Chapter 6: Away We Went

Although our family spent several years in our Detroit flat, the atmosphere in our home grew increasingly tense. Our parents' relationship was unraveling. The loud and abusive arguments, fueled by Dad's heavy drinking and gambling, left their mark on all of us. Amid the chaos, Mom worked hard to hold things together. She took a job at the Sani-Wash Laundry near St. Leo's, the Catholic church and school we attended, in hopes of improving our circumstances and giving us a better life.

Then, one day in early 1951, everything changed. While Mom was at work, Dad abruptly uprooted our lives. He moved all our furnishings and belongings from the flat, He simply said, "You kids, come with me. We're moving."

Without warning or explanation, we were separated. My three older siblings—Tom, Mary, and Ted—were moved to Aunt Ida and Uncle Bill's home at 4896 Lovett Street in Detroit. My baby sister, Eleanor, went to live with cousin Eugene and his wife Barbara. Eugene was Aunt Ida and Uncle Bill's oldest son. I was sent out of state to Bridgeport, Ohio, to live with my godparents, Uncle Walter and Aunt Ceil. During this painful time, Mom found temporary housing with family friends, Mr. and Mrs. Bertin.

It was a deeply emotional period for all of us. The family we had always known was scattered. The following year, our parents divorced, a turning point that would reshape our lives permanently.

Living in Ohio with Uncle Walter and Aunt Ceil was an adjustment. Uncle Walter, my father's brother, was kind and busy—working both outside the home and managing a small grocery store attached to the house. Aunt Ceil, who took charge of day-to-day parenting, ran a very strict household. I quickly learned to tread carefully under her watchful eye. She never harmed me physically, but her discipline was firm. Forgetfulness was my downfall. "Rose," she would say with exasperation, "I think you'd forget your head if it weren't attached to your shoulders."

Their home offered structure and stability, but the emotional cost of separation weighed heavily on me. I missed my mother and siblings fiercely. Many nights, I cried myself to sleep in silence.

They enrolled me at St. Anthony's School for my second-grade year. I found comfort there. I made new friends and joined a Brownie troop where thoughtful mothers planned fun activities for us. I worked hard in school and earned good grades, but inside, I was still struggling. My bed-wetting embarrassed me and frustrated Aunt Ceil. To manage it, she forbade me from drinking anything after 4:00 p.m. I often went to bed thirsty, but I now understand the burden of washing wet linens in those days. In a way, I sympathize with her too.

Reunited with Mom in 1952

In the summer of 1952, I returned to Michigan for a visit with my siblings. While staying at cousin Eugene's house, where little Eleanor still lived, our Mother unexpectedly arrived with

the authorities. She had come to regain legal custody of Eleanor—and when Eugene mentioned that I was also there, the police took me into custody as well.

Just like that, my little sister and I were reunited with our Mother. The joy of that moment is something I still remember vividly. Shortly before this, my older siblings—Tom, Mary, and Ted—had made their own daring decision. They wanted to change the arrangement at Aunt Ida and Uncle Bill's, and planned their quiet escape. When the adults were away one day, they gathered what they could and left to join Mom in her new home.

At last, we were all together again.

After a year of uncertainty, longing, and separation, our reunion was a powerful reminder of how deeply we cared for one another. Despite everything, what endured was our bond—and our Mother's unwavering determination to bring her children home.