave us three additional hours off in a port of our choice. And while my colleagues needed time to choose, in consultation with my girl, I decided to take the extra hours today in Cozumel and go on one of the most recommended tours there—snorkeling to the three reefs. The first reef we visited was El Cielo, which, in Spanish, means heaven, and that speaks enough for the place. Crystal clear water, soft white sand on the bottom, starfishes, stingrays—the place is absolutely heaven on earth.

Next, we visited another excellent snorkeling spot called Colombia Reef, where we spotted sea turtles and different fishes. The third and most impressive was the Palancar Reef,

which was full of colors and marine life, including sea turtles, lobsters, and many types of colorful fishes. The tour took four hours, so we still had time to rest, but when I went to bed, she attacked me, broke her fake nail while trying to tear my t-shirt, and we repeated the act once again.

I enjoyed the day until then, but once I returned to duty, I started feeling a slight numbness in my right hand. Initially, I didn't pay attention, but the numbness increased, so I decided to go to the ship's hospital. After I finished working in the evening, I canceled the cabins I had for tonight and went to mine to take a shower first. Before the shower, I successfully laid a sh\*t and used my left hand to wipe my \*\*\* for the first time in my life. "Is this the small change the guy on TV was talking about?" I wondered. Fortunately, the doctor took the situation more seriously, gave me some medicines, and I was back to normal in the next two hours.

## **March 26th**

Because my girl is a human fountain, we have to change the bedsheets daily. And that would be fine if I didn't need to struggle for every piece of linen I take from the linen room. Most of the time, I sneak bedsheets for myself when I pick up for the side job, but the linen keeper isn't from yesterday, and after a few days of counting, today he reminded me that I couldn't take new linen more than once a week for each crew member. Tired of everything, I apologized and knowing that everything on the ship has a price, I asked for his. "\$15 a cruise, and you don't see me again," said the linen keeper, and I agreed. My expenses on the ship are rising even faster than my tool rises in my girl's right hand but

paying \$15 a cruise is still better than hiding the linen and explaining all the time.

In the evening, my Indonesian colleague shared some 'good news' with me. "I'm so happy, bro. They accepted my request and extended my contract for one month. I'll stay on the ship until June 6th," he said, and I didn't find anything good in that news. The guy is pretty lazy, and I hoped I would share the section with a new colleague for the last two months of my contract, but it is what it is.

### **March 27th**

"Tonight, I will surprise you with something," she told me this morning while we were doing the adult stuff. To guess what the surprise would be about was easy, and the only surprise was her believing she could surprise me.

Today we visited the non-crowded Las Palmas Beach in Roatan and enjoyed the relaxing atmosphere and the almost exclusive service provided by the friendly staff. Equally important, pretending I didn't care, I also enjoyed the three-million-dollar view of the three beautiful girls sunbathing in front of us. My girl, of course, noticed that, but her beliefs were wrong again because what made me most happy today was the nice set up of the sun chairs and everything else around that was in a perfect line—professional deformation at its finest.

When I finished with the cabins in the evening, my girl took out her phone and showed me the surprise—downloaded Kama Sutra poses. "No time to lose," she said. "We have to

try them all." Using the absence of my roommate, who was in the crew bar, I embraced the challenge, put the mattress on the floor, and we jumped into action.

## **March 29th**

This afternoon, a guy who works as a maître d' in the ship's restaurants came to my section and asked me if I could clean his cabin. In line with my Say No More attitude, I agreed to clean his cabin every day; he was okay with my rate and asked if I could start today. "I know you have luggage duty tonight, but if you could find time during the day, it would be great. My girlfriend is coming tomorrow as a visitor, and I don't want her to see the mess I live in after my cleaner resigned from his contract on the last turnaround day. But please, don't worry if you can't do it today. I will throw the garbage and will make the cabin look clean," he said, knowing that for the money I asked for, I couldn't say no to him. So, I agreed and told him I would clean his cabin before the luggage operation in the evening.

The day went smoothly, and after the usual 8 pm clock out, I went to my cabin for a 20-minute nap before going to the maître d's cabin. My plan was good, but putting my oval-shaped head on the pillow, I immediately fell asleep, and if the supervisor didn't call me five minutes after nine, I probably would have woken up in the morning. Not having time to think about why I didn't go to the maître d's cabin first, I washed my face, put on my uniform, and went straight to the I-95, where my colleagues had started putting the suitcases in the trolleys.

Feeling refreshed after the one hour of sleep, I was throwing the bags with ease, but I still had to do the cabin, so I called the Romanian guy from whom I bought the master key to bring a set of linen and chemicals to the front of the maître d's cabin. It wasn't fair from my side, but at 10 pm, I apologized to my colleagues and told them that I had to go to the toilet. Not having too much time, I activated the octopus mode, took out the garbage, changed the linen, collected the visible pieces of garbage from the floor, did the dusting, cleaned the toilet, put the soiled linen, garbage, and chemicals behind the opened electrical panel door in the corridor and returned for the luggage 15 minutes later with a poor excuse that the struggle in the toilet was real.

## **March 30th**

Today we had another busy day in Ft. Lauderdale, disembarking one group of beautiful people in the morning and embarking on another group of beautiful people after that. Despite the short one-hour lunch break today, I went to the nearest gaming store and bought another piece of electronics that would give me temporary happiness. Because the time was short, once on break, I went straight to the cabin, changed my clothes, and was outside in less than five minutes. As my Indian colleague told me in the morning, the store was only a 10-minute walk from the ship, but I got lost, so it took me double that time to find it. Once there, I bought a PlayStation and two games in a rush and hurried back to the ship, where I still returned on time.

The Chinese girl signed off today, and from what I heard, she is going to the Philippines to spend the two-month

vacation with her boyfriend before returning together on (thank God) another ship.

## **March 31st**

This evening, I had an argument with the Chief Housekeeper. An argument that wouldn't happen if he had a smarter thing to do at that moment. Passing on I-95 with a sack of soiled linen from my side job, he showed up from nowhere like a f\*\*\*\*\*g magician and asked me if I could think about getting more rest and focus on the primary job. Surprised by his interference in my private life, I asked him the logical question if there was any complaint about my work. On that, he said that I was doing a great job in my section and that there wasn't a single complaint about me, so I asked him if he could email the shoreside office and ask for a pay raise for his people, so they don't have to work additional jobs. He knew I was right, but his ego was huge, and he disappeared the next moment using his magician skills. I'm still young and in full power; I clean the cabins in my free time; I work like a horse in my section; the guests are happy with my service ..., so there isn't any chance I will let him tell me what to do when I'm off duty. And not only do I not plan to stop, but tonight, I tested the PlayStation and spent three hours playing Call of Duty. Hopefully, I will be able to control myself with this addictive game and manage my time properly.

## **April 1st**

I received another half-month salary today, and getting my relatively low pay on April Fools' Day wasn't a coincidence. Again, I can't write a lot about something that's the opposite of a lot, but the future is bright, and I'm sure I will get in a position to make more soon.

## **April 2nd**

Today we visited St. Thomas for the last time this Caribbean season. After carefully planning with my girl, we borrowed bicycles this afternoon and went to Coki Beach, which is one of the most beautiful in St. Thomas. We were lucky to have nice weather; the water was perfect for swimming; the food was good, and as a bonus, I found a cocktail named Painkiller on the menu, which was great for the back pain I have from lifting all that luggage on the ship. The place was also full of locals selling souvenirs, and because it was my last time there, I bought some shipwreck coins representing the St. Thomas pirate history. The only problem on this beach is its relatively small space which can't accommodate many people, so we decided to leave more time for visiting one of the biggest attractions there called 99 steps.

Built in the 1700s, as a local guy told us, the stairs are made of stones that were used as stabilizing weights for the colonizing vessels in the past. And we hadn't climbed them yet when we realized we had taken too many photos on the way there and were running out of time. Anyway, we were already on the spot and, in a rush, went to the top from where we enjoyed the breathtaking view. Not surprisingly, we

were ten minutes late for duty, which was well used by my supervisor, who was waiting for an opportunity to scream at me as if I had killed his goldfish.

Four days with the PlayStation as my best friend are behind, and I started realizing this thing wasn't for me. I enjoy playing Call of Duty, but I find it challenging to stop, and since I bought it, I have slept for only 3 to 4 hours a night.

### **April 3rd**

The last time we visited St. Maarten, I was port manning, but fortunately, there wasn't any surprise today, so I finally made it to the famous Maho Beach. As expected, going there was a one-of-a-kind experience, and I wish I had used my thinking capacity better and visited the beach more often during this Caribbean season. Our stay at Maho Beach today was short, but we still had lots of fun: we swam around, drank a few cocktails, took photos with the planes flying just above us, and forgot ourselves there, so we had to run like headless chickens to return on time and avoid another lecturing from my supervisor.

St. Maarten isn't a vast island, but it still offers something for everybody. The biggest attraction for the male crew members on the ship is the dozen strip clubs where h\*\*ker lovers can find girls from every nationality possible. And while I didn't enjoy my visit there too much, my Mauritian colleague became obsessed, and every time we docked in St. Maarten, he spent the afternoon breaks there. At the same strip club and with the same girl. Sad that today was our last time in St. Maarten, once we returned to duty, he came to

tell me something 'important.' "She is the love of my life, and I want to marry her. We met again today, but this time, we didn't \*\*\*\*; we only talked for an hour, and she told me she loves me too," he said with tears in his eyes. I couldn't believe my ears, but I knew how much he missed smoking weed, and I thought his behavior resulted from that. "Of course, she loves you. You spend your entire salary on her. How will you marry a girl who sleeps with ten people a day? Can you turn on your brain?!?!" I tried to wake him up. Still not knowing if he was serious, I told him he needed a smoke, and he agreed but got upset when I asked him if there wasn't any h\*\*ker in Mauritius, so he wanted to marry one from St. Maarten. "You can't understand. And please don't call her h\*\*ker," he said to me. Apologizing for the inappropriate naming of the girl, I wished him all the best in realizing his intention.

## **April 5th**

This afternoon, I found a paper with three complaints that a guest with beautiful calligraphy had written, most probably to the guest relations desk. I believe he/she had a few more, but the pool isn't the only place on the ship. There are also many restaurants, bars, and other venues to write complaints about, so three seems enough:

1. The water level in the pool is too high!
2. The sun loungers are difficult to move!
3. Change the pool boys' uniform!

We are thankful for every suggestion that makes sense and could help us improve our service, but expecting us to replace the extremely light sunchairs or change our uniforms doesn't sound very serious.

## **April 6th**

Raised in a society where having food on the table is enough, I grew up hearing that money causes all problems, all rich people are criminals, and other similar things. Despite all that influence from the environment, I refused to get infected and came on the ship looking to provide a better future for my family and myself. And after five months on the ship, I can say it's the best thing I have ever done. Other than putting more than bread on my family's table, the biggest benefit of this job is the chance to talk with many guests daily. They are all great, and I learn from each one, but the one I met today cleared even the smallest doubt I had about what is true when it comes to money. "Not that I want to brag, but I have a point that I'd like you to understand. I have businesses all around the world and have become extremely rich and extremely hated as well. My employees hate me because they think I should share the profit equally with them, and others hate me because they think money is evil, so I'm evil too. I love my employees; without them, I wouldn't be where I am now, but unfortunately, they can't understand what it takes to run a huge business and how ruined my private life is. I also love those who think I'm evil because I'm rich. It's okay to be modest and happy with what you have and even to hate the rich, but schools, hospitals, and roads need to be built, and money for all that comes from those who create jobs and pay taxes," he said.

