

## *A Detective's Ghost Story*

by Caroline Conrad

Ghosts, sir? Well, I think if you had been in my place once, you'd have believed in ghosts, too. Tell you about it? With all the pleasure in life.

You see, I had gone down to Sandy Point, about a big robbery; and while I was there, working the thing up, my attention was attracted by a pretty girl I used to see at the hotel where I stopped. Nobody could help noticing her, she was such a beauty. Eyes black as sloes, hair black and curly, skin a little dark, just enough to give it a rich look. Cheeks crimson. Her name was Rose Jalett, and they called her there in the town, *the* Rose, because she was so handsome and so gay, I suppose.

Of course, she had plenty of beaux, and coquetted them all; but there were two who were a long way ahead of the others. I used to wonder which she liked best, but I could never guess, for while she smiled sweetly on one, she would fling a merry word at the other, and so on. Both young men were good-looking, one fair, the other dark; and both were carpenters. One was called James Arnold, and the other Walter Snow. Snow was a jealous fellow, and showed it. Arnold was jealous, too, but didn't show it so plain. Snow was always in a quarrel with her; Arnold, I fancied, was mad enough at her coquetries sometimes to eat her, but he never let on.

Rose Jalett knew I was a detective, and had a sort of awe and curiosity about me. Many a yarn I told her, some true, some not. It was so pretty to watch her big eyes kindle and get bigger.

I used to joke her sometimes, and try to find out whether she liked Arnold best or Snow. But she never would tell me.

"See here, Rose," I said to her one day, when she's been playing those two chaps off against each other pretty lively, "you'll have those foolish fellows fighting about you if you're not careful."

"I'm much more afraid of one of them fighting me," she laughed.

"Which one?" said I, laughing, too; but I thought of Arnold's glowering looks.

"Guess," she said.

"They've both got temper—too much of it."

"Jim Arnold hasn't much temper," she said.

“I shouldn’t like to be in your skin, if you ever give him the sack for the other,” I answered.

“Why not?” she asked.

“Never mind,” I said; “but if you ever make up your mind to marry any body beside Jim Arnold, don’t do it while he’s around, that’s all.”

Rose glanced across to where Arnold was standing at the other end of the veranda, watching us, though he pretended not. Then she looked back on me.

“Well, you’re solemn enough about it,” she said; “anyone would think you meant it.”

We both laughed; but I said, shaking my head at her:

“You know I do mean it, every word.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said Rose. “If any harm ever comes to me through either of them, I’ll promise to come to you, Mr. Busby, or send my ghost to tell you who did it. And you must hunt him down for it. Will you promise me that?”

“Yes, I will,” I said, “and there’s my hand on it.”

And we shook hands, and had a good laugh, and thought that was the last of it, of course.

Well, I went away soon after, and it was a year almost to a day before I saw the place again. Then I had almost forgotten there was such a person as Rose Jalett.

The case I was on was a very important one, and I didn’t want it known I was around at all. So I had disguised myself in a farmer kind of rig, that I didn’t believe my own mother would have known me in. I stopped at a cheap lodging house at the end of town, because I suspected some of the gang I was after frequented it.

Well, I’d had my supper, and gone to my room to sit by the window, and study a bit about the business in hand. I am positive I wasn’t thinking of Rose Jalett. I don’t believe I had thought of her since I got there, my head was so full of my business. My room was on the ground floor, and my window was open. It was growing dusk. It wasn’t a very nice part of the town, lots of roughs about, you know; so when I saw a woman standing all at once, there under my window—alone, too—I thought it was very queer; but when she looked up, and I saw it was Rose Jalett, I thought that was queerer yet. She was all in black, even her head was wound about with thick folds of black, and never had I seen her face so pale, or her eyes so sad and solemn. She came close to the window and looked up at me.

“Mr. Busby?” she said.

I jumped, for you see I didn't think anyone would know me, fixed up as I was; and I said in a whisper:

"Is it really you, Rose? Don't speak so loud, please, for I don't want to be known here."

She went right on without seeming to have heard me.

"Harm *has* come to me," she said, "and it was Jim Arnold. Remember your promise."

And then all in a flash she was gone, and I couldn't have told where, up, down, or round the corner of the house, only she'd gone, and I hadn't seen her go.

As I sat staring out, with her words going through and through my head, I began to feel kind of creepy and odd. Now I don't believe anyone who knows me would call me superstitious. But all at once, as I sat there, it came over me that maybe I had seen Rose Jalett's ghost, instead of herself. She had certainly spoken and looked very strangely for a living woman. Then I laughed at myself for the fancy.

"Busby, old fellow," said I, "you know there are no such things as ghosts. What are you thinking about?"

And I put on my coat and hat and went out into the town, to see if I could learn anything about the business I had come down there upon. Every now and then as I walked along in the darkness, the thought of Rose Jalett would come over me with a kind of thrill, and I seemed to hear her saying: "Remember your promise."

I tried to shake off the impression, but it wouldn't go; and at last I stepped into a store, and said to a clerk, a fellow who used to be running after Rose:

"Is there a young woman living round here by the name of Rose Jalett? 'Cause I've got a letter for her."

"Then you've got a letter for a dead woman," he said. "Rose Jalett is dead; drowned in the river."

"Who did it?" I asked, turning cold.

"Did it herself, I suppose. I never heard of anyone else being accused of it."

