

# Dog-Gone Cruise Director Sneak Peek

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## Cast of Characters

**Mildred “Millie” Sanders-Armati.** Millie, heartbroken after her husband left her for one of his clients, decides to take a position as assistant cruise director aboard the mega cruise ship, Siren of the Seas. From day one, she discovers she has a knack for solving mysteries, which is a good thing since some sort of crime is always being committed on the high seas.

Recently married to the ship’s captain, Millie has embarked on a new adventure on board Siren of the Seas.

**Annette Delacroix.** Director of Food and Beverage on board Siren of the Seas, Annette has a secret past and is the perfect accomplice in Millie’s investigations. Annette is the “Jill of all Trades” and isn’t afraid to roll up her sleeves and help out a friend in need.

**Catherine “Cat” Wellington.** Cat is the most cautious of the group of friends and prefers to help Millie from the sidelines, but when push comes to shove, Millie can count on Cat to risk life and limb in the pursuit of justice.

**Danielle Kneldon.** Danielle first found her way on board Siren of the Seas working undercover. After her assignment ended, she snagged a position on board the ship and joined Millie and the gang to round out their “Super Sleuths” to a team of four.

## Chapter 1

Millie hustled down the corridor as her co-worker, Danielle, struggled to keep up. “It can’t be that bad. Andy wouldn’t intentionally add to your anxiety by springing an unpleasant surprise on us hours before he leaves. He knows you’re already stressed out about Fiona joining us for the cruise.”

“Thanks for reminding me,” Millie groaned.

“Dealing with Fiona will be a piece of cake. Just keep your cool and don’t let her get under your skin.”

“That’s easy for you to say.”

Several days earlier, Millie’s husband, Nic, the captain of the mega cruise ship, *Siren of the Seas*, had told his wife that his daughter, Fiona, would be joining them in Southampton and then disembarking when they reached Dublin, Ireland.

For most, it would be something to look forward to, particularly for Nic’s sake. The only problem...actually, the *biggest* problem was that Fiona didn’t care for Millie. Although “didn’t care” might be too mild of a description. Detest would be more accurate.

The last time Millie and Fiona had come face-to-face was during Nic’s and her honeymoon on the island of St. Martin. Fiona had made a scene at dinner in front of Millie’s family. She stormed out of the restaurant with her father chasing after her.

Fiona had cut her trip short, caught an earlier flight and returned home to Italy. Nic rarely mentioned his daughter, which had become somewhat of a sore subject, but not because Millie didn’t want a relationship with the woman. The animosity was on Fiona’s end.

And if worrying about Fiona’s visit wasn’t enough, Andy had summoned Millie and Danielle to his office to discuss an urgent matter. Which may not have been a concern except for the fact that Andy, the ship’s cruise director, was supposed to be getting off to spend time with *his* family in the UK.

During Andy’s last break, chaos ensued, valuable artwork had gone missing and Andy’s name was floated around as being the person responsible. Millie had gotten to the bottom of it during the voyage, with help from some of her friends.

“Maybe Andy is retiring and there are plans for you to assume the position as cruise director,” Danielle teased.

“Are you kidding? I’m having too much fun as assistant cruise director,” Millie joked.

The women reached the back of the dark theater, and the only light was coming from Andy’s office which was directly behind the stage. Millie gave the door a tentative knock, announcing their arrival.

Andy was seated at his conference table surrounded by stacks of paper, clipboards, and notebooks. “Millie, c’mon in.” He waved her inside. “Splendid. I’m glad to see Danielle with you, as well.”

“We didn’t want to keep you waiting.” Millie perched on the seat opposite her boss while Danielle took the one next to her. “Your office is a mess.”

“I’m trying to wrap up some final details so that things will run smoothly this upcoming week.” Andy scooped up a pile of papers. “Are you all right, Millie? You have that look.”

“What look?”

“Like something is bothering you. Are you having second thoughts about filling in for me this week?”