## April 8th

Working my \*\*\* off my entire life didn't make me responsible with money, but when it comes to my girlfriend, I can't say that I spend a lot on her. She makes money for herself, has dignity, and with a few exceptions, we pay for ourselves whenever we go out. But, seeing her mood change in the last few days, after the short walk around downtown Cozumel today, we went to a lingerie store where I bought her three pairs of sexy underwear, which is still a kind of selfish gift that should spice up our game. The atmosphere was heated for the rest of the day, and everything culminated in the evening when my roommate went to the crew bar and gave us space to create a lifetime memory. Laying on the bed and waiting for her to come out of the bathroom, I set a short-term goal to avoid falling asleep and screwing everything. After a long wait, she finally showed up wearing the black underwear, but instead of attacking her like a tiger, I remembered our first conversation when she told me that everybody except her grandfather back home was in good health and connected that to the black underwear. "What happened? Did your grandfather die?" I asked her. I was foolish to say that, but she was extremely horny and didn't let one stupid joke destroy a promising night. Both on fire, we checked the next Kama Sutra position and took the mattress to the floor. Everything was going well, but unfortunately, my roommate entered the cabin while we were in the Catherine Wheel position.

"We have to talk later," he said to me and left the cabin. My roommate caught us naked, which was very uncomfortable, but that didn't stop us, and we finished what we had started. "We can't continue this way," he said when he returned from

the crew bar. "If you want to keep fixing your girlfriend in our cabin, you must pay me \$5 a day." After the one-time fee for the master key that I bought from the Romanian guy and the weekly fee I pay to the linen keeper for taking as much linen as I want, this was going to be another, this time daily expense for me, but I did some quick math in my mind and agreed to his blackmail. I'm not sure I would have come up with the idea to ask for \$5 a day if I was in his shoes, but for sure, I would have gotten pissed too.

## **April 9th**

Cleaning cabins after a long day under the Caribbean sun isn't easy, but in that one and half-two hours side job, I make one more salary, and that's why I always do my best. But, yesterday, we had a crew cabin inspection after the safety drill, and one of the waiters I clean for this morning told me that the f\*\*\*\*\*g 1st officer, as he called him, visited his cabin and left a note that it's not clean. "The cabin was very clean, and the only problem was the top of the cabinet, where there was some dust. And that's where he left the note. But please don't worry because it's not your fault. Recently I had problems with him over a girl, and he couldn't accept that she had chosen me over him, the three-stripes officer. That's the only reason," he said.

Today we were docked in Costa Maya and used the afternoon break to relax outside a bit before crossing to Europe. Walking around with no clear idea of what we wanted to do, we went to the shopping village, where I bought a good quality hammock and a nice souvenir magnet for the fridge back home to thank him for keeping my food

fresh. The rest of the time there we spent by the pool, which is part of the complex, and had a useful conversation about our relationship.

Talking about last night, she started fuming when I told her that my roommate had blackmailed me and that I would have to pay rent for my cabin from now on. I guess she couldn't accept me giving \$150 monthly to my roommate and spending 50 on her. "You aren't giving anything to that war-profiting guy. It will be crowded, but we will continue mastering the Kama Sutra positions in my cabin," she said, and we had a good laugh. Her roommate is still with the Mauritian guy who works in the restaurants, and, in an intimate atmosphere, they are also actively deepening the relationship between their two beautiful countries. Still, from now on, their cabin will be a full house.

Although she didn't need to, in the afternoon, my girl spoke with her roommate, who said that the cabin belonged to both of them, but as my girl told me, she didn't manage to hide the disappointment successfully. So, tonight was our first time in her cabin, and she was even more loud and proud, which is normal when you have another couple in the room doing the same thing. Only the neighbors weren't happy tonight, and they didn't stop knocking from all sides of the cabin for the duration of the double action. Considering that the walls are only a few centimeters thick and our noise for them was like listening to a porno movie on the radio, that was understandable. The first adult exercise in her cabin was awesome, but another thing also excites me these days, so at 1 am, I returned to my cabin and played Call of Duty until 3 am. It still doesn't affect my performance in bed or at work, but it's obvious that I can't control myself.

## April 13th

Today's turnaround day was our last in the US for this season, and as I write this, we are sailing to Europe. It will be a 14 days trip, which meant a busier turnaround day for the crew with much more luggage and supplies that we had to bring on the ship today. With nine days on open waters, this transatlantic cruise will be a real nightmare for us, the crew members, and an excellent opportunity for the guests to enjoy everything that our ship offers for a significantly lower price than they would pay for a regular cruise. And from what I found out in a few conversations with them, except for the cruise lovers, on this cruise, we have people with free time who choose to travel 14 days to Europe on our ship instead of taking a flight and paying almost the same price.

On top of all the s\*x, side job, and a bit of rock and roll in the evenings, in the last two weeks, I was spending a lot of time on the PlayStation and was sleeping only for three to four hours. And while I was physically able to handle that, the lack of sleep started affecting my mental health on more levels. That's why I returned the PlayStation to the store today before the situation inevitably worsens. The good thing is that I bought it in a normal country like the USA and got a 30-day money-back guarantee, so, using my short lunch break, I went to the store, told them that the product wasn't what I was expecting, apologized, and they returned the total amount I paid. That would be unthinkable in my country, and even on the way back, I was still curious if the store owner would kill me before I reached the ship. Back on duty, I found the open deck in a mess. Some of my colleagues had luggage duties, some had gone for a break,

and I had only the colleague from Nepal with me. Still, we put everything under control and didn't get a 'banana.'

Speaking with a few experienced colleagues, they told me that there is a high chance of stormy weather during the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, but I'm one of those who enjoy it when the ship is rocking, and I look forward to that. The headache for me will be the different time zone in Europe and moving the clock one hour forward a few times during this cruise.

## **April 15th**

Today was my most challenging day since I came on the ship; even more challenging than the day before the new year celebration when I got stuck with the woman in the handicapped elevator. As always, this morning, I started the day by preparing my section for the busy day ahead; I swept and mopped the floor, put the sun chairs in line, and filled the bins with towels. Everything was ready before the guests started arriving, and around 11 o'clock, my section was full of beautiful people—almost all of them. The morning went smoothly, but little did I know what an interesting 'easy money' idea a guest had in his not-so-genius mind. It was almost noon, and I was about to go for my afternoon break when I saw two ladies struggling to turn their sun chairs to the sun. And not only that I helped them, but I found that they were also passionate about astronomy, and we started an exciting conversation.

"Oh darling, our friend, the universe sent you. Thank you so much," one of them told me. "The pleasure is mine, ladies.

By the way, what do you know about the universe, so you call it your friend?" I asked them, hoping I had finally met people with the same interest. "Many things," they said in one voice. I was already into my break, but they were so knowledgeable about the topic that I was ready to spend my entire break listening to them. "Ladies, I'm so happy we met. Can we please continue with the conversation after I clock out?" I asked them. But just when I asked, I heard a painful scream coming from a male guest in the corner, and the next moment, his face was covered in blood. The scene was horrible, so I immediately called the bridge, gave them the location, and the captain made an announcement to notify the medical response team. In less than two minutes, they were in my section assisting the guest, and after the first aid, they brought him to the ship's hospital to take care of his injury.

Shocked by what happened, I apologized to the women and went for a break, but on the way to the crew mess, I first stopped at the hospital to ask for the guest. "He will be okay," shortly answered the nurse. Images of the guest's face, covered in blood, didn't let me sleep, and after two and a half hours of blindly staring at the TV, I was back in my section. There was also the ship's investigation officer, and from what he told me, the guest complained that his chair was placed just under the railing and that, while trying to raise himself after waking up, he hit the metal on which the railing was fixed. Needless to say, he is threatening to sue the company for negligence. I was worried about the guest, but I knew I didn't put the sun chair even close to the railing, so that was the last thing bothering me.

The thing with this cruise line is that they have been in the business for a long time, and nothing new can happen that could surprise them. And one of the things the Supervisors and Chief Housekeepers kept reminding us of in these few months was to put the sun chairs away from the railings in the corners. Two hours later, the investigation officer returned to my section and told me what I already knew. "I checked the camera, and the chair was where it was supposed to be. It was obvious on the recording that the guest was pushing the sun chair slowly under the railing, and he hit the railing's holder while raising himself. He did that on purpose," he said to me. Unfortunately, instead of enjoying the cruise, some people are looking for something to happen to them, so they can sue the company or get something for free. Today's guest hit his head so hard that it's a miracle he's still alive and won't even be rewarded for that. Not fair!!!

## **April 16th**

Three full days at sea are behind us; we have four more before we reach land. Despite everybody saying that the weather on this crossing will be rough, fortunately for the guests, so far, it's okay, and the water is calm. After a few conversations with beautiful guests today, I was also about to finish the day calmly and positively, but the supervisor came to my section in the evening and assured me that I won't. "If you continue like this, you will die! I'm serious!" he said. "You work all day in your section, clean cabins in the evening, and have a lot of s\*x with your girlfriend. I'm repeating. You are going to die if you continue like this!" "Yes, Chief. I do all that, but please don't worry. I'm in full

power, and I can manage. Plus, the Chief Housekeeper had come to me earlier with the same worries, and I told him to contact the shoreside office and ask for a salary increase for his people, so they don't need to do additional jobs. Let's see what will happen with that first," I replied. "It's up to you. I just wanted to express my concerns. By the way, make sure you don't become a father now. You are still too young for that," he told me, not knowing how technically advanced my girlfriend was.

He sounded caring, but while I didn't have a chance to meet Martin Luther King, I know my supervisor very well. And I'm sure the last thing he takes care of is my health, and his concern is more about the fact that despite all the privileges he has as an officer, his right hand is his best friend, and he never has time to go out on the ports. While he was talking, I imagined myself as a healthy young man taking care of himself on the highest level—eating well, resting well, and never drinking or smoking. And, on a beautiful sunny day, I go outside to do what I have to do, of course, by walking because that's good for my health, and suddenly somebody loses control of the vehicle and kills me right on the spot. I could also die choking on a healthy organic apple, being hit by thunder coming from a clear sky, and in other thousand bizarre ways. So, what's the point of taking care of what could happen? "Do the things while you can. Tomorrow isn't promised anyway," my grandfather used to say.

In the evening, they put a notice on I-95 informing the crew members that for a discounted price, they could go for dinner in some of the guests' restaurants on the 21st. And saying to my girl that I wanted to make a reservation, she went crazy. Thrilled that I was finally taking her to dinner;

tonight, she fell asleep while talking about the dress she would wear that night.

## **April 18th**

As we get closer to Europe, it's getting colder, and the open deck is emptier. So today, we started doing deep cleaning projects in our sections, and my job was to clean the sofa cushions with a steaming machine. The steaming machine brought terrible memories from the day I was killing bed bugs in the guests' rooms, but as if that wasn't enough, after staying in the same posture for three hours, I felt a sharp pain in my lower back. The pain wasn't naive, and after some 10 minutes of unsuccessful waiting to be gone, I called the supervisor and told him that I had to go to the hospital. And while that would be a straight okay from every other supervisor on this planet, this one told me to wait for him and came to my section upset a few minutes later, telling me he wasn't a supervisor from yesterday. His words made me furious, but I didn't throw him overboard. Without responding to his provocation, I went straight to the medical center, the doctor gave me some painkillers, and in an hour, I was back at work trying to understand why my countryman was such a big idiot. After all the hard work, his suspicion that I was simulating back pain was hurting, and thanks to his behavior, he is now dangerously close to getting the red card from me.

