

When the Stake Is High

By A. V. PEACH

Marion Bishop, listening in the quiet of the hall, knew at last the reason for the sudden change in her father. She heard with slowing heart the grave voice of the lawyer saying, "Colwell has the papers which are the evidence against you; and while we who know you feel that your action was never criminal to any degree, in the eyes of the law and the gang who are determined to drive you from business, you are guilty. I must tell you frankly. You must prepare for the worst. Colwell takes office this week, and naturally he will want to start with a case he can win."

Marion heard her father's low groan of pain, and she hurried down the hall to her room. There she stood, in silence and thought. She had watched her father gradually seem to grow old that month. He was haggard and worn, and his will was gradually breaking under the burden of what he was facing.

What could she do? That was the question. She had often seen Colwell, the young attorney who had been elected state's attorney. His strong, serene face had appealed to her, and she knew that if his mind was made up to imprison her father no plea of hers could count.

"But I must do something—something! Father's lawyers evidently think there is nothing to be done," she thought to herself. "I will see Colwell and tell him just how it is."

Her decision reached, she set about carrying it out; but all the way to the heart of the city she was wondering what she could say—and what he would say. There was nothing for her to say other than that she had faith in her father's honor and honesty. She realized how foolish that statement



would sound to the keen lawyer whose life had been spent among men who did not do things from honest motives.

When she reached the great office building her courage almost failed her; but, setting her will, she entered.

She went into the outer office, and, without realizing the stir she made among the clerks as she came into the busy office atmosphere looking like a wild rose strayed from some garden, she found herself guided by a polite young man to the waiting room.

She was one of three girls waiting. Her wonder as to their errands there was quickly ended when she heard one of them say, "I'm going to make a try for the job even if I don't make good afterward."

It dawned upon Marion that the girls were applicants for a position as stenographer or secretary to Colwell. A blinding thought made her quiver. She had prepared herself for secretarial work in order to aid her father. Colwell did not know her nor did any else in the district. A wild, rash plan formed in her mind; she, too, would apply for the position, and perhaps—perhaps she could secure the fatal papers which alone could convict her father.

Shivering slightly with nervousness, she watched the girls go in and come out depressed. Then her turn came.

She stepped into the quiet office bravely, and found herself courteously seated and then scanned quickly. She had never been near enough to see his eyes; she found them grave, searching, with the thought of his mind hidden.

He asked her the usual questions and then gave her some dictation. With trembling but skilled fingers she wrote and afterward typed the matter. She watched him, half praying, half hoping he would reject her, for she sensed that he was favorably impressed.

He looked up with his gray eyes. "If you wish the position it is yours, Miss —"

Quickly Marion breathed the name she had already sent in to him—"Marion Lane."

She was soon at work beside him, and through that fated afternoon she came in touch, for the first time, with a personality so strong that it mastered her. When the afternoon ended he turned to her with a friendly word.

"You are very capable, Miss Lane, and if you will tell me more about about yourself I would like to make you my secretary," he said, his gray eyes upon her.

She shook her head, frightened.

"Really, there is nothing to tell."

His words disturbed her. If she was to be his stenographer she would not have the opportunity to secure the damaging paper; as his secretary she would. But evidently before giving her the position of trust he wished to know more about her.

To her surprise the next morning she found herself doing a secretary's work. Her hopes rose again; she would get those papers.

The week went by. Her father's case was approaching trial. She caught herself wondering, now and then, if she had not better tell Colwell the whole story—her own action—who she was. She felt sometimes as if she simply must go to him. Her thoughts were often with him; memories haunted her after working hours—memories of his face, his ways; and suddenly the truth came.

Her face crimsoning though she was in the shelter of her own room; she tried to drive the thought away. "I do believe I am in love with him—oh, the idea of it!—the man who may send father to prison!"

She fought bravely, but when she found on her desk a bunch of roses the next morning she all but wept into them. It was just his customary thoughtfulness, yet it meant more than that to her.

Then came the crisis! The next afternoon she saw him take some papers from a case, and from her desk she read the inscription upon them. It was the evidence against her father. She saw Colwell glance through them, then place them in a file. He picked up another folio and went out.

She looked at the file with fascinated eyes. Then with a low cry, stirred by some inner despair, she rushed over, drew the slip of papers from the file and clasped it to her with a whisper, "Now I have them!"