"But why should she? Where is Jim Arnold?" I blurted out, before I knew what I was about.

"Oh, Jim went away ever so long ago. I guess Rose and he were engaged. It was thought they had quarreled maybe, and that was why she drowned herself."

That night I dreamed Rose came to my bedside, and stood looking at me just as she had under my window, and saying:

“It was Jim Arnold; remember your promise.”

Well, I made some more inquiries round, and I found the general impression was, that Rose had drowned herself, just as the clerk had told me. The body had never been found, but she was missing, and her handkerchief and gloves, and the hat she wore the night she disappeared, were picked up on the riverbank. The water was swift here, and it was generally believed the body had drifted out to the lake.

Well, I had some pretty curious thoughts. Was Rose dead or wasn't she? Anyway, there was a mystery, and I was just the fellow to ferret it out. The first thing was to find Jim Arnold. So, just as soon as I had got through the business I was on, I started on his track.

Never mind the hunt I had for him. It was longer than I expected it would be, and the longer I looked for him the more I suspected he had something ugly on his mind. People with clear consciences ain't, as a general thing, so hard to find.

Well, I found him at last, working on a *farm*, and he a carpenter by trade. He was a good two hundred miles from Sandy Point, too, and he'd got a new name besides that. He called himself Turner, but he couldn't Turner *me*. I knew him the minute I put my eyes on him. He was at supper with the man he was working for and the other hands, and I stood and watched him through the kitchen window some minutes.

He'd changed a good deal, got thin and yellow, and had a sort of hunted look in his eyes, that settled his case for me then and there. I never saw *that* look in an innocent man's face.

The kitchen door stood open, and I walked in and right up to him.

“How do you do, Mr. Arnold?” said I.

You should have seen him. I've had some experience with frightened men, but I never saw one so scared as he was. I never in my life saw a face get so white as his did. First he jumped up and looked round as if he was going to run, then he sat down again and set his teeth hard. You see, he knew me and knew I was a detective.

“My name ain't Arnold,” he said, glowering at me with eyes like coals. “I don't know you, sir.”

“Your name *is* Arnold, and I know *you*, if you don't me,” I answered in a low voice. “Who do you think sent me here after you?”

His eyes almost jumped out of his head, and his teeth would chatter in spite of him.

“Rose Jalett sent me,” I went on; “you know what for.”

When I said that, the wretch fell on his knees and fairly howled for mercy.

“I’ll confess,” he shrieked. “I killed her, I did. I’d sworn Snow shouldn’t have her, and I killed her to keep her from him. She said she’d haunt me for it. She said she’d come out of her grave to hang me, and she has.”

Well, I took him back to Sandy Point, and lodged him in the prison there. The trial come off in due time. There wasn’t one atom of evidence that he did the deed, except his own confession to me. He hadn’t opened his lips to anyone since, and when he was called upon to plead “Guilty, or not guilty,” the villain answered, “Not guilty,” after all.

As he said the words, there was a slight stir in the crowd behind him. He looked round, and something he saw there turned his face chalky.

He gave a sort of gasp, staggered upon his feet, and fairly screamed out “Guilty,” and fell down in a fit.

They carried him out, foaming and writhing, and as they did so a woman dressed in black came forward and threw up her veil. It was Rose Jalett, alive.

“He tried to kill me,” she said. “It was not his fault that he did not succeed. I had been engaged to Mr. Snow a long time, but because my father liked Mr. Arnold best, we kept the engagement a secret. I had gone out that night to meet my promised husband, and as I was crossing on the railroad bridge, over the river, James Arnold came from the other side and met me. He told me if I did not promise to marry him then and there he’d throw me down into the water. I was always afraid of him; he had such a savage look in his eyes sometimes. But I wouldn’t promise, and when he took hold of me, and I saw he really meant to drown me, I struggled with him, and told him if he did I’d have him hung for it, if I had to come out of my grave to do it. And I told him I was going to marry Walter Snow, and that I had come out there to meet him. For I thought perhaps it would scare him if he thought Walter was around. But he suddenly snatched my shawl off me and wound it round my head to keep my screams from being heard, and the next thing I knew I was in the water. Walter came up just in time to save me; but Arnold had run away as fast as he could, and he did not know that he had failed in killing me, after all. The shock was a dreadful one to me, and my fright of Jim Arnold was so great that I begged Walter to hide me from him, and from everyone, and let it be supposed that I was dead. So then we were married and went away from this part of the country for several months, till we heard Arnold had gone, when we returned. But I kept close, and let no one but my own folks know I was alive; and I never went out without a thick veil doubled over my face, for I was afraid of Arnold yet. Then one evening I was riding along in a carriage, with my husband, and I saw Mr. Busby sitting at a

window, and I went up and spoke to him and told him about Arnold, and, that is all. I didn't want the man hung, of course, but I hope he won't be allowed to murder me, as I am sure he will want to when he finds I am not dead."

But Arnold was past hurting anyone anymore. The wretch went from one fit into another, and finally died, literally frightened to death.

Rose was never quite her gay self again. She didn't even laugh when I told her I took her for a ghost that time.

"I meant you should," she said, without a smile. "I felt like a ghost myself."

"But how did you know me?" I asked.

"I couldn't tell you that," she said. "I knew you, and that is all I know about it. I didn't even know you were disguised."

And that is the end of my ghost story.

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