## **April 20th**

What I have with my girl is, as we call it here, 'ship's love,' and this type of love disappears on the day one partner leaves the ship. The simple truth about the cruise ship's crew is that we work hard for six to eight months without a single day off, and we all need an escape. For some, the escape is gambling in casinos on the ports; for others, it's drinking; and for the rest, it's s\*x. When it comes to relationships, almost nobody here will take them too seriously, and while we enjoy each other, we are also well aware that, most probably, it won't last forever. Some of us would eventually find our soulmate on the ship, but that's rare. Knowing that there is no future for my girl and me, in the last few days, I have been thinking about being less selfish and spreading my love further. "It's risky, and I can lose my girl, but if the idea passes, I will have a threesome for the first time in my life," was my thought before asking her tonight if she was okay with adding her roommate to the team. "Why are you late? I already spoke with her about that," she said, with sparks in her eyes.

## **April 21st**

After seven days of sailing, we finally reached land today. Our first stop in Europe was Funchal, Portugal, which is the capital of the Madeira archipelago and the most alive and colorful city I have ever been to. Funchal is a place we visit only once during this European season, so, for the afternoon break, we went outside and first visited the old town, where we enjoyed the beautiful architecture, narrow cobblestone streets, and painted doors all around.

After the short walk, we bought tickets for the cable car and went to Monte, from where we had a fantastic view of Funchal. There, we also visited the Monte Palace Tropical Garden, which is home to about 100 000 species of trees, plants, and flowers from all over the world. The Garden also contains small bridges, fountains, waterfalls, and a museum with over 1000 sculptures.

On the way back, we took a toboggan basket car and enjoyed the 2 km ride down Monte's streets, navigated by two persons pushing and pulling the basket car. Despite being pricey, the experience was fantastic, and it reminded me of my childhood when I was doing the same thing with my friends.

At the finishing line of the ride was Tobbogan café, where we drank Madeira's traditional drink, Poncha, a cocktail made of sugarcane rum, honey, and lemon juice. We enjoyed our day out but didn't have much time left from the break, so after the drink, we took a taxi and returned to the ship.

It's still spring in Europe, and the open deck is empty, so back in the section, I continued with the special cleaning. My project for this afternoon was to open and clean the drains in my section, but before starting, I saw the two ladies I met at the beginning of the cruise coming my way. After we recalled the accident with the guest who hit his head on the railing while we were talking that day, we continued our conversation about the fascinating universe. I thought I was ready to talk with anybody on that topic, but they were so impressive that there was nothing left for me other than turning to a sponge and trying to absorb as much as possible.

Today was about to be special for my girl, and she woke up this morning on the seventh sky, or whatever people call that feeling. But nothing from that moment was as expected. And how would it be, when she came with her roommate in the morning to ask me if I was okay to reserve a table for four because her roomie wanted to go with us? "That would be great," I said, having no other choice, and a single tear rolled down from my left eye. What was supposed to be a romantic dinner for the two of us turned out to be a dinner with friends. And that was just the beginning because my luck had one more surprise for me today.

After cleaning the cabins in a rush on the one-hour break in the evening, I continued in my section until 8:30 pm (whoever was going for dinner tonight had permission from the Chief Housekeeper to clock out half an hour earlier), and by nine, we were on our way to the restaurant.

Dressed in our best outfits, the hostess sat us at a nice table, and we started exploring the menu, which was crowded with options we were only partially understanding. A few minutes later, the waiter came to our table, and, playing safe, I ordered beef with something, and the other guy ordered chicken with something. The girls ordered too, and while we were waiting for the food, the Mauritian guy told us about his religion, how devoted he was, and why he didn't eat beef. Right after the guy finished his monologue, the waiter brought our dishes, and we jumped on the food as if we had been starving for a week—no class there! I was looking forward to finally tasting food that's different from the one we get in the crew mess, but before I said *bon appétit*, the Mauritian guy had already tasted the meat and started sweating.

"They gave me beef," he said, and after tasting mine, I confirmed I had the chicken. The waiter swapped the dishes covered with sauce, which is why we didn't notice his mistake on time. "I committed a sin. I have to take a shower," he said and ran out of the restaurant. Seeing that something was happening at our table, the assistant waiter, the waiter, and the maître d' came and apologized for the inconvenience. The Mauritian guy returned after about half an hour, and the trio returned to apologize for the mistake again and told us that the dinner was on the house. I respect the guy's religious beliefs, and I'm sorry for what happened to him, but if he had booked a separate table for himself and his girlfriend, he would have lowered the chances of getting the wrong dish by 50%. And I would have paid for my girl and lowered the pressure on me.

## **April 23rd**

Today, the captain parked the ship in Cádiz, Spain, which is one of the oldest cities in Europe, known for its endless beaches and the world's second most famous carnival after the one in Rio de Janeiro. It was still too early to swim, and we were late for the carnival, but fortunately, there were still many things to be seen. We started today's tour with a walk to the most famous monument there—the Catedral de Cádiz—and sat in a nearby restaurant where we had our lunch. From there, we continued through the narrow streets to the Cádiz Market, and after hundred meters, we got to the tallest watchtower in Cádiz called Tavira Tower, where, for a small fee, we climbed to the top and enjoyed the panoramic view of the entire city.

There were more attractions for us to see, but we didn't want to run on the way back, and after the tower, we returned to the ship.

Knowing that the Mauritian guy was on duty until late tonight, during the day, I organized in detail my first threesome with my girl and her roommate. Going step by step, I cleaned the cabins during the one-hour break in the evening, and right after we finished working for today, we did the setup, and in the next hour, we did everything imaginable and unimaginable. Once a fifteen-year-old boy's dream became a reality. Nobody reported the noise; the Mauritian guy didn't enter the cabin unexpectedly, and hopefully, he won't discover what happened. Finding out that I fixed his girl only two days after the awkward dinner would be too much for him.

## **April 25th**

After only two stops in Europe, my girl's mood about going outside changed completely. Now she is so eager to visit the places that she is researching them on the internet and making plans on how we can make the most of our time in each port. The Caribbean was too predictable. There were a few nice beaches in each port, and that's it. Still, as a European with no sea in my country, I had a great time there, but now it's my girl's time to enjoy all the history and beauty that Europe offers.

Today we visited Palma de Mallorca, which is known for its beautiful beaches and nightlife, and by all rankings, is one of the world's best places to live. Even though our afternoon

break wasn't enough for that, today we decided to visit both the Cathedral of Santa Maria and the Bellver Castle on the way back to the ship. So, once on break, we changed our clothes and took the shuttle bus that brought us to the 400-hundred-year-old architectural marvel built in Gothic style. We used the opportunity to take a few dozen photos of the impressive Catedral, and after only half an hour there, we rushed back to the shuttle bus. I can't say that we enjoyed the Catedral, but at least we caught the shuttle bus just before it left, and after a ten-minute ride, the bus left us on the main street under the Bellver Castle. It took us a lot of sweating to get there, but the view of the city, marina, and its thousands of yachts and boats definitely justified the climbing to the top. Built in the 14th century, the castle was used as a military base and prison. Now, people can enjoy musical performances and learn about the island's history by visiting the museum inside the castle, which consists of eight rooms with artifacts. After the short visit to Bellver Castle, we caught the next shuttle bus and returned to the ship on time, agreeing that we had made a mistake visiting both places in less than three hours. Palma de Mallorca is to be enjoyed fully and not in a rush like we did today, so, most probably, I will include it in the planned tour around Italy after I finish this contract.

## **April 27th**

Today we finally arrived in Civitavecchia, Italy, for our first turnaround in Europe, and if I don't fall apart in the meantime, I plan to use every opportunity to visit the beautiful places from our itinerary.

After finishing the section this morning, my supervisor again sent me to the suites to help the guy from India. My first experience with him was mildly said terrible, but the guy asked the Chief Housekeeper for me, and I accepted to go there because I wanted to see his reaction. Ashamed, he apologized for his behavior the previous time and said it was his first time working in the suites, so he felt under pressure. That explanation wasn't fully honest, but today, he gave his best to hide his BS character, and that's how we finished quickly with the suites. Happy with that, he gave me \$100 and asked me if I could help him on every turnaround day from now on. "I can't deal with your colleagues anymore. They are very slow and don't care at all," he said. On his revelation, I told him that if he wanted me there on every turnaround day, he must talk with the Chief Housekeeper, who, of course, doesn't give a \*\*\*\*\*(\*\*\*\*) about the rotation. He only cares about the job in the suites being done as best as possible and avoiding complaints from the guests. So, there's no doubt that I will help the guy until I finish my contract. And I am okay with doing that for a \$100 tip.

In the evening, my roommate came to the cabin dancing. "For years, I clean after the guests who traditionally f\*\*k a lot when on a cruise, and I always wondered how good the s\*x must be on those comfortable beds. But I was patient, and my day finally came. In the schedule for this cruise, every room in my section was occupied, but a couple was upgraded to a suite, and their room was empty in the evening. So, I didn't want to miss the opportunity, and after I finished with the rooms fast, I called the girl I fixed from time to time, you know, the one that cleans the section next to mine, and we had some fun. I wish I had fixed my supervisor instead, but I didn't dare to ask her because you

know how crazy and unpredictable she is. Unfortunately, it looks like they will bring somebody in that room tomorrow, but at least I tried the bed," he said. Just when he finished talking, his wife called him; he answered the video call at the same moment, showed her his bed, toilet, and closet, and without speaking, she hung up the phone. "I told you. Her 6th sense is developed like my first five altogether," he said, laughing.

Today, the colleague from Nepal went on vacation, and it was nice seeing his cheerful face this morning. His replacement will be a guy from the Dominican Republic, who also looks like a good guy. When it comes to me, I have two more months from the contract, and I look forward to my sign-off day, which looks like it's coming on a turtle.

## **April 29th**

After all the research we had done about the ports, I was already familiar with the beauty of Marseille. But I also knew that downtown wasn't close to the pier, so I was thinking about staying on the ship and resting today. However, my girl didn't want to hear about that, and once on a break, we took the shuttle bus that brought us close to the Old Port, which is where the locals and tourists enjoy the view of the impressive Notre-Dame de la Garde Basilica and hundreds of docked boats while sitting in the coffee bars and restaurants around. Even though we only partially belonged to one of those two categories, we enjoyed ourselves on the outside terrace of a bar, drinking some traditional Marseille drink whose name I totally forgot. Sitting in the sun and enjoying the view was making us happy, but we wanted

more, so we continued to the part of Marseille called Le Panier. There, we enjoyed the colorful houses and the street art, but we got lost while walking down the narrow streets, and with no internet access and not a single local who spoke English, we struggled to find our way to the bus. Fortunately, we recognized another couple working on our ship, which was nice enough to direct us. After everything, we still returned to the ship 15 minutes before our next shift, but that didn't change my girl's plan, and she insisted on exercising before returning to duty. "It's okay to be a few minutes late," she said and pushed me onto the chair.

