

# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

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Cover by John Giunta

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## NOVELETTE

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*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use  
of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

# Tryst Beyond the Years

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**B**ETH is a name that deserves to be loved. A soft name, suggestive of moonlit nights and the whispered murmurs of endearment. Of lacy frills and flowing chiffon, of the subdued background music of a string quartet playing something old—of course, old—as a setting. Faint perfume that lingers in men's memories, and a smile and charm as unforgettable as woman-kind herself.

The whole of it—Miss Beth Simpson—was less moon-washed, tiptoes and curtesy. Miss Beth Simpson—quite prosaic and suitable for use on the nearest—print, don't scribble—resort hotel register.

That was the beginning. The Simpson you get from your family. The Beth is wholly yours, to be said first with that unreachable pride of the six-year-old pointing in on herself and announcing in accents uncertain but purposeful:

*"I'm Beth!"*

Which was quite so since first she could remember.

Now the years ran together like colors in the rain. Like the rain, wind-driven, that washed and worried at the square, Hodgson prefabricated house at cliffside. Petals of rain making the oblong windows opaque, turning eyes from The View—see, it says here you can see the whole of the lake from the cliffside bungalows—inward towards the white-covered bed, the two (one comfortable) chairs and the writing desk for sending back those, "Wish you were . . ." cards.

All rooms, if not created equal, become so in the rain. In Bangkok or New York, Kalamazoo or Liverpool . . . or at Creel's Mountain Lakes. That's what the sign said

on the wall. . . . "Tell Your Friends. Ideal for Vacations, Honeymoons. All Sports, Central Cuisine. Forget Your Worries. CREEL'S MOUNTAIN LAKES. . . . Where The Sun Always Shines." (Please put light out before leaving cabin. . . . Thank you. I. Faber, Mgr.)

The white-board cabin with real-looking paneling was hers for one week, which was all Beth could afford. Money, although not an insurmountable problem in her life was at least always a consideration.

The neatness of the room-and-a-half was unchanged since Beth's arrival. Her belongings—for the week—stowed away neatly into the closet. There was a magazine she'd bought on the train up. And the silver-framed picture of Him she stood carefully on her bedtable where it would not miss a thing.

**F**OR all of the weather outside, the impenetrable screen of rain and mist, there might have been a prairie or skyscraper beyond her window instead of the lake and the cliffs that stood here against the eastern sweep of the waters.

But Beth knew the color of sky, the blinding sparkle of the lake and the brown-gray pillar of cliff as she had known it before there had been a Development and noisy all-ages in store knickers, frocks and sunsuits playing at tennis and golf and using the pool, sipping cocktails and complaining about sore muscles and sunburn and Damn, I have only three more days!

In the rain you can stop and catch your breath. Beth did. She had time to think of all the running-away. And here, here where she would rather be than anywhere else be-

**BY MALCOLM KENNETH MURCHIE**



*All comes to be—or she—who waits, no matter how many the weary years*



Heading by Vincent Napoli

cause, well, because of so very much, had now the discordant quality of Benny Goodman's clarinet at High Church.

She'd noticed with distaste the multi-colored banner across the gates where before no gates and nothing else had been: "Welcome

to Creel's Mountain Lakes. . . . Stay Awhile and You'll Come Again." Things like such. They annoyed her. But that wasn't it.

It was this other. The running. It first happened when she had pigtailed and the memory of her Mummy was a fading thing

to be refreshed by the big picture in the living room. Not as strong as the memory of the soreness in her neck and the kind lady who'd appeared beyond the rim of her father and doctors' stern attentions, come to her to say, "I'm your Aunt Edith and you're going to feel better very soon."

Of course, her mother's death, which was a big thing, had taken place in the early shadows of her life. And the little thing, mumps, had been later.

That night when the great house was supposed to be asleep, Aunt Edith had come and bundled her up, whispering to her to be very quiet. The words she had reconstructed in later life. They went something like this:

"I know you are very young, Beth, but, dear, I'm going to take you away from this house and that man. You belong to your poor mother and to me." They went out a back way into the night and somewhere at a great rate through the darkness.

Some of the darkness dispersed as Beth grew away from her leggings and pigtails. But it always came back on even the brightest day. Beth still remembered the sunshine streaking through the windows of Aunt Edith's small home the day her father and the other man with the briefcase arrived. There were loud words, and Aunt Edith cried and cried while the child crouched above on the stairs looking through the banisters.

