

Chapter One

Pearl had often dreamed about breaking out of the tidy little box in which she lived—the one that allowed others to live more comfortably with her existence. She had played out the fantasy many times over the years, first rolling it about in her mind, and eventually scoring it on her heart. But tonight she was through fantasizing; she was about to bring her dreams to life.

As she prepared for bed, she held a close check on her nerves. She would lie beneath the bedcovers in the cold, spartan room and wait for just the right moment to make her move; she'd wait until the way was clear. Her throat was dry from the anticipation of it, and she hoped the time would pass without incident. With trembling fingers, she worked the sash on her bathrobe, fearing the wait would overwhelm her sensibilities. Finally managing to get the robe tied, she stood still for a moment, inhaled a deep breath, and tried to calm down.

She thought about the emotional havoc she'd experienced over the last few hours: she was first happy, then anxious, then excited, then filled with longing, then felt girlishly giddy, then fearful, and then she was back to happy. It was knocking her psyche to pieces, but she would endure whatever it took to bring her dream to life. Her emotions would not dictate her actions this time.