“No. At least not yet. It depends on why you called us here,” Millie said. “You should be packing and getting ready to get off the ship. Instead, you called an emergency meeting. I’m mentally preparing myself for your surprise.”

“What’s wrong with a surprise?”

“C’mon, Andy.” Danielle laughed. “Are you sure you want us to start down that list?”

“I have wonderful surprises. Splendid surprises.”

“That’s debatable.”

“This is a good surprise, one I’m sure you’ll both be pleased with.” Andy paused, letting the anticipation build. “I’ve decided to remain onboard Siren of the Seas.”

Millie stared blankly at her boss as she attempted to digest his announcement. “You’re cancelling your vacation? What about seeing your family...your sister, Sarah? Siren of the Seas will be heading back to the States soon.”

“She’s on her way here. We had a few unsold cabins on this voyage. Donovan offered one of the cabins to my sister, so I’ll be taking my vacation on board the ship while you, with the help of Danielle, fill my shoes and run the show.”

“I...are you sure you want to do that?” Danielle asked.

“One hundred percent. Instead of me working ‘round the clock, I’ll be able to enjoy the ports, not to mention the fabulous food, the activities, and all the ship has to offer,” Andy beamed.

“I guess I can’t blame you,” Millie said. “It would be an excellent way to get a feel for the passenger experience.”

Andy straightened a stack of file folders. “Captain Armati has already approved the request for the cabin. I called my sister, Sarah, this morning. She’s ecstatic about the upcoming journey and eager to meet both of you as well as the rest of the crew.”

“I can’t wait to meet her too,” Millie said sincerely.

“There are only a few details to go over with you before I head down to the gangway. We have some special groups on board this cruise.” Andy reached for his clipboard. “The Pedigree and Show Club, a rather large group of dog enthusiasts, will be joining us for this voyage. They haven’t submitted an official roster, so you won’t have to worry about them. They’ll be hosting events on their own. There’s also an Irish historian group boarding. They’ve arranged a trio of planned events. I have detailed instructions so you shouldn’t have any issues.”

Andy went over some minor changes for the upcoming itinerary and then segued into a spiel about passenger expectations, staying on schedule, reminding Millie to make sure she kept her cell phone and ship-issued radio on and turned up so the entertainment staff could reach her in the event of an emergency.

Millie’s eyes glazed over when he began discussing the number of meetings she would be required to attend. Her mind wandered as she wondered about the added responsibility not to mention added stress of having Fiona on board.

“Millie.” Andy snapped his fingers in front of her face. “Are you listening?”

“Yes. No. Somewhat,” she admitted.

“Is this too much for you? I know Captain Armati’s daughter is boarding or has already boarded the ship and you’ve voiced several concerns. I don’t want to overwhelm you. If this is too much, I can have Danielle take over instead.”

“No. I’m fine. It will be fine. I can handle it. I have before.”

“I’ll help Millie in whatever way possible,” Danielle promised. “Besides, you’ll still be around if we find ourselves in a situation we don’t think we can handle.”

“That’s the spirit. I appreciate your can-do attitude.” Andy consulted his watch. “I have one more pressing issue I need to handle before officially starting my vacation.”

Millie slowly stood. “We’ll do our best to let you enjoy your time off.”

The women headed out and Danielle waited until they had exited the theater. “I have a hunch I know why Andy had a sudden change of plans.”

“Cat,” Millie and Danielle said in unison.

Millie, along with Felix, another member of the entertainment staff, had recently hosted a crew get-together. There was food, drinks, some party games and a rousing round of karaoke.

She’d gotten the idea after discovering her close friend was struggling with depression. Cat was contemplating leaving the ship after confessing to Millie she felt as if she had no life other than work. The crew spent so much of their time on board the ship working, it left little free time to meet new people.

Millie had convinced Cat to not only come to the party but to participate in the karaoke. Andy showed up to check in on the event before she took the stage. He and Millie watched from the sidelines, and it was as if Andy had seen Cat for the first time. The two ended up spending the rest of the evening together.