In the end Julia, Aunt Edith's domestic, who made gingerbread Beth could still smell and taste, came upstairs and said, "Child, you're leaving us. You're going with Mister Simpson." And when the old servant turned from the trunk in which Beth's pinafores were being packed, some of Aunt Edith's tears were on her face too.

Beth had gone back to the big, dark lonely house. Her father, who was like the house, frightened her when he looked at her with his broad, heavy face and black hair and no laughter in him anywhere when she recited: "I asked my mother for fifty cents, to see the elephant jump the fence."

Mr. Simpson just looked at her and looked at her, and something in his face made her want to run away as far as China to hide with the upside-down people, but once when she had tried it, Jack Green, the grocer, had caught her seven blocks away and brought

her back: "I found the tyke all the way down by the park, Mister Simpson."

Her father had taken her up to her room, holding her with a grip that would have made her cry out if she'd not been so scared. Crying was something her father would not let her do, so it was saved for night when the old house was silent and empty of everything but her sorrow and fear.

THEN there'd been another day that Aunt Edith had come again. A strange, terrible day of alien sounds. A large man with a chain across his waistcoat, reading a paper, and another man with Aunt Edith, and all the time her father roaring in his big full voice made so well for roaring.

Then he called her down, and Aunt Edith cried and ran to her. But Beth's father stood there and looked and looked and said, "Beth is my daughter, and I mean to have her no matter what you do."

In the end Beth went off with Aunt Edith, back to the house on the other side of town, to Julia and gingerbread and sunshine. But fear went along with them, a fear that Beth realized and felt here as in the other house. Aunt Edith, when they were at home, would always seem to be listening. She would start at noises. Beth came to listen and start too. When they went anywhere, Aunt Edith seemed to keep watch, and Beth found that she herself took up the watching. Although in those years she was sure she didn't know just what the listening or the watching were for . . . unless it was for Father Simpson but Aunt would never say.

In the years that followed, they traveled; Aunt Edith and Beth, and Julia to take care of things and make gingerbread at the stove of rented houses. They traveled swiftly and without warning and Beth, thinking of last summer's home of maybe lilacs and honeysuckle with a bird's nest, would ooh with glee and ask if they were going "there" again?

Aunt Edith, with shadows in her eyes would say, "Not there this time, Beth, my dear. But somewhere *nice*."

Beth remembered seeing her father just once again. It was at a railroad station. They'd gone there hurriedly one early morning and had just caught the train. So hurriedly that Beth had left her very favorite

doll behind in the hotel room. As the cars began to slip out of the station, Beth heard Aunt Edith give a little cry and point out the window. Julia had crowded past Beth and tried to cut off the child's vision with her body.

But not before Beth had seen the tall figure running along the platform trying to keep pace with the train and swinging a heavy cane as though he would beat at its metal sides. But the face was what Beth would remember in nightmares, its broad, strong features about to burst with the emotions that contorted it. Then the train, gathering speed, left the specter behind, and Julia was bending over Aunt Edith with smelling salts.

That was the last time Beth saw her father alive.

**T**HERE were many places they traveled to, and there was time for studies and, as time passed, Beth's first party frock. And a visit to a huge old man who huffed and puffed like a porpoise while he thumped and prodded Beth, saying to Aunt Edith who was worried, "There's nothing the matter with this little girl, but she's nervous."

Aunt Edith said, "Thank you, Doctor Maxwell," but she went on worrying about her little girl who had taken up the watching and listening where she, Edith, had left off. And of course, there was no need for it anymore since they'd received the news about Mr. Simpson's death. But how could you explain that to a youngster without explaining a lot of other things that she shouldn't ever know?

It was later that they discovered the lake and the cliffs. Julia was gone now—Aunt Edith used to say, "We just have one another now, dear—" and Beth thought this was the nicest place in all the world.

It was here that she met Him, which should be capitalized like that for there'd never been anyone else and never would be. In the beginning Aunt Edith "disapproved" but it was token, bent only from a desire that Beth be sure and have the best.

Then came her aunt's sudden death and the inevitable changes that came with that. No time to think about the heartache, just the record of the thing . . . that other, soon to follow, mustn't even think about that. The

sore finger you mustn't prod but keep coming back to.

Sitting in the prefabricated cabin now, Beth thought of it all, the events that crowded one after another like the rain drops sliding down the pane.

