

## Cruising into a New Life

I take a big deep breath and look in the long mirror in the bathroom. I'm in a single cabin onboard a cruise ship and shake my head at the image before me. It doesn't look anything like me. Well, I smile, the old me. The old Geraldine Thompson. This Geraldine Thompson who left the sanatorium three days ago looks completely different now. Inside and out.

I'm not the old Geraldine who was frumpy, overweight, with long greyish hair scrapped back into a sever bun. I'd worn black or brown two-piece suits with thick tights and grey shirts all my adult life. My mother's dressmaker, Mrs Whittaker, had made them exactly to mother's instructions. Not mine. I'd never had a choice of clothing with Mrs Whittaker. Nor a choice of footwear. My feet had been forever in brown flat brogues or laced up boots.

I smile now and smooth down the sides of the white pencil skirt and spin around to look at my back. I chuckle. The navy silk blouse is tight fitting and shows off all my curves in just the right places.

I feel the slight sway of the ship as it comes into dock. I know the routines of cruising as I've been on many before, but I'd always been with mother sharing a cabin. This time however, I've loved having the cabin all to myself.

Grinning, I peer closer into the mirror at my face. My hair has been cut in a short trendy style and coloured a rich auburn. It is shining with the sun flooding through the balcony window. I'm wearing makeup for the first time in my life.

Mother had never approved of make-up. She'd once snarled at me, 'You'll look like a dirty harlot!'

A fellow patient in the sanatorium, Jeanie, had shown me how to apply the rich face cream and foundation. She'd also shown me how to sweep the blusher across my cheeks. I pull down my jaw and my favourite stodgy perfume. I lick my front teeth to my front teeth to myself imaging n

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g mother's tongue around small hoot to tick.

I place the jaunty blue hat on the back of my head and swish my hair from side to side making sure it is securely fastened. I don't want it to blow off on my descent down the gangway.

After sailing for two days, where I've mainly stayed in my cabin, we are docking in Rio today and I can feel my insides bubble with excitement.

The water now is gently lapping on the sides of the ship as staff hurriedly lower and secure the metal gangway. I wait in the queue patiently taking big breaths of fresh sea air then follow the man in front who is wearing a white panama hat. He reaches the railings and stands to the side allowing me to go first. I smile my thanks at him and take my first step.

Now that it is time to disembark my stomach lurches and my heart begins to thump. The old feelings of low self-esteem, no confidence, and depressing miserable thoughts fly into my mind. I can't do this, I want to shout, this isn't me. I'm dressed up to look like somebody else.

My mother's constant haranguing drones on and on in my ears.

Immediately, my head drops, and I look down. I'd forgotten about my new shoes and I stare at them. They are white with a two-inch heel and a tan toe-covering. They are simply gorgeous, and I smile. Out of my whole transformation it is the shoes that make the biggest difference.

I hear Doctor Jones words in my mind. 'Step out, Geraldine, you can do this. Walk tall and meet the world right in the eye.'