

## CHAPTER X INGUA IS CONFIDENTIAL

Ingua slowly resumed her seat on the bank beside her friend. It was hard to resist Josie's appeals.

"The whole thing looks pretty black ag'in Gran'dad," she said. "I s'pose ye can't understand what I mean till I tell ye the whole story, from the beginning 'cause ye didn't live here at the time. If ye lived here," she added, "I wouldn't tell ye anything, but by-'n'-by yer goin' away. An' ye've promised to keep yer mouth shut."

"Unless you give me permission to speak."

"I ain't likely to do that. I'm tellin' ye this, Josie, so's we kin talk it over, at times. It has got hold o' my mind, somethin' terrible. Once I was goin' to tell Mary Louise, but--she couldn't understand it like you kin. She's--diffrent. And if Gran'dad ever hears that I blabbed I'm as good as dead, an' I know it!"

"He won't hear it from me," promised Josie.

"Well, Gran'dad was allus sly. I 'member Marm tellin' him to his face he were cold as ice an' sly as sin. Mann had a way o' sayin' what she thought o' him, an' he'd jes' look at her steady an' say nuth'n back. She was allus tryin' to git money out o' him, Marm was, an' when he said he didn't hev no money she tol' him she knew he did. She ransacked the whole house--an' even tore up the floor-boards--tryin' to find where he'd hid it. Her idee was that if he'd sold his land for a lot o' money, an' hadn't spent a cent, he must hev it yit. But I guess Marm didn't find no money, an' so she lit out. The day she lit out she said to him that he was too slick for her, but she could take care o' herself. All she wanted was for him to take care o' me. Gran'dad said he would; an' so he did. He didn't take any too much care o' me, an' I'd ruther he wouldn't. If I had more to eat, I wouldn't kick, but since Mary Louise come here an' invited me to tea so often I hain't be'n hungry a bit."

"Mary Louise likes company," said Josie. "Go on, dear."

"Well, after Ann Kenton got married, her new husban' come here, which was Ned Joselyn. I never took a fancy to Ann. She wasn't 'specially uppish, but she wasn't noth'n else, either. Ned made me laugh when I first seen him. He had one spectacle in one eye, with a string to ketch it if it fell off. He had striped clothes an' shiny shoes an' he walked as keerful as if he was afraid the groun'

would git the bottoms o' them nice shoes dirty. He used to set in that summer-house an' smoke cigarettes an' read books. One day he noticed Ol' Swallertail, an' looked so hard at him that his one-eyed spectacle fell off a dozen times.

"That night he sent a letter to Gran'dad an' Gran'dad read it an' tore it up an' told the man that brung it there was no answer. That's all I knew till one night they come walkin' home together, chummy as a team o' mules. When they come to the bridge they shook hands an' Ol' Swallertail come to the house with a grin on his face--the first an' last grin I ever seen him have."

"Doesn't he ever laugh?" asked Josie.

"If he does, he laughs when no one is lookin'. But after that day I seen Ned Joselyn with Gran'dad a good deal. Sometimes he'd come to our house an' wait fer Ol' Swallertail to come home, an' they'd send me away an' tell me not to come back till I was called. That made me mighty curious to see what they was up to, so one day I crep' up behind the house an' peeked in the winder. They wasn't in the kitchen, so I went aroun' an' peeked through the winder o' Gran'dad's room, an' there they both sot, an' Gran'dad was countin' out money on the table. It must 'a' be'n gold money, 'cause it was yaller an' bigger ner cents er nickels. Ned put it all in his pocket, an' writ somethin' on a paper that Gran'dad put inter his big pocketbook. Then they both got up an' I made a run fer it an' hid behind the barn."

"When did that happen?" asked Josie.

"The first summer Ann was married. That was three summers ago, countin' this one. I was only a kid, then," said Ingua, as if realizing she was now two years older.

"And after that?" said Josie.

"Las' summer it was jes' the same. The two was thicker'n gumdrops, only Ned didn't go to the office no more. He allus came to our house instid. One day, when he was waitin' fer Ol' Swallertail, he says to me: 'Ingua, how'd ye like to be rollin' in money, an' Jive in a big city, an' hev yer own automobile to ride in, an' dress like a queen?'

"I'd like it,' says I.

"Well,' says he, 'it's boun' to happen, if Ol' Swallertail sticks to me an' does what I say. He's got the capital,' says Ned, 'an' I got the brains; an' atween the two of us, Ingua,' says Ned, 'we'll corral half the money there is in America.'

"Will he stick?' says I.

"I dunno,' says Ned. 'He's got queer ideas 'bout duty an' honesty that ain't pop'lar these days in business. But I'm gitt'n so now that I kin lead him by the nose, an' I'll force him to waller in money afore I've done with him.'

"I don't see how that'll make me rollin' in money, anyhow,' I told him.

"The ol' man'll die, pretty soon,' says Ned, 'an' then you'll git the money I make for him. By the time yer growed up, if not afore,' says he, 'you may be the riches' girl in the world. It all depends on how I kin bend that ol' stick of a gran'dad o' yourn.'

