# A Ghostly Correspondence

By W. A. SMITH

"Some letters up at your shack," Mr. Jackson.

Big, healthy, good looking, Arnold Jackson, mining engineer for the Consolidated Metal Company, turned and faced Billy Brantly, who had just driven in from Ruxton, the company's main office, 20 miles distant.

"Anything important, Bill?" he asked.

"Don't know, sir, been on the road a long time I guess."

"Thank you, Bill," said Jackson, and strode off to his shack some distance from the works.

On entering he went directly to the table in the center of the room and picked up the letters, some six in all, and examined them.

When he saw they were from Reedville, N. Y., his boyhood home, he was overcome with emotion. For sometime he held the letters before him. They were the first word he had received from home in 11 years.

He read them slowly and upon completing the last one, mailed a month before, a broad grin spread over his face, and gathering up the letters, he went quickly to the superintendent's office.

Knocking he was told to enter.

Mr. Upson, the superintendent, looked up as Jackson entered, and said, "Hello, Jackson. What's up? You look as if someone had left you a million."

"Better than that, Mr. Upton, I have just received some letters from my aunt back home. The first word from her in 11 years. Do you wonder that I am happy?"

"Not a bit," said Upson. "Sit down and tell me about it."

Arnold seated himself and rapidly gave a sketch of his early life.

His parents had both died when he was 9 years old, and he had gone to live with his mother's sister and husband. His folks had left him some money and his uncle, a very religious man, had wanted him to study for the ministry. However, he had other plans for himself, and when he became of age, he told his uncle he was going West to take up mining. His uncle became very angry and told him he was through with him if he went, and never to come back or enter his door again. His aunt's appeals had no effect; so, with the determination to make good, he had left for the West, and, turning to Mr. Upton, he said, "You know how well I have done?"

Mr. Upton replied, "You bet I do, my boy, anything more?"

"Yes, Mr. Upson," Arnold answered, "my uncle is dead and Aunt Elizabeth wants to see me. She has been sending me a letter every month for 6 months, but for some reason I have not received them until now. I have them all in a bunch. I would like 3 months leave. I am going back and square up with my aunt."

"Right o' my boy. The 3 months are yours and may good luck go with you," said Upson.

Arnold's plans were soon completed, and within the week he was on his way east. To Arnold the trains were never so slow. It seemed a month to him before he reached New York.

He wandered around the city for a day and bought several presents for his aunt. At length he was on the train that was to take him to Reedville, and seated in the smoker, struck a match to light his pipe. As the flame flared up a man in the seat opposite jumped up, and grasping his hand, said, "Arnold Jackson, by all that's good! How are you? Why, boy, nothing could please me more than to see you. Where in the world have you been all these years?"

Arnold was delighted when he saw that it was none other than John Billings, his uncle's, and also his father's old attorney. In a few words Arnold told Mr. Bilings of his experiences and life since leaving his old home.

Mr. Billings shook his hand again, and asked, "Now, Arnold, what brings you to Reedville again?"

Arnold's answer, that he had received some letters from his aunt, brought Mr. Billings to his feet in amazement. He said, "What's that you said?" and seemed very much excited.

Arnold was surprised at Mr. Billing's evident astonishment and repeated that his coming at this time was due to the letters from his Aunt Elizabeth.

Billings dropped back in his seat with a queer look on his face, and said, "Tell me about it."

Arnold complied with his request, and when he had finished, Mr. Billings said slowly, "Well, I am glad you came, but before you go to the house, I want you to take supper with me and stay tonight. I have something I want to say to you."

After a moments thought Arnold agreed, saying, "Thank you, Mr. Billings, that will give me a chance to rest up and let aunt see me at my best."

When they reached Reedville Mr. Billings' car was waiting and they were soon at the Billings' home.

Mrs. Billings' surprise was great, and she said, "My, what a big husky fellow you have grown to be. Indeed you are good to look at."

Mr. Billings caught her eye and motioned to another room. Arnold was shown to his room, and Mr. Billings told her he wanted to talk with her before she saw Arnold again.

Mrs. Billings was as much surprised as her husband when she was told that Arnold had received letters from his Aunt for 6 months. Mr. Billings cautioned her to show no surprise if Arnold talked about the letters. She promised, and Arnold was soon down to supper, and a happy party it was. After the meal was over Arnold was shown into Mr. Billings' study. After sitting down by his desk he motioned to Arnold to be seated. Pushing a box of cigars toward him he said, "Smoke, my boy?"