In the afternoon, I met a Norwegian couple who said they had spent the last ten years cruising. Listening to their stories from the high seas was highly addictive, but since it was my first time talking with Norwegians, I was more interested in how they developed that much as a country and used the opportunity to ask them. "Our secret is the upbringing we have received from our parents, which we also teach our kids. 'Always be happy with what you have, but never be satisfied, and always ask for more' is our simple motto in life. For example, if the school is 5 km away, we won't stop until we get a school built in our suburb. Of course, we have natural resources, but I think our attitude of always asking for more brought us where we are now," said the husband.

## **April 30th**

It's well known that the Turkish crew in the ship's restaurants, bars, shops, and casino gets more tips than anybody else, and today, they showed again how good they

are at selling. Together with my girl, I went out to Barcelona this afternoon to buy a pair of sneakers, and while walking around, we found a huge store for sports equipment owned by Turks. And once inside the store, we realized how difficult it would be to leave the place with money still in our pockets. While at the store, we had a dedicated guy who stayed with us and ensured that we bought what we needed and didn't need. The choice was extensive, and I bought a pair of sneakers, two t-shirts, sweatpants, and a windbreaker jacket, all of them high quality for an affordable price (except for the sneakers, which cost me 170 euros). My girlfriend purchased a beautiful polo t-shirt, but what she fell in love with was a nice pair of sneakers. They didn't have the red color my girl was looking for, but the guy went to another store, bought the red version of the same sneakers, and sold them to my girl!

From the store, we went for a few drinks in one of the numerous bars around, resulting in our first argument later on. Walking down Barcelona's most famous street, La Rambla, I couldn't stop myself from staring at a lovely girl in tight jeans in front of me. My girlfriend was cool initially, but after losing the girl in tight jeans, I continued gazing at another in even tighter jeans, and my girl asked me what the \*\*\*\* I was doing. I didn't negate my misconduct, but although I had never seen her doing that, I had to defend myself somehow, so I asked if she wasn't doing the same when she would see a beautiful guy. Expectedly, she got offended by the question, and I had nothing else to do but apologize.

My supervisor uses every opportunity to play dirty with me, so today, I asked myself why I wouldn't do the same to him

at least once. Today was the last day of the month, so he reminded us a few times during the day to approve our working hours after the last clock-out for this month. "You must approve your hours before midnight. Preferably at 9 when you finish working," he repeated all day long. Say No More. After clocking out in the evening, I cleaned the cabins I had for today and returned to mine at 11 pm. Five minutes later, the cabin phone rang, and knowing why my supervisor was calling; I didn't answer. He called two more times, and 15 minutes before midnight, I took the elevator, went to the computer, and approved my working hours for the month. Returning to my cabin, I heard the phone ringing again, and this time I answered. It was him again, screaming and asking why I hadn't approved my hours yet, and why it took him ten calls to get me on the phone. "First thing, it isn't true that I haven't approved the hours, and second, I'm off duty, and I'm not obligated to be in the cabin answering the phone. The next time you disturb me with midnight calls, I will report you to the HR manager," I said to him, and I heard a noise that seemed like it was coming from his phone smashing against the wall. Fixing him this way didn't make me happy, but I had to let him know that despite being a good guy, I could still come up with crazy ideas and easily destroy his career on the ship.

## **May 2nd**

"I need more money for my wedding, and that's why I extended my contract," my Indonesian colleague said to me in the evening. "While life on my island is cheap, the marriage ceremony is very expensive. According to my tradition, before I get married, I have to organize a ceremony

for my parents first where they will get remarried, and then my wedding follows. We believe that's the only way for us to have a prosperous marriage. All that costs money, but the biggest expense will be the two big golden crowns I have to rent. They alone will cost me \$5000 for three days. So, let me know if you have some extra cabins for cleaning," he said, laughing. The best thing I learned in these six months of working with people from different nationalities and cultures is to accept people the way they are and respect their beliefs without trying to understand them. So, after he was done explaining his tradition, I said nothing.

### **May 3rd**

Today we were in Lisbon, Portugal, and looking for what we could do outside, we decided to take Tram 28, which is one of the city's most recognizable tourist attractions. For that to happen, we first took a taxi to Rossio Square and continued to Martim Moniz Square, which is the starting point for the yellow tram that brought us through the streets of Lisbon. We enjoyed the breathtaking architecture of the Sao Vicente de Fora Monastery, Lisbon Cathedral, Portugal Parliament Building, and Estrela Basilica and finished in Campo de Ourique District. Using the same route, the yellow tram brought us back to Martim Moniz Square, where we took a taxi and returned to the ship.

### **May 4th**

It looked like a promising day out when this afternoon, together with five countrymen, I went to the Cádiz

downtown, where we chose a pretty empty bar because of our loud nature. We were a company of males drinking beers and enjoying the beautiful weather, but after about an hour, the girlfriend of the countryman who works as an assistant waiter joined us with one more girl, and they also started drinking. Although we changed the topic and started talking about pop culture and the impact of global warming on the reproduction of wine flies, the atmosphere was still good, and we enjoyed our time off. And that was until my countryman's girlfriend finished her drink, stood on her chair, and started dancing. The situation was quite uncomfortable for all of us, but on his insistence, she came down, and everything was back to normal. But two songs later, she got on the chair again, and this time, he dragged her behind the bar and slapped her a few times. No matter her provocative dancing in front of his friends, what my countryman did was wrong, and as expected, she started screaming and ran back to the ship with the other girl. It was already late, but knowing that we could all get in big trouble, we stopped drinking and ordered food and tons of water.

We returned to the ship at the latest possible time and passed the security check successfully, but unfortunately, the HR manager was on I-95 waiting for my countryman. The bad news traveled fast, and once back on duty, I found out that my friend had lost his job and got a free one-way ticket home tomorrow from Malaga. Those are the rules. There's zero tolerance for alcohol and violence on and off the ship, especially when the violence comes after alcohol abuse. And the free one-way flight ticket means he lost any chance to come back on this cruise line. He can work for another one, but whoever did that said there was no comparison.

## May 7th

Although it wasn't my turn, at the morning meeting today, the supervisor told me that my side duty for this turnaround day would be to clean bed bug-infested guest rooms. That side duty is especially difficult because, together with a colleague, for a few hours, I have to work with a steam machine and a strong chemical while sweating in a coverall that covers 99 % of me. And even worst, killing all those bed bugs makes me automatically a serial killer. There isn't a discussion about that. I had done that massacre already not long after coming on the ship, but nobody is perfect, and this time, I didn't want to go for another bed bugs duty and was thinking about how to avoid that.

It doesn't matter how bad we believe those small living organisms are; they didn't come from the sky. They also have parents, siblings, and other relatives. Only, I'm not sure if they celebrate birthdays, go to school, cut their nails, have their scientists that have discovered some cream for eternal life, or die when their biological clock stops ticking. And, of course, when people kill them because they want to sleep with them on the same mattress. Of course, they can attach themselves to humans and drink some blood, but how much blood can a bed bug drink?!?!

I was thinking about how to say no to my supervisor, but I didn't need to. Going to the locker to take the mop bucket, I saw the Chief Housekeeper shouting at him and passing by them; he told me to forget the bed bugs and help the Indian guy clean the suites. "I spoke with the Chief Housekeeper a few days ago; he called your supervisor on the phone in my presence and told him to send you to my section on every

turnaround day. But still, he sent one of your colleagues this morning. I called the Chief Housekeeper again, and he couldn't believe that your countryman acted opposite his instruction," the Indian guy said, obviously upset. My supervisor started making big mistakes, and it looks like I won't need to throw him into the water anymore or kill his goldfish and make it look like a suicide, but take popcorn and watch him fix himself.

The spring in Europe still behaves like autumn, and the temperatures aren't allowing people to occupy the open deck yet. And that means an easy life for me. I still do a lot of cabins, go out to every port, and exercise a few times a day with my girl, but the ten hours in my section now can't be compared to the amount of work I had in the Caribbean. It looks self-destructive, but I started missing the madness in my section, so I look forward to the end of the month when the temperatures will increase, and the open deck will get packed again.

## **May 9th**

This morning I received the letter of employment for the next contract, and I could say I was lucky to get another ship. Not that I don't like this one, but every ship does the same itinerary for two to three years, and returning there means visiting the same ports over and over again. If there is no change in the LOE, in the next contract, I will have an opportunity to visit Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, and the French Polynesian islands of Papeete and Bora Bora for the transpacific cruise.

Working on a cruise ship is physically demanding and mentally challenging, and I know that many crew members use gambling on the ports as an escape. But, until today, I wasn't aware that their number is so big that a few crew members on the ship (including the countryman who works as a waiter in the main dining room) make extra money by giving loans to those people. "All gamblers from the restaurants here know that I give loans, and I simply don't have enough money to give to everybody interested. You make good money from your side job, so I can easily find you customers if you want. They are paying back their loans on time with some interest, so you will make easy money without killing yourself cleaning the cabins," he said. Making some easy money after all the hard work sounded good, but I definitely wouldn't do that on someone else's misfortune. So I thanked my countryman for the idea and told him I wasn't interested.

Tomorrow is my mother's birthday, and I decided to surprise her by making a video compilation of crew members wishing her a happy birthday in their language. The idea is far from original, but there isn't a doubt that it will always work for anybody. So today, I used the two breaks to clean the cabins and spent two hours on I-95 in the evening, where I stopped 19 crew members from different nationalities, who were all nice enough to say happy birthday to my mother.

## **May 10th**

After I sent the video last night, I called my mother this morning, and she started crying, telling me how happy I had made her. I know she will celebrate her birthday this year

on the day I return home, but it is how it is, and I look forward to seeing my family again one and a half months from now.

Today we docked in Barcelona again and decided to borrow bicycles from the crew welfare and visit some of the numerous attractions there. Of course, we didn't have enough time to see everything in three hours, but we will return more times to Barcelona and try to cover as much as possible.

With the help of the map, the first place we visited today was the Cathedral of the Holy Cross. From there, we headed to La Sagrada Família, which is Gaudí's yet unfinished masterpiece made of beautifully shaped stone and stained glass. Our main goal for today was to get inside, but the place was crowded, so after taking a couple of hundred photos, we continued to the next spot on our map—Casa Mila. Built in a modernistic style with a stone facade in irregular forms, Casa Mila is one of only a few residential buildings that Gaudí has signed. Researching the building yesterday, I found out that there is a lot to be seen inside as well, but we didn't have time for that, so we went to the last spot planned for today—Casa Batllo. Also constructed out of stone, ceramics, and stained glass, this building is another must-visit architectural marvel designed by Gaudí that was built originally as a residential house but now is redesigned and serves as a museum with a colorful facade, skull-looking balconies, and oversized windows on the first floor.

Overall, Barcelona is one of a kind, and we had a great day because of the good planning. If I were planning the love part of my life like that, I would have had two girlfriends

instead of one. But, at least my right hand isn't my best friend, and I'm happy and appreciate that. Everything was nice, and we enjoyed it, but we were running out of time, and after another photo session with Casa Batllo, we returned to the ship.

The guy who had been cutting my hair for a few months went home on the previous turnaround day, and after a short investigation, I found another guy whose primary job on the ship is Oiler in the engine room. More people recommended him, and tonight he proved them correct, cutting my hair just as I wanted.

