

# Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1948

Cover by Lee Brown Coye

## NOVELETTES

- THE MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN** . . . . . Edmond Hamilton 4  
*Our universe is but one of many different branches in the road of Time, separated one from the other by an extra-dimensional abyss*
- THE COMING OF M. ALKERHAUS** . . . . . Allison V. Harding 28  
*Boy meets girl. How many millions of times has that happened since the world began? But this was somehow so very different*

## SHORT STORIES

- GHOST HUNT** . . . . . H. Russell Wakefield 16  
*Twice before the Ghost Hunters had tried unsuccessfully to find their quarry. This was the third—and LAST—attempt!*
- THE LEONARDO RONDACHE** . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 20  
*The study of black magic and how to nullify it is rewarding; it can save your life*
- THE LA PRELLO PAPER** . . . . . Carl Jacobi 38  
*It was, after all, a strange countryside; but land, like a leopard, should not change its spots*
- SOMETHING IN WOOD** . . . . . August Derleth 44  
*The question was, just what that "Something" was!*
- THE OCTOBER GAME** . . . . . Ray Bradbury 52  
*It isn't enough to just punish someone; the suffering must be prolonged*
- CATNIP** . . . . . Robert Bloch 57  
*Why should a grown-up boy be afraid of a little old lady and her tomcat? Isn't that "witch" stuff just for Hallowe'en?*
- THE MASTER OF THE CRABS** . . . . . Clark Ashton Smith 64  
*The Island Iribos was a jagged, lonely promontory rising out of the sea, warning away the unwary*
- THE PROFESSOR'S TEDDY BEAR** . . . . . Theodore Sturgeon 72  
*"A metempsychosis is a thing that happens when a person moves from one house to another"*
- THE MERROW** . . . . . Seabury Quinn 78  
*Such talk was for the mystically superstitious; for those who were either mad or childish—or both*
- ROMAN REMAINS** . . . . . Algernon Blackwood 87  
*They listened and they stared but no one knew just what was to be heard or seen*
- VERSE**
- THE HOUSE** . . . . . H. P. Lovecraft 27
- THE EYRIE** . . . . . 3

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.

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 20 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, \$1.00. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. Copyright, 1947, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

Vol. 40, No. 3

D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

LAMONT BUCHANAN, Associate Editor.

# The La Prelo Paper

BY CARL JACOBI

**I**F ANYONE desired to set James Halliwell off in a temper he had only to quote the platitude, "Live with your times." It was not that he stood against progress, but from a standpoint of personal happiness and contentment, he looked upon

the developments of the last decade as insidious steps toward social decadence.

Halliwell liked good writing, good music and good art, but the modern schools of creative thought grated upon his senses. In keeping with his beliefs, he lived what he

---

*Left something he didn't want by someone he'd all but forgotten. . . .*



Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

considered the life of a respectable gentleman of the past. His bachelor apartment was in a down-at-the-heels district, still genteel, but one which had been passed by the forward march of the city. His car was a 1930 vintage, and his dress—white embroidered vest, starched collar, heavy watch chain with ivory charm—would have made a stylist turn away with a smile.

All went well with Halliwell in his musty routine until he received a telephone call one May evening. A man who mumbled his name and described himself as an attorney-at-law, informed Halliwell that he had inherited some land.

"But I have no relatives," the bachelor replied, bewildered. "Who would will me anything?"

"The land is part of the estate of Mr. Guy Bedering and may not amount to much, financially speaking. It consists of four lake shore lots at Lake Constance over in Deeple County. Do you know the place?"

"Yes, I believe so." Halliwell was thinking of Bedering and their many quarrels which had lasted for almost as long as he could remember. Bedering—potty old fool! Old enough to be Halliwell's father, he had considered himself a modern. Bought chrome chairs, went hatless out of doors, smoked those obnoxious cigarettes. He had moved away a year ago, and Halliwell hadn't heard from him since, but he must have relented in his argumentative stand at the end, for in life it was only their opposite views that had held them together.

The attorney continued, "If you will call at my office tomorrow, I'll give you the deed and the abstract and you can consider yourself the new owner."

Thus it was that noon of the next day saw Halliwell driving his old car at a humming twenty miles an hour out Highway 56, heading toward Deeple County and Lake Constance. He reached the lake at two in the afternoon, turned off into one of the many side lanes and began a search for his lots.

In due time he found them: a span of timbered land, two hundred feet in width by a hundred and fifty in depth, fronting a rutted road on one side and a rather marshy beach on the other. The timber, Halliwell observed, was worthless, consisting mainly of jack pine and second-growth poplar. Nor

was the site particularly suitable for building purposes, it being low with poor drainage. But what puzzled Halliwell was the large old signboard that stood just off the road, upraised from the tall weeds on high stilts.

