

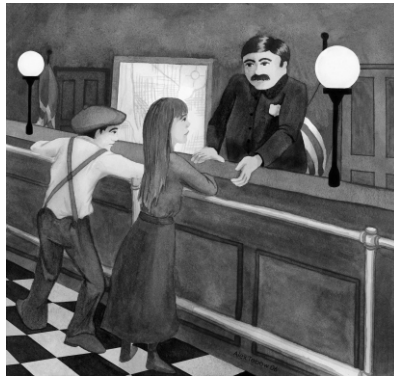
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THE SECRET LIFE

by Elizabeth McDavid Jones

Chapter 13

Jail



The story so far: Susan followed Bea to a suffragist office and overheard her tell the other women that Mum was probably in jail, after being arrested at the rally.

Susan fought against the hopelessness that was settling on her. She couldn't give in to it. She had no one to depend on now but herself. It was what Alice Paul had said in her speech: Sometimes a girl would have nothing but her own means to rely on.

"But what means do I have?" Susan asked aloud.

Then it came to her. Her barbershop money! She could use her own money to bail Mum out of jail!

It wasn't until Susan was in her own bedroom, pulling her money from the bureau drawer, that it occurred to her she might not have enough to make bail. Her entire stash amounted to only five dollars and twenty-three cents. Where could she get more money?

Russell! He'd been saving much longer than Susan. Susan found Russell at the barbershop on 28th Street. She quickly filled him in. He agreed to lend Susan money and go with her to the jail.

They walked the two miles to Police Central Headquarters on Centre Street. When Susan saw its dome rising majestically above the tenements and shabby buildings, her throat closed at the idea of Mum imprisoned behind those stone walls. Would Mum be wearing a ball and chain and a striped uniform like the "jailbirds" Susan had seen in movies?

"Do you want me to go in alone?" Russell asked.

Susan set her jaw. "No, I can handle it."

At a massive desk sat a large officer with a sour look on his face. Susan's courage faltered but she made herself think of Alice Paul's words—rely on yourself. She told the officer what she wanted.

He looked at his ledger. "Ain't no one by that name in this jail."

"No, but there is," Susan insisted. "She's my mother. I know she's here. Rose O'Neal."

"You think I can't read? There ain't no Rose O'Neal," he growled. "Now beat it, kids. I got work to do."

Susan's brain froze. Where was Mum? It was all she could do to go back down the granite steps outside. "Are you sure it was your mum Bea was talking about?" Russell asked her.

"Yes, I'm sure." Susan felt tears coming. "Mum can't just have disappeared into thin air. She has to be somewhere, doesn't she?"

Then her heart nearly stopped. People did disappear

into thin air—in this city they did. Like the dockworkers Dad knew who had angered Lester Barrow.

Lester Barrow!

Blood pounded through Susan's head. Mum, arrested as a suffragist ... She would have done anything to keep people like Lester Barrow and Mr. Riley from finding out. She would have tried to hide her arrest any way she could... Now Susan was sure she knew what had happened. Her words tumbled one over the other as she explained to Russell: Mum had given a false name when she was arrested!

"What name would she have used?" Russell asked. "Her maiden name?"

Susan shook her head. "Mum's family was German—Protestant. They disowned her when she married Dad. She'd have given the jailer her own name before she called herself 'Rosa Ullman.'"

"Then what name would she have used?"

Susan could think of only one possibility—"Lillian," the name Mum had dreamed of using for her acting career. She explained to Russell.

"Just 'Lillian.' No last name?"

"I don't know what last name she would've used. She always just said 'Lillian.'"

The officer grimaced when he saw them come back inside. "I thought I told you two your ma wasn't here."

"We want you to check your list again," Susan said, "this time for a Lillian."

"Oh, your mother's changed her name, has she? Or is Lillian your grandmother?"

"Please, just check the list," said Russell.

The officer grumbled, but he pulled out the ledger.

"What'd you say the last name was?"

Did that mean he had a Lillian?

Susan swallowed. If she acted unsure, maybe he wouldn't tell her anything. She would have to fake it. "We didn't say actually. We haven't seen our mother in a long time, and we wondered whether she was dead. Now we find out she's alive, but we're not sure what her last name is ... now."

"She might have gotten married again," said Russell. "Do you have a Lillian?"

The jailer looked annoyed. "The only Lillian I have is a Murphy. Now is that your ma or ain't it?"

Doubt tormented Susan. Was this person really Mum? Or a total stranger?

What if they used all their money paying bail for Lillian Murphy, and she wasn't even Mum?

Susan pulled Russell aside to talk to him. "It's mostly your money," she said. "What d'you think?"

"I think the decision's up to you."

"But it's such a gamble—betting every penny we have on a hunch."

"Sometimes playing a hunch can be your best bet."

"Then let's play it," she said.

Next Week, Chapter 14

Susan's Gamble