There were lawyers and conferences, those endless useless sessions where the obvious is made obscure and the obscure impossible. Then the brown manila envelopes that helped—but not quite—with the way of life.

Beth went to work. Her first job seemed such a short time ago. Well, wasn't it?

Her hair was long and brown, and she had small, pretty hands that were better at doing exercises on the piano than office work. The solicitor had said:

"I know it isn't much. Your father's affairs were in very bad shape and your aunt lived beyond the limit of her income. But with what you will get regularly, supplemented with some work, part time or occasional, you will do quite nicely."

"*Quite nicely,*" he had said. Of course he didn't know.

Then it was, with the working and all, perhaps she got over-tired—Beth was never robust, she was on the small-boned, small-bodied side—that she began to notice.

**F**IRST time was on the block near her room. She noticed because it was Spring and there were sounds in the air she was listening to, making her think of the lake and the cliffs. She heard the hard click of the man's heels. When she slowed, he slowed. When she stopped, he stopped, and when she turned in at her place, he was looking purposefully in another direction. A small thing, and someone else would not notice. But she knew.

Then there was the time in the waiting room of the station. She was making a short trip in connection with her work. Another man, oh remembered well, with a checked suit and a heavy mustache. He was reading a paper. But she knew he looked around the sides and over the top and rustled the journal impatiently as though he had no notice in the world except for the printed legends in front of him.

When she got up to leave for her train, she heard with ears that knew how to listen for such things, that he had got up too and

was following her. Just as she got aboard, she turned quickly and looked back down the length of Pullmans and saw a checked suit getting aboard several cars away.

Like that. Over and over. There was no mistake. Never was an attempt made to harm her; the man, men, for they wore different faces, never spoke to her. But the pattern of her life was suited to the tempo of these people. And it was accustomed. She'd known what it was like to be the pursued and to carry fear with her since she could remember. She carried fear gracefully and pretended it didn't weigh.

She had one thought to cling to. Him. And she thought of the things they'd said under the azure sky, with the soft smell of country and lake in their nostrils. She would be faithful to him; she had said it and sworn it.

If she held herself rigidly there like a fly pinioned to the wall by a pin, the uneasiness about everything else fled from her mind and heart.

And so she had known Creel's before it was Creel's. And several miles below the lake, known so well, Locust Corners where they had met again and again.

It was strange what drew her back now as though that were the only thing that mattered. And perhaps it was. The difference, the shining entrepreneur project of sham, glitter and noise, fell away before her eyes, and it was only as before, as she had known the lake, cliffs and Locust Corners with Him.

Behind the screen of rain the sky was lightening, and Beth peered out. It was getting on toward supper time, but she decided against going up to the Annex for supper. The play organizer was a fearfully conscientious young man who would come up to her and say, "Now Miss Simpson, we'd like to sign you up for some of our activities."

Oh heavens, Beth thought, as her quick small hands put together something to eat that would be much better than the noisy dining hall.

Time passes rapidly listening to the rain. When there was no rain to listen to, darkness had come, and the cool evening air that came through the window when she opened it was clear and refreshing. Out there beyond the fall of the cliffs, she could hear the lake.

She sniffed, and knew from the smell that tomorrow would be clear and sunny.

Beth got ready for bed. It was a ritual, womanlike, that ended in the same way. She picked up the silver-framed picture, smiled at it and placed the tips of her fingers on her lips and blew a kiss. Then she turned out the light, and in total darkness listened to the night and her thoughts until she fell asleep.

**BETH** awoke to the alien breathing and bumping. Her shaking fingers found the lamp switch. He was in the corner of the room. A hulk of a man with ill-arranged dark hair and huge, dirty hands that did not come alive but dangled even as the rest of him whirled and blinked at the sudden light.

He had, Beth noticed, a broad, brutal face; his mouth gaped and he made sounds totally unintelligible. With her tiny fear-fumbling hands, she pulled away the bedclothes and slipped bare feet to the ground. The creature took a lurching step toward her and as he did, Beth, instinctively, snatched the silver-framed picture from the bedtable and began to edge her way sideways along the wall toward the door. The brute stood regarding her with uncertainty, mouth slack now, streaks of red flame in his small eyes.

Then with a quick and half-deceptive feint, Beth whirled, made the screen door and was out into the night, the man behind, mumbling loudly and taking the first heavy steps to follow.

Outside, putting her back to the cottage, Beth ran away into the black mouth of the night, holding the picture to her small bosom.