She turned to her desk and paused. In the door stood Colwell, his grave eyes upon her, and in them something that drove her wavering senses into confusion. His eyes were not stern—although they told her that he knew something was wrong—but gentle and pitying.

She let the papers fall from her numb fingers and swayed as she stood.

"Miss Bishop—" he began.

He knew her name. It was the last shock. She wavered in faintness, and, struggling against it, she started for her desk, to find the whirling office grow steady as strong arms held her tightly. His eyes, looking down into her frightened ones, held the old but beautiful light; and her fear grew into wonder and then into a rush of hope and happiness.

"My dear little plotter, I know who you are; I saw you months ago, and thought I—I would like to have you with me—for—why, always, of course. Then you appeared in the office. I could not guess why, but I know now. Didn't you see I put your father's case in the file of those to be dismissed? There, now, let's go to your home and tell him. Then, too, I want to ask him for permission to make love to you in a real way!"

—Lee Richmond, editor of the Minden Courier, spent a day or two in the city the first of the week, making a visit with a family who have recently taken up their residence in Alliance. Although a young man, Lee grew up in the newspaper profession and has made the Courier known all over the state as one of the leading publications of its class in Nebraska. He made a short visit with The Herald force, and something in his manner, more than in what he said, made us think that the present visit in Alliance is one of a long series, and that in time we'll see more of him.

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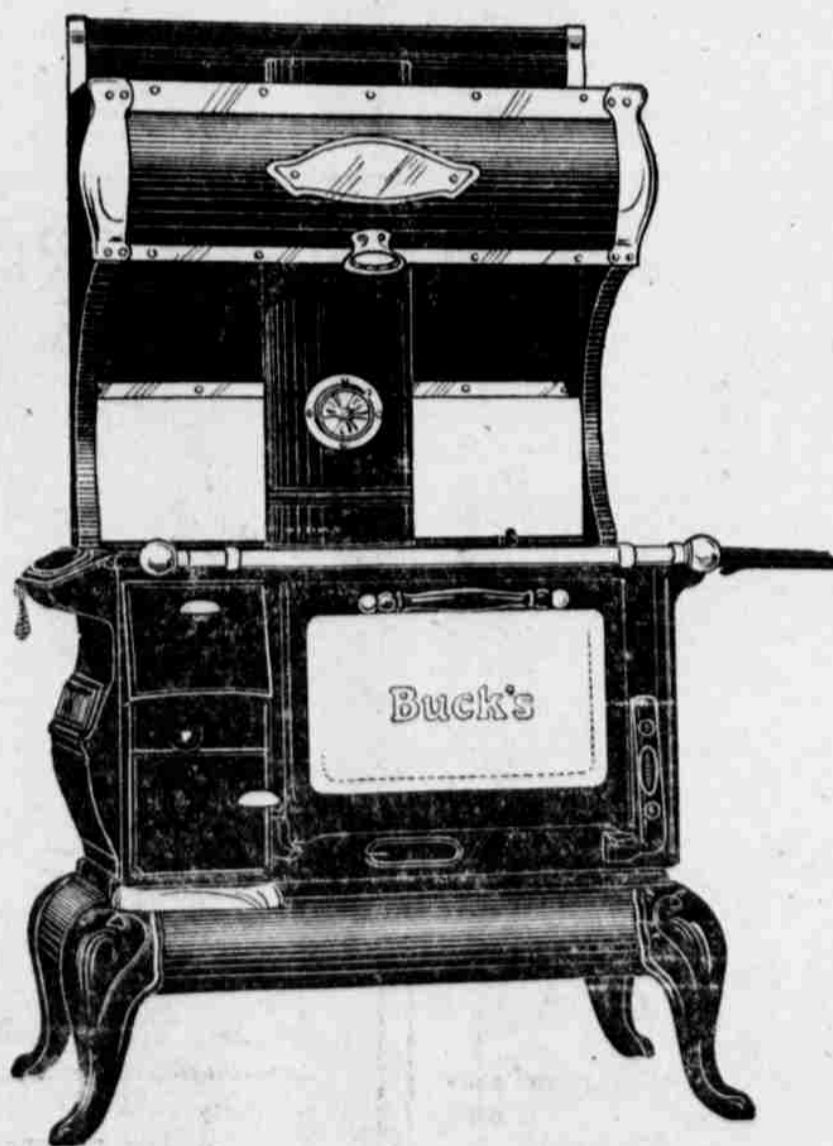
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