



THE SECRET LIFE

by Elizabeth McDavid Jones

Chapter 14

Susan's Gamble



The story so far: Susan and Russell went to the jail to bail Mum out, but there is no one there with Mum's name. They have to decide whether to use their money to bail out the woman who is using a fake name that they think is the one Mum would have chosen.

Any minute now, the jail matron would return with someone using the name of Lillian Murphy, either Mum... or a stranger. When the door opened, and Susan saw Mum, she fell into her arms.

At home, Susan settled Mum in the girls' bedroom. "I'm sorry to be such a troublemaker," Mum said. "I thought working for suffrage would help you girls have a better life." Mum said she hadn't wanted to support suffrage openly for fear of what her boss or Lester Barrow would do. "I was helping in small ways--- typing, sending out mailings and petitions. When Lester came to my office, I was sure he suspected something. I told Bea I'd have to quit the suffrage work, so she used her own money to pay Lester. She said it was worth it if I felt more secure. And I did--- until Kathleen was fired. I told Bea I was through with suffrage."

That was the argument Susan had heard.

Mum continued. "A few days later Bea said the suffrage organization had a job for me organizing working-class neighborhoods. I met her friends on Saturday morning, and everything was arranged. I had made up the story about visiting Aunt Blanche to tell Mr. Riley, and I figured I'd better tell you girls the same. I hated to lie to you, but I thought it was safer for us all---"

Just then, Helen and Lucy pounded into the flat and pounced on Mum, hugging and kissing her. Bea stood in the doorway, looking astonished. "Rose! You're ... home. But --how?"

"Didn't you know Susan had come to get me?"

Bea stepped hesitantly into the room. "I didn't even know where you were. I had assumed you were in jail---I planned to bail you out, but my grandfather refused me the money. When I went to the jail, they told me you weren't there. I spent hours checking police stations and hospitals. Then I went down to suffrage headquarters...."

Susan gasped. Bea had been telling the truth this morning!

Mum looked bewildered. "Susie, how did you know

where I was?"

Susan explained.

"What possessed you to follow Bea?" Mum asked.

"I've been wondering that myself," said Bea.

"You shouldn't have!" Susan cried. "Did you think we were dumb little kids, swallowing your lies?" Then Susan spilled the whole story. Bea moved toward Susan. "Susan, try to understand. I was sick from worrying over your mother, and wanting to shelter you girls...I handled things badly, and I'm sorry. That's all I can say."

"You needn't say anything else." Mum embraced Bea. "You did your best at the time." Lucy and Helen hugged Bea, too. Susan could only watch. Everyone was ready to forgive Bea, but Susan couldn't. She turned toward the door.

"Let me talk to her," said Bea.

Bea followed Susan into the other bedroom and sat on the bed. "It was different between us, wasn't it, Susan? We had a special friendship."

Yes! Susan's heart cried out. But all she could do was nod.

"I know you trusted me, and I failed you. I wish I didn't have to see the disappointment in your eyes." Bea paused. "I felt that way about someone once. My grandfather. When I was about your age, I told him I wanted to be a member of Parliament someday, like him. I remember his voice, cold as ice, telling me, 'Females do not vote. They cannot serve in Parliament. Nor will they ever do so, as long as I have anything to do with it.' How that hurt me! I never quite forgave him."

"Was that the argument you had with him?"

"Oh, no, that came later. When I became involved with suffrage, my grandfather insisted I give it up, or he would cut me off financially. I wouldn't, and he did. What I'm saying is, you have to look to yourself to make your dreams happen. That's all we're fighting for with suffrage. The right of every human being to rely on him or herself." Alice Paul's words again.

Susan felt shy toward Bea now, like there was a wall between them. "Bea," she asked, "Your friend Alice Paul? Could you tell her I really liked her speech ... about relying on yourself? It's what got me through these last few days."

"That will mean quite a lot to Alice," Bea replied.

Susan had the feeling it meant even more to Bea. Bea went to the dresser and pulled out the framed photograph.

"No secrets between us anymore, Susan. I want you to have this photograph. Alice gave it to me, as a memento."

Susan reached out to take the photograph.

"Are we friends, then?" Bea asked.

"Special friends," Susan answered. She rushed into Bea's open arms.

THE END