Once she stumbled as she ran. She must not trip and be caught. She tightened her grasp on the picture and went on. Out here the darkness was friend. She had only to fear a broad, brutal face, black hair . . . someone who made sounds without laughing. Then the dreadful thought came to her that Jack Green, the grocer, might loom up out of the night, capture her and take her back that long, long way across the years. The thinking made her bare feet move even faster over the slick wetness of the ground.

Ahead, the night opened out for the cliff-top, and all of a sudden she heard the lap

of lake water from far below. Behind she detected a small sound that must be pursuit, but she knew her mind before that. As a child Beth had often believed that if she leaped into the air and willed it hard enough, she would fly and be safe. That came to her now, and when she jumped there was a certainty as the swift air engulfed her in an ecstasy that drove all else from her mind except the last obligation to clutch the picture to her falling body.

\* \* \* \* \*

MR. IRVING FABER was annoyed and bothered. Mr. Creel, the Creel of Creel's Mountain Lakes, who stayed with his balance sheets, out-size paunch and bank accounts in the city, would be angered when he heard. Then there were other complications.

"Damn, you Gormley," Faber said for the tenth time that day as he stared at the hulk of man lounging in the chair opposite him in the Development's office off the Annex. Early fear had sobered the handyman, but last night Gormley had been on one of his toots. And if the actual act of entering a guest's bungalow and scaring its occupant into running out into the night and off a cliff could be charged to the man-of-all-work if worse came to worse, he, Faber, was nevertheless responsible for the help. Mr. Creel would say—ah yes, he could just hear the owner—"And why, pray Faber, do we employ drunken incompetents at Creel's Mountain Lakes, eh?"

The latest word from the nearest hospital—relayed to Faber, for Beth Simpson had come alone and without friends or kin; they knew nothing of relatives and such in the outside world, if indeed she had any—was that she was still in the most critical condition and not expected to live. The phoning official observed that she had several times mentioned a Jack Green, and murmured that she didn't want "to be taken back." Faber expressed his helplessness and requested perfunctorily that they do all they could for her.

The manager knew it would be a considerably more serious thing if Miss Simpson died, demanding a sheriff's inquiry and all that, which would make Mr. Creel most angry. Faber turned his disapproving gaze back on Gormley.

The handyman squirmed uncomfortably under the scrutiny. "Aw hell! Can't a man take a little drink once in a while?"

"Once in a while," mimicked Faber irritably. "One little drink, as you call it, shouldn't make you so blind drunk as to stumble into a woman's cabin in the middle of the night!"

Gormley made a face. "That old Simpson crow! Must be close to seventy, that one. Thinking I was after her, the old buzzard!" the man snorted.

"Oh, I don't know," Faber bristled up slightly. He was getting along himself. He leveled a finger at the other. "Just keep yourself in shape, Gormley. Someone may want to ask you some questions."

IN TOURING the grounds a bit later, Faber had to admit to himself that last night's unfortunate event seemed to have left the rest of the guests untouched. Of course, he reasoned, few of them had seen the old spinster in the three days she'd been up here. The tennis went on, the pool splashed, and Faber, looking in at the glass-windowed bar, saw that that source of company profit was well-attended.

Here and there, somebody asked him a question which he avoided or evaded with the aplomb of a seasoned management man. Irving Faber finally came to the conclusion that his worst fears were not to be realized; certainly there was no pall of gloom here. He was pleased, for the croquet handicap matches were about to start. A little invention of the play director, the matches were a fine combination of drinking, kissing and other silliness, with croquet figuring only incidentally.

Faber seated himself on the front verandah to watch. The lawn was certainly crowded; Joe from the bar gave him a wink which meant that the till was doing well. The croquet extravaganza went on to the hoot, yips and noise of the only partially sober guest contestants and spectators.

It was about five when Faber saw it. Up the long drive from the gates it came at a great rate, and as it passed the players—many of them now more than considerably the worse for wear—they turned to stare and then laugh or shout.

Certainly the high-sided, shiny buggy was

an incongruous sight, pulled by the large, brown-marked roan. But the two occupants, one the driver, the other the passenger, were even more so. As the carriage wheeled around in front of the porch steps, the driver, a fine old Negro with powder-white hair, drew in the animal, and the whole rig came to a stop.