Arnold laughed and said, "Yes, I am afraid I have acquired some bad habits."

After lighting his cigar he settled back for a comfortable chat, little knowing that he was to receive the shock of his life.

After sitting quietly for a moment, Mr. Billings said, "Arnold, have you your aunt's letters with you?"

"Indeed I have," said Arnold, and taking them from his pocket handed them to the lawyer, who took them and read each one slowly.

Arnold sat back and was puzzled at the expression on Mr. Billings' face.

When he had finished the last one he handed them back to Arnold, and said, "My boy, there is not a shadow of a doubt that they are your aunt's handwritnig, but prepare yourself for a shock. Your aunt has been dead for more than a year."

It was indeed a shock, and for a time Arnold was too amazed to speak. When he did it was to say, "My God, Mr. Billings, is that true?'

The lawyer put his hand on Arnold's knee, and said gently, "It is only true. I wish I could have had better news for you on your homecoming."

Arnold pulled himself together and thought deeply for a while, then said, "Mr. Billings, how did these letters come to me? It can not be for a cruel joke, as they are certainly Aunt Elizabeth's handwriting."

Mr. Billings shook his head and said, "My boy, this is a mystery that we will have to unravel together. As you know, I was your aunt's attorney, and I want to tell you, had she lived, she would have been only too glad to welcome you home.

"You and Rose Whiting, whom you knew as a girl, and if I mistake not, liked, too, were the only ones she really loved. She often talked of you to Rose and me when I was settling up the estate after your uncle's death, and in her will made Rose and you joint beneficiaries."

At the mention of Rose Whiting's name Arnold was visibly affected, for she had been a cherished companion of his boyhood, and the secret of his having never married. While no word of love had ever passed between them, he had nourished the thought that she might some day care for him, but after success had come to him, could not bring himself to risk of refusal, not knowing whether she had already married or not. With trembling lips, he asked, "And Rose, has she married?"

Mr. Billings smiled, and said, "No, Arnold, she is still single, and I think will be glad to see you. She refused to accept her part of the legacy which left her the old home your aunt lived in, but has always said that some day you would be back, and then it would be time enough. Her home is but a short distance from your aunt's and Rose has seen to it that it has never lacked attention. It is as your aunt left it."

Arnold was much affected by this news, more than he cared to show.

After thanking Mr. Billings for his kindness and sympathy, he asked if he might be excused. He felt that he would like to get out and walk.

Mr. Billings sympathized with Arnold's feelings, and told him a long walk would be the best tonic he could advise, to come back when he felt like it, that the house would be open, and on the morrow they would tackle the solution of the letters.

When Arnold left the house he did not know in what direction he would go. He walked through the business section of the town, but as it was late and few were out he did not expect to see anyone he could recognize. His mind was on the solution of the events that had been unfolded in the last few hours, and unconsciously his steps took him toward his aun't old home. He was not aware of his proximity to the house until he recognized with a start, an old tree standing in a corner that was the boundary of the estate. The house was only a short distance back from the sidewalk, and reached by a winding path. As Arnold realized where he was, and stood looking at it, a flood of memories came over him.

How long he would have remained there no one can say, but suddenly his attention was attracted by a light that showed for a few seconds from one of the windows upstairs. His thoughts flew to burglars, so he walked lightly up the path, taking care to keep in the shadows of the bushes that grew along the border of the walk.

As he neared the house he was surprised to see the front door slightly ajar. He crept up softly and opened it. Stepping into the hall he tiptoed along until he came to a door he knew opened into a room his aunt had formerly used as a private reading room. He heard someone coming down the stairs, and although it was dark, his familiarity with the room helped him to find a screen that stood at one side opposite another door.

He slipped behind the screen and waited.

He did not have long to wait for someone came into the room and switched on the light.

Arnold was so astonished when, instead of a burglar, he saw a beautiful woman, and none other than Rose Whiting, that he nearly disclosed his presence.

Rose went over to a small desk that he recognized as belonging to his aunt, switched on a light over the desk, shutting off the one she had lighted before. This threw her face into profile and Arnold was conscious that she had grown to be an exceptionally handsome woman. He was mystified as to what she could be doing alone in the house at that hour. As he watched her he saw her take a long box from a compartment in the desk, open it and take out several letters. After looking them over she selected one and put the others back into the box, replacing it in the desk, then taking up a pen, she made a few marks on one of the top sheets of paper, and taking an envelope from another box in the desk, she took time to copy the address of someone from what appeared to be a clipping from a newspaper. After seeming satisfied that everything was all right she placed the sheets in the envelope and putting a stamp on it, switched off the light.