## **May 12th**

Today, we visited Gibraltar, a small territory known as the gate to the Mediterranean Sea, which is why powerful countries fought to take it over in the past. The place is so small that the main road passes through the airport's runway, and cars must wait for planes to land or take off so they can pass. It's a territory attached to Spain but still British. The beautiful weather and cars driving on the right side of the road confuse you, but everything else reminds you that you are on British territory—they use the pound as their primary currency, have the recognizable red phone boxes, police officers' uniforms, and so on.

When deciding what to visit first in Gibraltar, there is no doubt and not too many choices as well. You just buy a ticket for the cable car, and in a few minutes, you are on the 'Rock of Gibraltar,' enjoying the magnificent view of Gibraltar, Spain's border city, and the African coastline

where the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean waters meet. Monkeys rule the place, but while taking a photo with one of them, we were warned not to end up having items stolen from the backpack and even getting a scratch after a wrong move.

After we enjoyed the view for some 15 minutes, we proceeded to the 100 million-year-old—and empty at that time—St. Michael's cave, which serves as a concert hall, so we didn't miss the opportunity to test the acoustic inside by laughing and making strange sounds. Gibraltar is a duty-free territory, so returning to the ship, I didn't miss the opportunity to spend some money on stuff I needed and a souvenir for the fridge back home.

## **May 13th**

Another visit to Lisbon today. The last time there, we did the right thing by taking the yellow Tram 28 and saw some of the most recognizable buildings and monuments, but although I didn't see anything of Lisbon this time, the day out was adventurous, thanks to the \*\*\*\*\* taxi driver. Talking with the younger colleague from the Philipines this morning, he told me that there is a sports equipment mall, and although I recently visited and spent good money in the one in Barcelona, I decided to go to this one too to find out if there was something for me.

Trying to cut the expense of the costly taxi, my colleague took two more countrymen with us for what turned out to be, by far, the craziest ride in my life. It looked like a normal thing for them, but seeing the people jumping from one line

to another while driving 100 km/hr was a scary experience, and I could say that I had never been that afraid for my life before. But I was also amazed at how skilled they were and expect the next Michael Schumacher to come from Lisbon.

Happy that we reached the mall in one piece, the short Filipino guys, who are big basketball fans, jumped straight to the sneakers section, and two of them bought Air Jordans. I bought a nice pair of sneakers too, and quite expensive and ugly workout shorts that I don't think I will ever wear. And the reason I bought those shorts was a combination of the stress I got from the crazy taxi ride and the beautiful girl who was pushing me hard to buy them. Just by looking at her seductively biting her lips, I knew that ignoring her would be such a big sin that my karma wouldn't recover in the next 30 years. On her insistence, I even gave her a 5 euros tip. On the way back, using mimics, we negotiated the same price of €20 for the taxi, but when the driver brought us to the ship, he asked for €27 that was on his display. We reminded him that we already had an agreement for €20, but he kept saying 'English no' and showing the amount on the screen. I was fed up with everybody there trying to play dirty, but my colleague was pretty cool. After giving him seven euros extra, with a smile on his face, he told the driver that the next time we were in Lisbon, he would fix his wife for that seven euros. Because he couldn't understand English, the driver agreed to that, and we separated in a friendly manner.

## May 15th

Before I came on the ship, one of my plans was to spend part of the money I would make on renovating the first floor of my house. After years of working in construction, my father knows that business very well, and on our last call a few days ago, he suggested that the renovation be done before I return from the ship so that I can spend the two months at home resting. Considering how much I exhausted myself in this contract, his idea seemed good, so today, I went outside in Malaga to send the money. The money transfer provider I found was a bit more expensive than the others, but I ignored that because we are all part of the same system in which everybody should make a living. If the people regularly cruising with us wake up tomorrow with the thought that there are cheaper options for cruising, I would most probably lose my job and wouldn't be in a position to send money anyway. After I sent the money, I went with my girl to Malaga's Paseo del Parque and enjoyed walking down the beautiful promenade, surrounded by palm trees, different plants, and a perfectly cut hedge.

Like every single day, more crew members today created lifetime memories by breaking the ship rules. No doubt, the winners were two crew members who returned to the ship running just before the security guards removed the gangway. Needless to say, the balconies and the open deck were full of guests who enjoyed the free entertainment, yelling and applauding like they were in a football stadium. So far, I haven't witnessed a crew member or a guest being left on a port, but from what I was told, if anybody misses the ship, they will be responsible for arranging their transportation to the next port of call.

## May 18th

Although I have never been to Italy before, I have done lots of research, so I visually know many places there and their history. And I don't think many countries offer anything close to what Italy offers. Today, we stopped in Genoa for the second time since we are in Europe, and this time, I didn't miss going out and feeling the spirit of the country I fell in love with without visiting it even once. Genoa has a rich maritime history, and the most recognizable thing there is the harbor, which is one of the biggest in Europe and the primary source of income for the city.

Together with my girl, we borrowed bicycles from crew welfare today and soon realized why they say Genoa is perhaps the most underrated city in Italy and wrongly never put in the same sentence with Milano, Venezia, or Florence. After the enjoyable ten-minute ride alongside the harbor, our first stop was at Via Garibaldi, which is the main street in Genoa and a UNESCO heritage site surrounded by palaces, churches, small coffee shops, and restaurants. From there, we continued to what the locals consider the most important holy place for them—the ten centuries-old Cathedral called San Lorenzo. Our next stop was the Porta Soprana, which is the direct access to Genoa from the East. It consists of two towers connected by a beautiful arch, and it's another ten centuries old historical site built in the past to protect the city. The last attraction we visited today was the main square in Genoa, named Piazza De Ferrari, with a big bronze fountain in the center and a few breathtaking palaces around.

Despite covering such a small area of Genoa today, we saw a lot, and we look forward to our next visit to discover more. If I get the opportunity on one of our next stops, I would like to go to Portofino and Santa Margarita, but they are 40 km from the pier, and more pieces should come in place for that to happen. Before we returned to the ship, we tasted the famous Italian bread called focaccia, which we bought from a street seller.

After I finished working today, I called home, and my father told me he had ordered new doors and windows for the first floor and had already started removing the old furniture and other stuff that didn't serve us anymore. The renovation includes changing the water pipes around the house, installing new tiles in the bathroom, new flooring, and so on. It's a big project, and I wanted to help with everything, but my father insisted that I should rest.

## **May 19th**

When it comes to Marseille, there is no time for rest, so once we went on break this afternoon, we took the shuttle bus that brought us to Musee Regards de Provence. From there, with a taxi, we went to Palais Longchamp, which is an impressive monument built to celebrate the opening of the Marseille Canal that brought drinkable water to Marseille, initiating the rise of the city. The monument consists of a magnificent fountain surrounded by two museums—the Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Fine Arts. And behind the monument are the gardens, where we spent another half an hour before returning to the ship.

In the evening, I encouraged a verbal fight between two waiters I cleaned for, but I don't feel guilty and expect to have a good sleep tonight. Despite making good money as a waiter and getting his room perfectly clean for a relatively small fee, one of them chose to spoil the relationship with his roommate and, a few days ago, canceled my service. That, of course, put me in a bad position, and since then, except for making his bed, I was cleaning the bathroom he was also using, taking out the garbage he was throwing, and vacuuming the floor. Feeling like the last idiot, I told the guy tonight that it made no sense to continue cleaning his roommate's BS and get paid only by him. That made him upset, and he started a verbal fight with his roommate, but when he saw that he couldn't change anything, he apologized and canceled the service for him as well. I'm very busy anyway, and I go home soon, so, at this point, I'm thankful to anybody who would do that.

## **May 20th**

"I never in my life won a bingo, never won in my sports betting career, or in a dispute with a woman. But I kept believing, and today I won a chance to be tested for alcohol," my roommate told me tonight. "Fortunately, I didn't drink last night or this morning, but even though I passed the testing, this was just another wake-up call for me." The alcohol testing happens when a crew member does something stupid, or, as in my roommate's case, from time to time, they would randomly choose 30 to 50 crew members for a group test. The alcohol policy on the ship is strict, and the allowed percentage in the blood is very low—on and off duty. Sailing on a cruise ship is the safest way of

traveling. However, despite being small, the possibility of a Titanic scenario is always there, and the argument that a drunk crew member can't help himself and others in the worst-case scenario makes a lot of sense. On the other side, despite the amount of alcohol they sell to the crew members being limited on paper, it depends on the bartenders, whose salary depends on the amount of alcohol they sell. So, the situation is 'the crazy f\*\*\*s the confused.'

## **May 23th**

Another crew drill today, and as always, I had to listen to a few crew members around complaining, saying they preferred working something over standing in one place for an hour. The reason behind their complaints is that they are used to moving all day long, and when standing in one position and having nothing to do, they think about how much they miss their family, about the problems they have, and problems they don't have but will appear because of their overthinking. All they need to do is to program their minds not to think about the things they can't change at the moment or, if they can afford, to resign from their contracts and enjoy home with their loved ones.

Today we were in Lisbon again, and tired of running on every single port to return on time, for today, we planned only to climb to the Castle of St. George, which is close to the cruise terminal, and to spend the break enjoying the view of the beautiful Lisbon. But, once there, we found out that there is also a nice restaurant inside the Castle, and despite the prices being over the roof, we decided to have our lunch there. I spent over €200 and was aware of the fact that with

that money, I could have fed an entire village in some countries for one month, but at least I removed the pressure I was feeling. Not that she was asking me for something, but I often catch her looking from below at her ship friends living the best lives sponsored by their boyfriends, and I guess how she feels. After lunch, we descended to Alfama and walked down the narrow cobblestone streets of the oldest part of Lisbon. The area is called a village inside the city and is home to many churches, museums, small squares, colorful houses, coffee shops, and restaurants. But, what gives the most spirit to the place is the tradition that people there have to sell drinks and snacks straight out of their living room windows. And that was so gorgeous that we had no choice but to buy something. We got a tasty sour cherry liqueur called ginja, and a few houses down the street, we got one more, which was even better. After getting another one from the same window, we kept walking around, got lost, and returned to the ship only ten minutes before the beginning of our next shift.

## **May 24th**

For the last few days, my roommate had been complaining about pain in the abdomen, and after the unsuccessful treatment with medicines, this morning, the ship's doctor sent him to a hospital in Cádiz. I didn't even know what was happening until my supervisor came to my section around ten o'clock and told me that my roommate had been diagnosed with an inflamed appendix and would undergo surgery tomorrow. "Despite the short recovery time, his contract ends soon, so he decided to go home after the surgery. Go to your cabin and pack his suitcase. The HR

manager will send it to the hospital," he said, and I went straight to the cabin and packed his stuff, including the artificial va\*ina that he was showing to his wife on the video calls as proof that he didn't need a real one while on the ship. He is a good guy and all that, but I hope my next roommate won't try to charge me a daily fee for fixing my girl in the cabin. And when it comes to that, tonight was my first time fully enjoying myself with my girl without being afraid that my roommate would suddenly enter the cabin while we were naked on the floor.