Faber went down the steps, wondering what tomfoolery this was. Several of the guests crowded forward curiously. The passenger was a young man, about thirty Faber would have guessed. He alighted from the carriage with dignity and grace and came forward. He was straight and tall with a handsome, strong face. The manager noted the ludicrously old-fashioned clothes of the two. The young man wore a high collar and black-buttoned shoes such as were in vogue nearly a half-century ago. He had a large and fancy cravat, a striped waistcoat and a frock coat with swallow tail.

Some of the guests were exclaiming gleefully about a "masquerade" as the young man called over his shoulder.

"I'll be just a minute, Uncle Ned."

The old darky nodded and touched his forehead in understanding. The watchers tittered at the show.

"You, sir," the gentleman addressed himself to Faber.

"Yes," the manager found his voice. He looked into the blue eyes of the other and found himself riveted there.

"I've come for Miss Beth Simpson." Those in the front row of guests who overheard passed this back to the ones behind, and the whispering increased and then hushed for listening.

Faber frowned. What sort of poor joke was this? He must get rid of this tactless clown as soon as possible.

"Miss Beth Simpson?" The man repeated. Faber beckoned to the other to come up the stairs with him. The manager had it in his mind to denounce the gentleman, whoever he was, give him a tongue-lashing and send him on his way. Instead, when the other joined him on the porch, Faber felt strangely affected and compelled beyond his control. He found himself telling the straight story of last night's events.

"I see," the old-fashioned costumed young man said, his features immobile. He seemed

to ponder a moment, then with a brief bow he made his way back down the stairs to the buggy.

THE crowd of vacation funsters stood around expectantly, looking from the rig and its two occupants to Faber for explanation, waiting for the gimmick.

Elaborately, the young man took out a greatwatch from his waistcoat, studied it.

"Uncle Ned, we'll be off. I expect I shall meet Miss Beth at Locust Corners at nine."

The old colored man had his crop out almost before the words were completed. He bobbed his head, "Yassuh, Mister Phillip," and the horse and buggy made off down the driveway at the same rapid rate.

Faber passed the whole thing off as the crude joke of some townie, but the guests, once interrupted by this unusual tableau, seemed unwilling to go back to the croquet and gradually drifted off still talking about it among themselves.

Early in the evening the manager got word from the hospital that Beth Simpson had just died. The news, not unexpected, but strangely disquieting when it came, sent Faber down to the cabin post-haste. There might be things, he reasoned, that a good resort manager should see before, or instead of, the authorities. Mr. Creel would approve. There had been a picture found at the bottom of the cliff with the woman. It had been brought back and dumped carelessly on the humble pile of belongings waiting for disposition in the corner.

Faber picked it up and studied it. The glass of course was shattered, but the picture was . . . the face . . . was . . . the young man of the carriage. With fingers that suddenly seemed strangely stiff he turned the picture to the light to read the inscription.

"To my always faithful Beth, from her ever-loving Phillip." The frame-back was loosened; something showed from inside. Faber was neither a coward nor a superstitious man. But as he probed the loose back off and scrutinized the yellow-with-age cut protected in some opaque envelope, he felt the coldness spreading from his stomach as he read.

Faber kept the clipping, putting it carefully in his breast pocket, but replaced the picture with elaborate care and returned



to the Annex as fast as he could command strength-drained legs. Some of the guests were dancing, and a young girl, silly and tipsy, was wondering out loud how she could "get" the young man of the buggy.

"I'll take him, even in that suit," she cried, and her audience roared with laughter. Faber winced. The palms of his hands were clammy.

Then somebody said that if she went to Locust Corners down in the valley she might meet him again—after all, wasn't he to meet his true love, Beth Simpson, there at nine? Others took the idea up, and there was much giggling talk of an expedition. The manager, feeling suddenly not himself at all, went to his office.

It was almost nine now. Faber, despite

himself, took out the old clipping from the picture-back, and read it over again.

It was dated 1908 and reported an accident to Mr. Phillip Hargrave, 28, which had taken place when the buggy in which he had been riding plunged off the cliff road. The cut mentioned that the rig belonged to Uncle Ned's livery and that Uncle Ned himself, the driver, had also been fatally injured. The clip concluded that Hargrave had been on his way to Locust Corners to meet Miss Beth Simpson to whom he was to have been married the following week.

Faber had just finished reading when the clock of his office chimed nine.

Locust Corners was some miles away, and he hoped fervently that none of the shameless guests had had time to get there.

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