"That was the day he gimme the dollar, an' Gran'dad come in in time to see it, an' took it away from me. It didn't set me up any, that talk o' Ned's, 'cause I didn't believe in them brains he bragged on, or his bein' able to lead Ol' Swallertail by the nose. Gran'dad begun gittin' kind o' harsh with Ned, afore the summer was over, which showed he wasn't bendin' much, and at the last--just afore Ned went away--the big quarrel come off. It wasn't the quarrel Miss Huckins knows about, but it happened right here. They'd sent me away from the house, like they always did, and I were layin' in the clover in the back yard, when there was a crash an' a yell. I jumped up an' run to the door, an' the table was tipped over an' a lot o' papers an' money scattered on the floor, an' behind the table stood Ol' Swallertail, white an' still, an' Ned point'n' a gun at him."

"What sort of a gun?" questioned Josie.

"One o' them hip-pocket sort. Same as Jim Bennett the mailman carries. Only Jim's ain't never loaded, 'cause he's afraid of it. I ain't sure Ned's was loaded, either, for when he seen me in the doorway he jes' slipped it in his pocket.

"Very well,' says Gran'dad, 'I knows now what sort o' a man you are, Ned Joselyn.' An' Ned he answers back: 'An' I know what sort o' a man you are, ol' Cragg. Yer a hypercrit through an' through; ye preach squareness while yer as crooked as a snake, an' as p'isonous an' deadly, an' ye'd ruin yer bes' friend jes' to git a copper cent the best o' him.'

"Gran'dad leaned over an' set the table on its legs ag'in. An' then he says slow an' cold: 'But I hain't offered to murder you; not yet, Ned Joselyn!'

"Ned looked at him an' kinder shivered. An' Gran'dad said: 'Pick up them papers an' things, Ingua.'

"So I picked 'em up an' put 'em on the table an' they sent me away ag'in. I laid in the clover a whole hour, feelin' pretty nervous an' rocky, fer I didn't know what was goin' to happen. Noth'n' did happen, though, 'cept that Ned crossed the river on the steppin'-stones an' halfway over he turned an' laughed an' waved his hand at Gran'dad, who stood in the door an' watched him go. But Gran'dad didn't laugh. He says to me when I come in:

"'Ingua, if ever I'm found dead, you go to Dud Berkey, the constable, an' tell him to arrest Ned Joselyn for murder. D'ye understan'?"

"'I sure do,' says I. 'Guess he'd 'a' shot ye, Gran'dad, if I hadn't come in just when I did.'

"'An' see here,' he went on, 'unless I'm foun' dead, you keep mum 'bout what ye seen to-day. If ye blab a word to anyone, ye'll git me in trouble, an' I'll crush ye as willin' as I'd swat a fly. Me an' Ned is friends ag'in,' says he, 'but I don't trust him.'

"'Does he trust you?' I asked him; an' at first he jus' looked at me an' scowled; but after a minute he answered: 'I don't know how wise the man is. P'r'aps he isn't a fool; but even wise men is foolish sometimes.'

"Well, Josie, that was all, just then. Ned went with his wife Ann to the city, nex' day, an' things here went on as usual. Only, Gran'dad begun to git wakeful nights, an' couldn't sleep. He'd git up an' dress an' go outdoors an' walk aroun' till mornin'. He didn't say noth'n' to me about it, but I watched him, an' one mornin' when he come in I says: 'Why don't ye git some medicine o' Doc Jenkins to make ye sleep?' Then he busts out an' grabs me by the throat an' near choked the life out or me.

"'Ye spy--ye dirty little spy!' says he, 'ye keep yer eyes shut an' yer mouth shut, or I'll skin-ye alive!' says he.

"The way he looked at me, I was skeered stiff, an' I never said noth'n' more 'bout his sleepin' nights. I guess what made him mad was my sayin' he orter hev a doctor, 'cause doctors cost money an' Gran'dad's so poor he hates t' spend money unnecessary."

"Did he ever again try to choke you?"

"He tried once more, but I was too spry for him. It was a winter night, when it was cold in his room an' he come inter the kitchen, where there was a fire, to write. I sot behind the stove, tryin' to keep warm, an' after a time I seen him look up an' glare at the bare wall a long time. By-'n'-by he says in a low voice: 'Fer the Cause!' an' starts writin' ag'in. 'What cause are ye talkin' about, Gran'dad?' says I.

"I guess he'd fergot I was there, but now he gives a yell an' jumps up an' comes for me with his fingers twistin' and workin' like I'd seen 'em afore. I didn't wait fer him to git near me, you kin bet; I made a dive out the back door an' stood aroun' in the cold tryin' to keep warm while I give him time to cool off where the fire was. When he was writin' ag'in I sneaked in an' he didn't notice me. When Marm was here she used to josh him about the 'Cause,' an' once I heard her tell him she guessed the Cause was hoardin' his money so's to starve his family. Marm wasn't afraid of him, but I am, so I never whisper the word 'Cause' while he's around."

Josie sat in silent reflection for a time. Then she asked softly:

"Does he still walk at night, Ingua?"

"Sometimes. Not so much as he once did, though. He seems to take streaks o' bein' wakeful," explained the girl.

"Have you ever seen him come out, or go in?"

"Lots o' times. When it's moonlight I kin see him through my window, an' he can't see me 'cause my room is dark."

"And does he carry anything with him?"

"Not a thing. He jes' goes out like he does daytimes, an' comes back the same way."

Josie nodded her tousled red head, as if the answers pleased her.

"He's a very clever man, your grandfather," she remarked. "He can fool not only his neighbors, but his own family. But you've more to tell me, Ingua."

"How d'ye know, Josie?"

"Because all this is just the beginning. It is something else that has been worrying you, dear."