## **May 26th**

I never thought I would do what I did today, but I'm sick of the games my supervisor is playing. Despite my section being very busy this morning, he asked me to help my Mauritian colleague on the other end of the ship, but unfortunately, at that time, the Chief Housekeeper passed through my section and asked my supervisor why my area was unattended and in a mess. The colleague from the Dominican Republic who heard their conversation came to me later and said that instead of telling the truth, the supervisor said he didn't know where I was. I was fuming beyond control when, an hour later, the Chief Housekeeper again passed through my section and didn't miss asking me why I wasn't in my workplace earlier. I was looking forward to telling him the truth and fixing my supervisor on the way, but at the last moment, I got a better idea of how to do that and just used the excuse, which nobody has ever found a response to—that I was in the toilet. Although we had a few uncomfortable situations, like the master hearing and the argument about my side job, the Chief Housekeeper has a

good opinion of me and appreciates my hard work, so I noticed that he even felt sorry for showing suspicion with that question. Today was the last day of the cruise, and I decided to go to the ship's hospital in the middle of the luggage operation to complain about back pain, which is very common when lifting hundreds of suitcases. "Nobody will suspect that I'm cheating, I will rest the next ten days, and most importantly, I will give some well-deserved headache to my supervisor," was my thought that would never have come to my mind if he was treating me like a human. I started working not long after walking on this earth, and I have never missed a day at work. But this time, I was so pissed, and half an hour after starting with the luggage, I went to the hospital, where they gave me some painkillers and asked me to return in the morning for another check. No problem, I will go there five times every day, but the \*\*\*\*\* supervisor won't see me on the next cruise.

The temperatures are high already; the open deck is busy, and the Indonesian colleague will have a bit of a hard time covering my section too. But, he is just a lazy guy having fun when watching my countryman and supervisor at the same time playing dirty with me every single day, so let him work his \*\*\* off the next cruise, which will also be his last for this contract—well deserved headache for both of them for the next ten days.

## **May 27th**

Today we had another turnaround day, and I was about to get a new roommate in the morning—my girlfriend. Actually, we went to the housekeeping coordinator

yesterday, but she told us we would need to wait today for her to move to my cabin. In our heads, we already had a couples cabin, but just before she brought her suitcase, the Indian guy whom I help in the suites came to ask me if I was okay with transferring to another cabin so he could move into mine with his girlfriend. My answer was a big no at first, but my business instinct turned on, and I decided to try my luck and asked for something that looked impossible. "I have a girlfriend too, but for \$1000, I would move to another cabin," I told him. "Give me five minutes," he said and disappeared. I could have changed my mind and told him I was joking, but I didn't because I knew I could transfer to a cabin with a guy that works in the night shift housekeeping team. I would be alone with my girl in the evening and the morning, and we could go to her cabin for the afternoon break. Not five, but three minutes later, the guy was back with the money, and we went to the housekeeping coordinator and told her he wanted to move to my cabin with his girlfriend and that I would like to move to the cabin of the night shift guy. At first, she didn't want to bother herself with making that many last-minute changes, but the guy gave her \$200, and in the end, everybody was happy.

The Indian guy who has been a stateroom attendant for 17 years, making between \$4000 and \$5000 a month, was okay to give me \$1000 and \$200 to the housekeeping coordinator, and I was more than happy to get one month's salary for moving my suitcase from one cabin to another. But, it turned out that not everybody was happy with my decision. The Indian guy's girlfriend is a colleague of my girl, and it didn't take her too much time to pass the information about the deal I made. Half an hour after I brought my stuff to the new cabin, extremely upset, she knocked on the door as if the

ship was sinking and woke up my new roommate. What a first impression that was. Ashamed, I introduced myself to the guy first and, aware of what was next, opened the door. The amount of rage in my girl's eyes was pretty high, and looking like a cobra ready to kill, she started screaming at me, saying that I sold her for \$1000. But that wasn't true at all. I just made a good deal, got something almost the same as a couples cabin, and easy money that I was ready to spend entirely with her and make our last month together memorable. Still, I couldn't calm her down, and she left, telling me she would need time to reconsider our relationship. Tired of her philosophy that we are on this planet just to have s\*x and nothing else, I didn't have anything against that and told her to take her time.

Later in the evening, I asked the new colleague from the Philippines if he could clean my cabins on this cruise, and he was amazed by the idea. He has experience cleaning cabins as a side job on his last contract, and if the people are happy with his work, he can continue cleaning the cabins after I sign off exactly one month from now.

## **May 29th**

Knowing that I can't change the past, I usually avoid looking back, but I've had too much free time since yesterday and realized I couldn't spend ten days in the present moment. So, after a whole day of sleeping yesterday, today I woke up wondering what it would have been like if I started working on cruise ships after I finished high school instead of spending another four years in university and graduating in biotechnical science. That course had a very good potential

at the time I enrolled, but soon after graduation, I saw how my colleagues with the lowest grades were getting the good and well-paid jobs in the field and realized where I lived and how my country became a third-world country. Anyway, I can't say I threw the best four years of my life in the garbage because I had some great colleagues there, and we had a fantastic time together.

A few days ago, I met a couple from the US, and they gave me a lot of material to think about. "We have 164 cruises together and other cruises from the time before we met. Cruising is our passion, and a few hours after disembarking from this one, we will embark on another ship," the woman said and left me thinking of how big of a difference there is in the mindset of Americans and the mindset of the people in my country. Most of our guests are Americans, and talking with tons of them; I realized they work hard until they retire, and a good number of them spend the rest of their lives traveling and enjoying their lives. On the other side, not many people in my country are financially able to do that, but a big majority of those that can afford it would never travel but would buy a piece of land to grow their food. That's still great, but the scarcity mindset they have developed as a result of living in a corrupted country, where fear rules the people, would never allow them to enjoy.

## **May 30th**

Despite being together in the cabin for the last four days, my new roommate never says anything if not asked, and we haven't exchanged more than five words at once yet. So, the only thing I know about him is that he is from India and

works as a night shift cleaner who sleeps only a few hours a day and spends the rest of his free time reading books. It looks like he is strange, but I believe he is just upset, considering the way I introduced myself the first day. Because there is also a possibility that I may be sharing the cabin with a sex offender who could handcuff me while I sleep and fix me, last night, I called his countryman who works with me. "I don't know anything about him, and I don't know anybody who knows anything about him," he said. In normal circumstances, sharing seven square meters with somebody and not talking would be an uncomfortable experience, but my life on the ship was crazy enough, so, for now, I enjoy the quiet medical time off.

Having nothing smarter to do in the last few days, I started missing my girl, but I don't think I did anything wrong with the cabin change, so I didn't call her for the last four days. Knowing her addiction, I thought she found somebody else, but tonight she came to the cabin, and we spoke for half an hour. And we were on a good path when somebody called her on the work phone and changed her mood instantly. She was talking and yelling something in Spanish and was so upset that on her way to the bathroom, she slammed the door and took it out of its place. I have never seen her that upset and that sexy. Fixing the door was easy, but I didn't stop there and wanted to fix her too. I got extremely horny and, expecting to have a once-in-a-lifetime experience, took out my reproduction tool and used it to slap her face. Unfortunately, that made the situation even worse, and she left my cabin, saying it was over.

## June 1st

Another day and another visit to the ship's hospital this morning. "Looking beautiful today. How is your back?" the nurse asked me when I entered the room. Asking about my back was her job, but telling me I looked beautiful today was part of the seduction game she plays with every guy she encounters while in a relationship with the Chief Engineer and the Chief Engineer only. Knowing that I have no chance of recreating some of the many adult movies I have watched in which the patient changes the role and solves the nurse's problems, I opened up about the looking beautiful today part, which woke up painful, almost forgotten memories.

"When I was ten, I started going to the local library with my sister. Reading was our favorite thing, but on one of our first visits, the woman there told her colleague to look at my sister and me and explain to her how my sister could be that beautiful while I was that ugly. And if someone who should be a pedagogue in the first place calls you ugly, there isn't any doubt that you are. But, although she was the most idiotic librarian in the world for putting that kind of seed in a ten-year-old brain, later on in my life, I realized that only a woman could be beautiful, while the destiny of every man on earth is to be born ugly, live ugly, and die ugly," I said to her. Not that I was serious about the second part, but knowing that I couldn't eat from the Chief Engineer's plate, I was trying to get the maximum out of the situation. And I got it—feeling sorry about my childhood trauma, the nurse gave me a long hug and warmed my heart with her huge b\*\*bs. The feeling was good, but within those ten seconds, I also realized that clothes are the biggest fraud in human

history, serving only a tiny percentage of people who make money producing and selling them.

## **June 2nd**

I wasn't really afraid of being handcuffed and fixed while sleeping, but I was curious about whom I breathed the same air with. So this morning, I started a conversation with my roommate and discovered that the guy is a true legend.

"I have worked for this company as a cleaner for seven years, and I've hated my job since day one. But I also don't want to quit before becoming financially independent and working for myself one day. That's why, once I finish this contract, I want to start my real estate company, and now I'm fully focused on learning everything about that. In fact, after every contract on the ships, I invested 100 percent of the money in some business, and I failed in everything I did so far," he said, laughing. "After my first contract, I invested all the money in opening a small restaurant that didn't work as planned, and I returned to the ship broke. After the second contract, I started selling low-quality electronic devices and almost ended up in jail when several people reported getting electric shocks. After the third one, I bought a limo that I rented out, but it turned out that the auto was shiny only on the outside, and I didn't have money left to fix all the mechanical issues that appeared. I had several more attempts, and tired of all the failures, at the end of the previous contract, I tried my luck in the ports' casinos and lost all the money playing black or red on roulette," he said with a 'that's the life' face.

I admired him for following his dream, but I couldn't understand why he didn't want to apply for a better job on the ship, make more money, and increase his chances of success in some business. And saying that his answer blew my mind would be an understatement. "Working as a cleaner gives me peace of mind and time to think about how to achieve my goals. That would be impossible if I worked under pressure as a stateroom attendant, waiter, or any other position. Also, if I make more money here, I will most probably get too comfortable and end up working on the ship until I retire. Some of my kids will waste my money, and I will spend the rest of my life regretting not doing something for myself. My everyday goal here is to get as upset as possible because, in those situations, I'm most creative and motivated to find solutions and fix my life. For example, a few days ago, I found a gigantic poop in the main dining room toilet, and because I couldn't flush it, I put on three pairs of gloves and finished the job. That made me so furious that I got hyper-motivated and wrote a perfect sales copy on two pages for my future real estate business. A day without getting upset on the ship is lost for me," he finished his impressive story. Most of the crew members I have met so far are comfortable with their jobs and aren't interested in learning new things and building something for themselves, and that's why I'm happy to see my roommate playing in another league, with a mindset that is out of every box possible.

## **June 3rd**

I remember my younger days and how difficult it was to go to school with a bag full of books and work clothes and

continue from there on the construction site until 7-8 pm. I was doing construction for the weekends, too, let alone the summers, when I worked 12-15 hours under the extremely hot sun and without a single cloud in the sky during those three months. Still, in my memory, those were happy times, and I'm grateful that my parents let me contribute to the family budget and grow into a humble human. On the other side, now I work on a cruise ship, make relatively good money, and travel the world, but something is always missing. Recalling some memories and trying to understand what happened in the meantime, I think the turning point, not only for me but for society as well, was the moment we connected on the internet, which brings many advantages, but it looks like we still have difficulty in learning how to use it properly.

On the internet, I found out that there is more. And soon after, I realized there will always be more. And there will never be enough. I was also happy with my first girlfriend until we connected on the internet and started watching adult movies. We both realized there was something more exciting out there and ended up in a never-ending cycle of searching for that 'more.' We were young, and nobody told us that the roles in those movies were chosen actors and actresses from around the world, and those one-hour intense movies were filmed in one week. The internet didn't come with a user manual and only caused unhappiness to those who didn't know how to use it. Still, I lived in both realities, and although I was happy living in darkness, living a less happy life in daylight is what I would choose over and over again.