Since the party, Millie had caught them chatting in the halls several times. Cat confided in her that she thought Andy was going to ask her out on a date.

“I don’t think Andy wants to be away from Cat for a week,” Danielle said.

“He really seems to like her, and I think she feels the same.”

According to Andy he’d once been engaged but the woman had died. For as long as Millie had known him, he hadn’t shown much of an interest in women until recently, when he’d hired an “old friend” to work on board the ship.

To say it hadn’t worked out was an understatement. The woman, Sophia, turned out to be someone completely different than who she portrayed, and had played Andy to get what she wanted.

Cat had also been through her share of heartache and heartbreak with failed relationships including an ex who had tracked her down with plans to murder her. Afterwards, she’d suffered a bout of depression.

Since the party, things were looking up for Cat, and Andy, and although Millie never would have put the two of them together, the more she thought about it, the more it seemed like a match made in heaven.

The rest of the early afternoon passed uneventfully. Passengers stopped her several times to inquire about dining times, the Welcome Aboard show and the muster drill.

Millie shifted into assistant cruise director mode as she hosted the popular *Cruise or Cash* bingo, the first of many bingo events on board the ship.

Out of all of the different bingo games, *Cruise or Cash* was the passengers favorite. The winner was given a choice of two thousand dollars in cash or a seven-day cruise for two.

Up next, Millie was in charge of the ship’s guided tour. She led the group from the spa, to the basketball court, around to each of the pools and the outdoor miniature golf. They worked their way down the decks, popping into the dining room where she introduced them to the maître d, who was helping the new arrivals with changes to their dinner arrangements.

While guest services was slammed on embarkation day and the last day of the cruise, the maître d was busiest the first day, changing dining times, moving diners to different tables and attempting to accommodate a wide range of special requests. It was a job Millie would not want to have.

She ended the tour near the comedy club where a picture of Donovan Sweeney, the ship’s purser, was posted on the marquee stand. Millie had recently discovered Donovan’s interest in improv and convinced him to try his hand at hosting an amateur improv night.

She ended the tour, passing out copies of the Cruise Ship Chronicles to each person in her group as she answered their questions, and then thanked them for joining her.

She hurried back to the apartment to check on their pup, Scout. She carried him out on the balcony for a brief break and stood at the railing, watching as the stevedores raced back and forth on their forklifts, loading bins of suitcases and pallets of supplies onto the ship.

Her eyes drifted to the end of the pier and the dilapidated warehouse where Halbert Pennyman, an area homeless man, lived. Millie had tried to carve out some time to bring him food and check on him, but there was too much going on with Andy's vacation and Fiona's arrival.

Instead, Annette Delacroix, Millie's friend and the ship's director of food and beverage, offered to deliver it.

From her vantage point, she spotted a trio of passengers dragging their carry-ons up the twisting, turning ramp.

Millie had taken the ramp once. It was the largest she'd ever been on and easily twice the size and length as the smaller ramp she was accustomed to at the Port of Miami.

She wondered about Fiona. Nic had told her that she planned to spend the night at a hotel not far from the port and walk from the hotel to the ship, only a few short blocks away.

When Nic discovered her plan, he insisted his daughter take a taxi and had even arranged her transportation in advance. Millie couldn't blame him since hearing the news about the murder of two women. They were both attributed to the Southampton Strangler, a serial killer who had recently resurfaced.

The thought of facing Fiona made Millie's stomach churn. She desperately wanted the woman to like her but wasn't quite sure how to.

Although Millie was eager for Nic to be able to spend time with his daughter, to catch up and make memories, it would be an uncomfortable voyage.

How would they handle meals? Would there be awkward silence, or would Fiona and she finally sit down and discuss what was bothering the woman?

Something told her the latter was not going to happen. For whatever reason, Nic's daughter did not like Millie, and yet they barely knew each other.