When he was sure she had left the house he stepped to the window, and pulling aside the shade saw Rose cross the street and place the letter in the mail box, and walk quickly away.

He waited until he was sure it was save for him to have a light, then he went to the desk, turned on the light, and taking out the box was amazed to find that it contained a number of letters written to him by his aunt. There were no dates on any of the sheets, but they were apparently written as his aunt would have done had she intended to send them. A short note enclosed in the box, gave instruction that if Arnold ever came back the letters were to be given to him as a token of what she would have liked to do had she dared.

What looked like a clipping was indeed one and had been cut from a mining paper. It told of the operations of his mining company and the work he was engaged in, with the address of the company. It was a pleasing revelation to Arnold, and he saw at once that the letters not being dated had allowed Rose to supply the dates and convinced him that they had been written recently.

The true intent of Rose came to him in a flash. She wanted him to come back and had taken that way to bring him home. Arnold was radiant with joy, and going to a closet in the hall where he knew his uncle had always kept an extra latch key, found what he wanted and let himself out of the house.

After assuring himself that no one would see him he started for the Billings' home with a lighter step than when he had left. Indeed he could hardly wait to get there and tell the wonderful tale to Mr. Billings. When he did reach the house, imagine their astonishment to hear him come bounding up the steps whistling a lively tune. They waited for him almost fearing his mind had gone back on him.

They stood in the middle of hte room as Arnold opened the door.

He sped them at once, and dancing a jig, cried, "It's all right, old boy, I have laid one ghostly correspondent, and now I want you to help me create another one."

In a short time he had acquainted the Billings with what had happened, and they were as happy as Arnold at the queer solution. They were also eager to help him with any finale he wanted to carry out.

On his way back to the house he had outlined in his mind a way to bring Rose and himself together and assure himself that he had made no mistake in his interpretation of what she had done.

He first asked Mr. Billings, "Have you an expert on handwriting in the town, one that can make a good copy?"

Mr. Billings assured him that there was; that Mr. Strong in the First National Bank was conceded to be among the best.

"All right," said Arnold, " then here's my scheme to catch Miss Rose. But, first, please let me say I have loved her since I was a boy, and many a time I wished I dared to write and find out how she was, but could never screw up the courage."

Mr. and Mrs. Billings were not surprised at this, having guessed that state of affairs before.

Arnold told them he intended to have Mr. Strong make a copy of his aunt's writing and draft a letter purporting to come from her, requesting Rose to go to the old home at nine the next night; that she had commanded Arnold to be there, and there Rose would meet him in the flesh and confess what she had done, but not to go unless she was prepared to accept his love and make the rest of his life a happy one.

The next morning saw Arnold at the bank with Mr. Billings and it was not long before he had a letter that passed even his critical eye.

The letter was duly mailed and purported to come direct from the "Spirit City."

Arnold could hardly wait until evening to test his fortune, but eventually the time came, and with fear in his heart, he entered the house a little before the hour appointed and secreting himself behind the screen, waited.

The minutes seemed like hours, but at length the time came, Arnold was conscious of another's presence in the room.

As the final stroke proclaimed the hour of nine the light at the desk was switched on and Rose was shown standing by the desk. She was gazing intently around the room. Arnold could hardly repress his excitement, but finally mastered himself and in a sepulchral voice said, "Miss Rose Whiting, do you confess your duplicity with regard to the letters and in repentence will you take Arnold Jackson to be your loving husband?"

Rose waited a moment and then in a solemn voice, yet one that contained a note of rougishness, said, "Yes, Mr. Spirit, I certainly will. Where are you, Arnold?"

With a whirl the screen was thrown aside and in a moment Rose was in Arnold's arms.

Some way the switch was struck and the room plunged in sudden darkness. Arnold and Rose—but never mind what happened. That is none of our business, dear reader.

Suffice to say that an hour later Arnold and Rose were receiving the congratulations of Mr. and Mrs. Billings, and the future of Arnold Jackson and Rose Whiting seemed assuredly rosy.

May we hope as happy a solution will come to every reader who has "ghostly" troubles.

## These Girls of Ours Will Ride

In this day of automobiles and airplanes the girls refuse to either walk or swim when they go to the water for a cooling dip. Now it is the "Bubble Boat" — a bamboo frame on three inflated rubber balls—and equiped with a sail. It is a quite popular craft at the beaches this summer. See how it works?

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