Thinking about my (ex)girlfriend on the ship, I feel that the cabin switch was just an excuse for our relationship to explode, and after everything, it looks like what happened was somehow expected. We lived like there was no tomorrow, having s\*x three to four times every day and going outside at almost every port. It seems we got tired of each other. And I'm sure she also got tired of seeing her friends, most coupled with officers and other high-paid guys who take them to dinners and buy them expensive gifts every second day. What I was spending on her wasn't too much, but we enjoyed our relationship, which wasn't based on material stuff.

## **June 5th**

After the valuable conversation with my roommate, in the last few days, I started again thinking about my life after the ships. Coming here was the best decision I ever made, and I will probably work on ships for two or three more years, but I don't think all the benefits could justify staying in this industry for more than that. So, thinking of what I could do in the future, yesterday, I started reading the tons of notes I have on business ideas that I always bring with me. Not because they are mine but some of them have huge potential, and I have to choose the one that is most suitable for me and develop a concept of how to grow the idea into an actual business. Working for somebody else means less responsibility and less headache, but I get sick every time I remind myself that it doesn't matter how hard I work; my day depends on how my supervisor wakes up in the morning.

Another problem when working for a salary is the fact that whether you make \$200 or \$2000, in the end, you always have the same money in your pocket. When you make \$2000 a month, you will spend \$200 on sneakers instead of \$20 when you earn \$200. Also, when I was making \$200 a month and when the roof of my house was leaking, I would fix it myself. Now when I make \$2000, I want to change the roof. Besides keeping myself busy these ten days with thinking and even more thinking, I call my parents every day. We mostly talk about the renovation of the first floor, but I still haven't told my mother that I'm on medical leave. Even though I'm okay, telling her that I visit the ship's hospital every day could easily kill her.

Today was the last day of the cruise, and tomorrow morning I will return to work. I've never felt better, and I look forward to more interactions with the guests and listening to what they have to say.

In the evening, my supervisor confirmed what kind of person he is. I was on medical leave for ten days, and he never asked how I was, but before the turnaround day, he called to find out if I would be back at work tomorrow. "If I feel better," was my short answer.

## **June 6th**

Today I returned to my section, and the feeling of being back at work and enjoying the beautiful atmosphere on the open deck again was really good. The day my Indonesian colleague mentioned a few billion times in the last few months finally came, and today was his turn to go on

vacation after nine months on the ship. Despite his laziness, he is a good guy, and I wished him a smooth wedding and quality time with his family. Obviously, he has a much better opinion of me, and before leaving the ship came to my section for a ten-minute farewell, totally forgetting the rest of the team. "On the previous cruise, our supervisor got so many complaints from the guests and the management that he almost resigned from his contract. I was helping in your section, but he was the one running like a headless chicken. Trying to make up for your absence, he was desperately asking for help from the public area housekeeping team, but they were short of people too, and he had to work hard during the entire cruise," said the colleague, and we had a good laugh. Later in the afternoon, I met the new colleague from Panama who came as a replacement. This is his first contract on ships, and of course, he will need some time, but I will help him as much as I can, and he will be fine.

I ended the day not very proud of what I did on the previous cruise by faking back pain, but the supervisor was constantly making my life difficult without any reason and forced me to fix him that way. I look forward to seeing if he will start behaving like a human or continue playing his game and get another knockdown.

## **June 8th**

Last night I was so busy cleaning the cabins that, after finishing with them at 11 pm, I didn't have the power to throw the garbage and the soiled towels, so I left them under the staircases in a crew corridor, intending to throw them

away early in the morning. I was so tired that I even forgot my problem with the supervisor and the Chief Housekeeper about my side job and how impatiently they waited for my mistake. The problem woke me up four minutes before 3 am, and thinking about the possible consequences; I set two more alarms. As planned, I was on the way to my stuff before the morning traffic, but once there, I saw the Chief Housekeeper taking photos of the garbage and the towels. For the first time in my life, I could say that my dream had come true. I gave him a penalty kick, but it looked like he remembered our previous argument when I told him to call the office and ask for a salary increase for his people instead of asking them to stop doing side jobs. So, he just told me to remove the garbage and the towels and be more careful in the future.

## **June 9th**

The company is doing a good job when it comes to allowing visitors of the crew members on the ship and would never say no to a family or friend visit at any port. Knowing that, a few days ago, I invited my friend who is in Barcelona for some IT project, and today I used my afternoon break to show him the ship. "Let me see your house. Stop acting poor," he said when he entered the ship, and a few moments later was shocked and couldn't believe I had spent seven months living in seven square meters. "I spend only five hours a day here, so this cabin is even bigger than what I need," I told him, and we had a good laugh. From my cabin, we proceeded to the crew areas and ended the tour by visiting the guest venues. He was so amazed by the ship and by the stories I told him that he quite seriously said to me

that life is too short to be spent untangling cables and that he is pretty sure he will leave his well-paid job and come to work with me.

Once my friend left the ship with the realization that he was in the wrong business, it was my turn to realize something—that I'm too sloppy sometimes and that today I did the last violation of the ship rules for this contract. I can't afford to lose my job only days before my sign-off. Once I said *arrivederci* to my friend and returned to duty, a couple that was sunbathing in my section asked me if I could bring them a beer and Aperol Spritz. That wasn't my job, but my section wasn't yet busy, and after bringing the drinks, I went to the bar pantry to try the famous Aperol Spritz that the guests were ordering all the time. But, to be more productive, I took the bucket with me as well, and for the time I was drinking, I was also filling the bucket with hot water that I needed to clean the glass near the fence that looked very dirty in the sun. And with the water running, of course, I didn't hear the Assistant Bar Manager coming. "You have to be careful, brother. The bar manager is checking the pantries all the time, and you know the consequences if he catches you," he said, and I thanked him for understanding.

Passing through her corridor in the evening, I saw a guy leaving her cabin. We hadn't had contact for ten days, and the last thing on my mind was to question her about who the guy was, but she felt the need and told me he was her friend who was there to borrow her USB. Knowing her, I don't think she could have a male friend, but it wasn't my business. So, I just told her that I was glad she found a 'friend' and continued to the housekeeping locker from where I took the vacuum cleaner for my side job.

## June 11th

I knew she was addicted to s\*x, but I was still astounded by what her roommate told me today. "When we all come on the ship for the first time, we have difficulty finding our cabin for the first few days. Not only did she not have a problem with that, but she also found the crew bar on the second night and brought a guy to the cabin. She was with him for two weeks and met another guy. You were her third boyfriend here, and I'm surprised how long you were together. She started seeing another guy when you were still together. You are a good guy, and you have to know this," she said to me. Hearing that she fixed me, as well, wasn't painless, but it's a cruise ship, and that's quite a regular thing. Our relationship was based on s\*x, and we had no future, anyway. Talking about her relationship, she told me that after our threesome, she feels uncomfortable in the company of her boyfriend, but she still doesn't want to lose him. "I wish we do it again, but I was lucky he didn't discover us the first time, and I don't think I will be that lucky again," she told me, and my right hand started itching.

In the evening, I went to the girls from the casino to change their linen and saw the two of them with a machine sucking water from the floor. "We broke the sprinkler with a hanger, and all this water was discharged," said the one I already knew was a professional sucker. What happened didn't surprise me because every time I went to their cabin, they had clothes drying hooked to the sprinkler, and I knew they would break it sooner or later. Hanging anything on the sprinkler is strongly prohibited, and they will be happy if they end up with a written warning only.

## June 12th

We were again in Lisbon today, and together with my countryman who works in the shops, we visited Jeronimos Monastery and Belem Tower. Built at the same time 500 years ago, they are two must-visit historical UNESCO World Heritage sites in Lisbon. Talking with a guest during one of our previous visits, I found out that there was a daily pass that could save us a lot of time and money, and today I discovered firsthand how valuable that piece of paper is.

Our first stop this afternoon was the Jeronimos Monastery, where, instead of waiting in line for a ticket, we used the daily pass and got inside in a minute. The Monastery is built in a Gothic style and consists of several museums and a remarkable church where Vasco de Gama's tomb lies in the main chapel. But, the most impressive for me was the breathtaking carved stone with marine, animal, and nature motifs all around, and I don't have any idea what kind of people created those carvings and how much time they needed to do that. I could have stared at them for hours, but we didn't have too much time, and after an hour, we headed to the Belem Tower, which is another significant monument, built as a gate to Lisbon and one of the key defensive points from enemy ships in the past. Using the spiral staircases, we climbed to the top of the tower and enjoyed the beautiful 360-degree view of the city and the bridge over the Tagus River. Benefiting from the daily pass again, after the Belem Tower, we took a bus and returned to the ship.

## **June 14th**

Looking around to see if the beautiful guests in my section were happy this afternoon, I saw a guest releasing smoke while lying on his belly, and for the first time in my life realized how much the lack of experience as a head of some Indian tribe is missing in my life. Having difficulty understanding his need to be a jerk, I approached and politely told him that smoking there was prohibited and showed him where the smoking area was. Instead of apologizing or simply saying 'I didn't know,' he chose to make a monkey out of me and, with the cigarette in his right hand, told me that what I was saying didn't make any sense because he wasn't a smoker. I could have stayed there arguing, but because of my relatively low salary, I decided not to bother myself. So, I informed the security guard in charge of the open deck, and he spoke with the guest, who was still with a cigarette in his hand and almost burned himself in fear of being kicked from my section in front of everybody and officially becoming a jerk.

## **June 15th**

Collecting the last soiled towels for this cruise, I heard a guest in a wheelchair talking in Italian with his wife. Being in love with Italy and knowing the language very well, I approached them and told them how happy I was to meet Italians on the ship, and we started a conversation about their country and its history. They talked passionately about the Pompei ruins and the Colosseum, Leonardo da Vinci and Dante Alighieri, Pizza and Pasta, and so on, and I enjoyed every second of listening to them. Among the many things,

they told me about their humble beginnings growing up in a small Italian town, but also about one of the biggest furniture-producing companies in Italy that they created. "I had the world around my small finger, and when I thought I was omnipotent, one terrible moment changed my life. What's the purpose now of all the success when I lost my ability to move without assistance?!?!" the husband said to me. "That's why I beg you to enjoy your life as much as possible. I will accept to give everything away and work only for food if somebody promises me that I will get my legs back." His words were mind-opening, and at that moment, I felt ashamed because of what I was complaining about in my life.

With most of the guests getting ready for dinner or packing their suitcases, my section was almost empty, so we spoke for over one hour, but I wished I had met them earlier in the cruise. At the end of our conversation, they gave me a phone number and told me to call them whenever I'm in Italy. "It will be our pleasure to be your host," they said and hugged me.

After more than two weeks, today, she sat at my table in the crew mess and, in front of three more colleagues, told me that she wanted to be with me again. "I'm tired, and I will go to rest. We can talk in the evening," I said to her. She agreed and left the table with her neutral face on. "Just go and do it for the last time. You can also take ten \$1 bills and throw them on her after you finish. Make her feel the real version of herself," suggested the colleague from the Philippines. She cheated on me, but I also had the time of my life with her, and doing what my colleague suggested would have been too much. Instead, I decided to be less sensitive, forget

my ego in the other pants, and spend the last ten days of my contract properly. So, after the luggage operation in the evening, I called her on the open deck; we talked for a few minutes and ended up in the pool locker in my section exercising after a long time.