Her husband had mentioned some resentment on Fiona's end that her father was at sea when his wife had died. Perhaps she blamed him, and somehow transferred the blame to Millie.

A thick, dark cloud drifted into the harbor. The skies opened and a smattering of rain pelted her face and arms.

"C'mon, Scout. Let's head back inside."

Scout, their teacup Yorkie, ran past Millie and made a beeline for the front door. He planted himself in front of it, staring at her with sad eyes.

Millie scooped him up. “Do you want to help host the arts and crafts class with me this afternoon?”

He pawed at her face and started wiggling. “I’ll take that as a yes. I suppose now is the best time to get you out of here. The next few days are going to be crazy.”

Millie eased his stroller out of the hall closet and began packing his small travel case with a snack, water and one of his favorite toys. Scout pranced in a circle as he watched. The pup knew his stroller meant he was going for a ride.

After checking to make sure she had everything, she placed the travel case in the stroller basket and Scout on the seat. They passed through the bridge where Nic stood chatting with another of the ship’s officers. Millie gave them a quick wave but never slowed as they headed to the door.

They made it to the library, where the event was being hosted, with a few minutes to spare. Because the craft class was by registration only, Millie knew it was already sold out.

Andy had made sure he utilized every available seat in the place, and she suspected part of the reason was because the entertainment department earned a portion of the class fee, paid by each of the attendees. If there was one thing Millie knew about her boss, other than he loved his job, was he loved a healthy bottom line.

She placed Scout’s stroller not far from the entrance but out of the way and then opened the French doors that connected the library to one of the conference rooms.

The class coordinator, Alison Coulter, breezed in. “Sorry I’m late, Millie. I had to run down to maintenance to pick up some extra nail art blocks. I wish Andy would’ve given me a little more notice he packed out this class.”

“You and me both.” Millie rubbed her thumb and finger together. “It’s all about the extra cash.”

“Right? I should’ve known better.”

“What are we working on today?” Millie watched as Alison began placing wooden blocks on the table.

“Nail and string art. Since I’ve only done it a couple of times, I picked patterns for beginners.” Alison arranged stacks of heart-shaped, star-shaped and butterfly-shaped nail boards on one of the tables.

Next, she removed packets of colorful string. There were shades of purple, blue, green, pink, yellow, and even a few neon colors. “I figured since we’ll be using both rooms, you could work the conference room in the back while I handle the library.”

They had finished setting up the material table when the first group of attendees arrived. Alison checked them off her list as soon as they entered, and then Millie led them to the craft table where she helped them choose their blocks and string.

During a brief break, Millie turned music on and then adjusted the lights from a soft glow to bright daylight.

She attempted to keep an eye on Scout as several of the guest stopped by to say 'hello.' Scout rewarded them by hamming it up, prancing around and yipping at whoever stopped by.

The bottleneck near the door grew as attendees waited for the line to move so they could make their way inside. Millie lowered the cover on Scout's stroller to speed up the process.

Alison waited for the final attendee to arrive and then gave them instructions on how to start the art. Millie moved around the rooms, assisting where needed, offering coffee or tea to the attendees and admiring the various creations.

The butterfly was her favorite, and it was fun to see all of the different color combinations. At the halfway point, Millie checked on Scout. She gave him a snack and some water before being called away by someone who needed help.

The event ended right on time, with Millie carefully wrapping each of the creations in tissue paper and placing them in a bag for the trip to the cabin.

Andy had recently ordered custom "Siren of the Seas" tags for the craft classes. The tags sported gold lettering against a sea blue background. She had teased him about the marketing ploy, and then congratulated him on the cleverness of making sure the guests would always remember their vacation on board Siren of the Seas.

After the last participant left, Alison and Millie made quick work of cleaning up. Millie finished filling a bag of trash and placed it outside the door before returning to Scout's stroller. She lifted the cover and reached inside only to discover the small pup was missing.

\*\*\*\*\*End of Sneak Peek\*\*\*\*\*

**Dog-Gone Cruise Director Coming Soon!**

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