

*Uncertain Alliance* excerpt

Where had Alice gone wrong if Burl thought stealing was the way to solve their problems? "Burl, stealing won't make it better." She mustered her courage to turn back to Mr. MacGregor. She hoped he would be understanding. "Are you going to notify the police?"

"Not if a couple of conditions are met."

"I'll pay for the window." When she got a job.

"That won't be necessary. Burl will come to work for me before school and after school until it is paid off."

He wasn't going to notify the police. She gave a sigh of relief. He was a nice man. "That's very generous of you."

"I can go with him to make sure he does as he is told," Grandpa said.

"That won't be necessary, Mr. Greig. Burl will do as he's told. Won't you boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"I do have one other condition. You come to work for me, too."

She jerked her gaze to his face. "What?"

"I could use another assistant at the store."

He was going to use her poor circumstance against her. "I'm afraid that won't be possible."

"Did you secure other employment?"

"No, but. . ." She didn't want him using this to take advantage of the situation. She wanted him to stay a nice man.

"Then you'll come work for me. I insist."

She looked from him to Burl to Grandpa. Tears welled, and she strode to her room. Latching the door, she leaned against it. *Dear Lord, what do I do? Is Mr. MacGregor using my poor circumstances and Burl's bad behavior to take advantage? Please let him just be a nice man with no ulterior motives.*

An alliance with Mr. MacGregor was tenuous at best. She was afraid. Afraid of him. Afraid of what he might do. . .to her heart. She couldn't trust herself where men were concerned. She had poor judgment. Very poor judgment.