## **June 16th**

After 15 hours of work and another four with the girl yesterday, I woke up late for duty this morning. Still, I didn't need to excuse myself since my supervisor had cut our communication after I fixed him with taking a cruise off. Anyway, that wasn't the best start to this turnaround day, but I couldn't complain about how things were developing later. After finishing my section in the morning, as usual, I continued to the suites, where I helped the Indian guy and got a \$100 tip, plus an additional \$100 from a couple that had just embarked on the ship. The guests staying in the suites are the first embarking, but while most of them are going for lunch first or getting a first glimpse of the public areas, this couple came straight to the suite while I was outside on the balcony unclogging the jacuzzi, and watched me struggle from behind the curtain. Fully wet, I wished them a pleasant stay on the way out, and they gave me \$100, obviously feeling sorry for me. The husband even blocked the door, ensuring I would take the 'Benjamin.'

## **June 17th**

It would have been great if I had more time on this last stop in Genoa to see Portofino and St. Margarita, but they are too

far, and obviously, I will have to come as a tourist if I want to visit two of the most colorful and vibrant places in Italy. Fortunately, there are many other things to be seen and experienced in Genoa, so for the afternoon break, we visited Porto Antico, which is a port that looks anything but old, as its name suggests. Walking down the promenade surrounded by palm trees, restaurants, and shops, we first stopped by the Aquarium, which is one of the biggest in Europe. Still, the waiting line at the entrance was long, so we skipped that and embarked on the Galleon "Neptune," a pirate replica ship built for movie purposes in the past that now serves as a tourist attraction. Me no like pirates, pirate ships, or even pirates' replica ships, but this one looked impressive and visiting it was the right decision. Because of the long lines, after the Galleon, we passed by and took photos with the Galata Maritime Museum, the submarine that's used as a floating museum, and the botanical garden shaped like a bubble. Before returning to the ship, we visited a restaurant along the promenade and enjoyed the famous Pesto Genovese and Sacripantina cake.

## **June 18th**

This morning I found a beautiful seagull under the staircases in my section and, following our hospitality standards, brought some food and water from the Lido restaurant. I don't know if the seagull came to cruise with us or to rest a bit and relax, but with all the beautiful guests taking photos, it looked like the bird didn't choose the right place. So, I fully understood the seagull's decision to fly away even before breakfast.

Today we docked in Marseille again, and together with my girl, we visited the Basilique Notre-Dame de la Garde. The only mistake we made was thinking we would enjoy climbing to the top more instead of taking a bus or hop-on-hop-off train, but still, the spectacular view from the Basilica's terrace made the climb worth it. From what I found, the hill has an interesting history, and the first thing built there was a small chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the 13th century. Three centuries later, trying to protect the city from enemy armies, they built a fortress there, and finally, in the middle of the 19th century, seeing that the chapel couldn't receive all the pilgrims, they built the Basilica in Byzantine style with domes, murals, stone, marble, and mosaics. At the very top of the building, there is the golden statue of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus, and the citizens of Marseille believe that the statue is their protector. Compared with similar places in other ports, it was surprising that there wasn't any fee for the Basilica, and there wasn't a service at that time, so we used the opportunity to enjoy its interior. Our visit to the Basilica was short, and we left enough time to taste the typical Marseille pizza with garlic. For that, we chose a restaurant with a beautiful terrace, but waiting for the pizza; a homeless man approached us asking for some change to buy bread. Instead of giving him money, we invited him to join us, bringing the purest happiness I have ever seen on any face. He was obviously hungry, but after finishing his pizza, the color of his face returned, and in surprisingly good English, he told us his heartbreaking story. Once a manager at the local railway station, he gave everything he had to his kids ten years ago, trusting that they would take care of him for the rest of his life. "After giving everything to my two sons, they married, started arguing, and sold the big house where we

all lived together. They disappeared with the money, and since then, I've been homeless," he finished his story and started crying.

## **June 19th**

Only six days to go, and I'm running out of power and everything else. My patience with the supervisor is nearly over; the toothpaste tube is almost empty, and the aftershave and the shower gel as well. Browsing what was left to be seen in Barcelona, for today, we decided to visit Parc de la Ciutadella, the Barcelona Zoo, and, if there were enough time, to go to the public beach and show my average body to a bigger audience. Riding the bicycles that we borrowed from the crew welfare, the first thing we visited was one of the most important sites in Barcelona—Parc de la Ciutadella. The most impressive in the park is the fountain called Cascada Monumental, but there are also the Catalanian parliament, the Arch de triumph, the Barcelona Zoo, museums, centuries-old trees, a giant mammoth statue, other statues, different bird species, geese, ducks, and so on. Walking around the park, we also enjoyed the entertainment provided by a few performers and spent some money on food, drinks, and souvenirs that we bought from the vendors around.

From there, we went to the Barcelona Zoo, which is home to many animal species, and a place with a high level of hygiene, spacious areas for the animals to do whatever they want, and wherever possible, the fence was minimal so the visitors could go close to the animals. We had a good time in the zoo, but once we headed to cuddle the lion, we

realized we didn't have time for that, so we returned to the ship, leaving the swim for one of the following ports.

It's been a few days since we reunited, and my girl is showing another level of hunger in bed, trying to make up for our two-week break. She was on edge even before, but now she crossed the border, and as a result of her violent methods, I have visible bruises all over my body. I don't think she is that crazy to bite my tool, but just in case, now I avoid oral s\*x.

## **June 21st**

My mother doubted my fascination with the ship and reminded me a few times to take pictures of the venues, I guess, to see if I was playing the role of the father in the movie *La Vita e Bella*, where a Jewish family is brought to a concentration camp during the WW2, and for all the time there, the father tells his son that they are part of a game and that everything is okay. I should have cleared her doubts earlier, but I didn't, and after almost eight months on the ship, tonight, I video-called my parents and went around showing them the ship. It was almost midnight, and there weren't many people around, but towards the end of the tour, unfortunately, I met the night shift security guard. He recognized me and reminded me that I couldn't go around the public areas without a name tag, but still, he was nice enough and let me finish.

## June 22nd

Walking around this morning to see if the guests in my section had started the day on the right foot, one of them stopped me to ask if he could buy a cap like the one I was wearing with the cruise line's logo. His question was totally in place, but I didn't have good news and informed him that the cap was part of my uniform and that they weren't sold in the shops. Still, he didn't give up and asked me if I could somehow find one for him. His question was again legitimate, and I love people that are persistent in asking for what they want, so instead of telling the guest to apply for a job on the pool, I asked him to wait a few minutes and brought him the spare cap I had in my cabin. Many times in my life, I was surprised by what I could get just because I wasn't afraid to ask for what I wanted, and refusing the guest would have been negating my life philosophy.

Despite being a peaceful type of guy, my father was so upset on the call today that I told him to think twice before killing the guy who was supposed to make the decorative glass for the door that leads to the second floor. He promised he would do it by the end of May, but now, three weeks later, he isn't even answering his phone. Other than that, with the help of a few professionals, my amazing parents almost completed the project, and I look forward to seeing how everything came out.

## June 25th

Today, we spent the whole day at sea, traveling to Civitavecchia, where I will sign off tomorrow. And what a last day of the contract this was!

I see the photographers as some of the biggest victims among all the crew on the ship. They aren't working for our cruise line directly, but for another company that's renting space on the ship, and their salary is pretty low, while they have a high target for the number of photos they have to take daily. And all the photos taken must be of the guests, not of the beautiful ship or fantastic ports. Neither an exclusive photo of two insects caught in a doggy-style position is counted.

This morning, I was near a couple taking photos of the calm sea waters when a photographer got too close behind and called them to turn around. The next moment, an uncomfortable silence took place. Frightened by the sudden approach of the photographer, the woman dropped her phone in the water and just sat down on a pool chair with her arms crossed over her head. Not blaming the guy who was apologizing, after five minutes in that position, she left with her husband. After seeing the guest unselfishly feeding marine life with her phone, another, this time, expected shock happened to me just before the afternoon break when I got the evaluation for this contract.

Overall score—three out of five. Despite working like the company belonged to my father, I have a lower score than any other colleague who left the pool for these eight months. Yes, I took one cruise off, but officially I had back pain, and

I'm pretty sure that even if I hadn't done that, I would have gotten the same grades.

Before the luggage operation in the evening, I met the people I was cleaning for, and they paid me for this cruise. Happy with how I did my job; some of them also gave me chocolates and thank you messages.

After I was released earlier from luggage duty tonight, I brought my suitcase to the security office for checking and went straight to the crew bar looking for the so-called sign-off s\*x partner. There, I drank a beer, targeted the biggest girl on the ship, and we ended up in my bed after a few minutes of dancing. It was quite a lot of job to be done, but I can say this was maybe the s\*x of my life. For the duration of the action, the girl from Peru called me a few times, but I didn't answer the phone. I didn't throw \$1 bills at her as my colleague from the Philippines suggested, but I still got some revenge for her cheating.

## **June 26th**

It came on a turtle, but after eight months, my sign-off day is finally here. Coming on the ship was the best decision ever, and this contract was an excellent opportunity to work, live, and learn from each other with people from 70 different nationalities, meet thousands of beautiful and pleasant guests, visit some of the world's most beautiful places, and last and most important, I go home with money that I would never have saved working in my country. Because of all these reasons, saying no to a new contract isn't an option for now, and in two months, I will return to another ship, with

whom I will have a chance to visit more beautiful places. Maybe I pushed myself to the limits in these eight months, but overall, I had a great time, and I also did many things for the first time in my life, including my first threesome.

Before I left the ship, I went to the pool to say goodbye to my colleagues and also spoke separately with my colleague from the Philippines, who will take over the cabins I was cleaning as a side job. "Thank you for giving me the business, brother. I promise I won't disappoint you and the people. I'm glad I met you and hope to see you again on another ship," he said. "Take care, bro, and enjoy the time with your son," said my colleague from India, who was next to us and left me thinking about what son he was talking about. The next moment, I remembered the joke about becoming a father and thanked my colleague for the good wishes.

Back to the cabin to take the backpack, I said goodbye to my roommate, and my phone rang to remind me that a security guard had confiscated the bottle of rum I bought in Nassau and told me I would get it back on my sign-off day. I didn't care about the \$10 bottle, but I wanted to see if they would keep it for that long. And as they promised, they gave me the bottle back on the way out, and I decided to give it to my father as a present.

Although my country isn't far from Italy, I had to take two short flights and wait three hours in between, which is still nothing compared to the Odyssey I went through to embark on the ship. Before midnight, I landed in the capital and was welcomed by my cousin, in whose house I will sleep before I take a bus to my hometown tomorrow morning.

## **June 27th**

Seeing my family after eight months was emotional, but now is the time to rest, enjoy myself with my loved ones, read the books I have in mind on cosmology, and get ready for the next contract. And I will have enough time for that, considering that my wonderful parents put in the effort and finished the renovation of the house's first floor in a way I couldn't have ever imagined. I was looking forward to these two months' vacation, and I will try to make the most out of them!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tired of working in construction, where the author of this diary started as a 12-year-old boy, he decided to apply for a job on a cruise ship and get to know the other side of the sun. He spent five years working hard aboard ships but also created a lifetime of memories by visiting some of the most beautiful places on earth, living and working with amazing people from over 70 countries, and meeting thousands of dear passengers.