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P. S.

“Bert” Martin’s Little Secret



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On October 13, 1900, Bert Martin, a ranch hand from Keya Paha County, was sent to the state penitentiary for two years for stealing a horse. A weeping woman with babe in arms, said to be Bert’s wife, stood by his side at the sentencing. At the pen, Bert was assigned to work in the broom factory and lived for eleven months with the same cellmate. At some point the cellmate informed prison authorities that Bert was really a woman, whose name turned out to be Lena Martin. She was promptly transferred to the women’s section of the penitentiary.

On October 12, 1901, the *Lincoln Evening News* reported, “She is distinctly masculine in appear-

ance. . . her former associates in Keya Paha County received the news of her unmasking with amazement and many still refuse to believe the story.”

Governor Ezra P. Savage was outraged when he learned of Lena Martin’s masquerade. In his biennial message he declared her “a sexual monstrosity, unfit for association with men or women even in a penal institution, and on the solemn promise of its aged mother to care for it and guard it, and that prison morals imperatively demanded its removal, sentence was commuted to one year, six months, February 3, 1902.”

JAMES E. POTTER