The sign had been painted and repainted and now was weathered almost past recognition. Still visible was the legend on one side: CRASH, THE CIGARETTE OF THE AGE. And on the other: USE MCGOWEN'S ALL-PURPOSE FURNITURE POLISH. But why any advertiser should have considered proclaiming his wares on this God-forsaken lane was to Halliwell a mystery.

HE STOOD before the sign for several moments, studying it. The artist had utilized a familiar trick in the illustration that accompanied the "polish" legend. It showed an open door, with a table just beyond the threshold and on that table a huge bottle of the polish. The picture on the bottle label was the same: open door, table beyond, and bottle on the table. The effect on the observer was a wonderment how many doors there were in all. No matter how far he looked there was always another bottle and another door. Halliwell noted with interest that the artist had done his work with curiously exacting care. He had carried out the illusion to almost microscopic detail, and for a moment Halliwell thought he could sense it going on and on into infinity.

There was a ragged hole in the sign, where the wooden paneling had rotted. Looking through this opening, Halliwell saw the beginning of a small path leading down through the woods. The path looked cool and inviting, and after a moment's hesitation he stepped through the hole and began to follow it.

He was conscious instantly of the sudden quiet that surrounded him. The birds which had been chattering before abruptly ceased all sound, and even the hum of insects was absent. Only the waves could be heard, swashing up on the distant lake shore. He followed the path for twenty yards when it made an abrupt turn to the left, climbing toward higher ground. The trees were thinner here, and the soil became rocky and covered with granite outcroppings. But the path it-

self was smooth enough; its surface was hard-packed gravel, and its borders were even and symmetric as if it had been made only a day or two before.

For some reason Halliwell felt nervous and ill at ease. The impression stole upon him that he had entered a tunnel of time within which all life hung in a state of suspended animation. He smiled at that and continued walking briskly. Now the lake shore disappeared, and he found himself going along a kind of narrow gallery, the view on either side cut off by high walls of granite. In this fashion he walked for the better part of an hour, all sense of direction quite lost, for the path turned and twisted repeatedly.

He was about to turn back in disgust when the way before him suddenly dropped; he rounded a corner and there before him was the signboard and his parked car. Halliwell looked back of him, puzzled. It seemed impossible that he could have made a complete circle, but apparently he had, and with a sigh he climbed into his car, glanced at his watch and started the motor.

He looked at the watch a second time. The timepiece must have stopped, for it still showed two-thirty, the hour of his arrival at the lots. Halliwell drove back down the lane, entered Highway 56 and began the trip toward the city at an even twenty-five miles an hour. He had gone a quarter of the way back when he relaxed his grip on the wheel for a moment to reach for his pipe. But the pipe was gone.

"Damnation!" Halliwell muttered. "I must have dropped it back there on the path."

Pipes were a fetish with him. He had one for each day of the week, and this was Saturday's briar, a full-bent favorite of his with a nickel-plated ferrule and a bowl that held a generous amount of tobacco. He hated to lose it.

Halliwell stopped the car, looked carefully in both directions, and satisfied that the highway was empty, made a complete turn and headed back in the direction from which he had come. Ten minutes later saw him entering the outskirts of a small town. He frowned perplexedly. He remembered no town here; in fact, he was sure he had passed none since he had left Lake Constance. But

there it was, printed in faded letters on a sign over the railroad depot: EMIT.

Driving down the main street, he was impressed by the scrupulous neatness of the buildings and the residences. It was more than a neatness. It was a geometric simplicity of line and angles as if the town were still on the architect's drawing board. Halliwell glanced at the cars on either side of the street and nodded approvingly.

None of those foolish streamlined affairs here. They were all fifteen or more years old. A sign in a corner drug store somewhat disconcerted him though. It read:

*Landon for President*

"Ought to take that down," Halliwell muttered to himself. "No sense in being as shiftless as that."

HE CROSSED a bridge over a wide river, and he didn't remember that either. The only answer must be that in turning about, he had somehow got into the wrong lane and veered off into a second highway that ran parallel to 56. Satisfied with this line of reasoning, he increased his speed a little and presently ahead of him saw the blue circular expanse of Lake Constance.

Once again he drove down the rutted lane and parked before the broken signboard with the strange door illustration. He passed through the opening in the sign and began to retrace his steps along the path, eyes studying the ground carefully for his pipe. But he didn't find it. Aware now that the sun was beginning to drop in the west, he hurried back to his car.

But when he entered Highway 56 once more, something curious happened. Without thinking, he found himself reaching into his pocket for his pipe. He checked himself halfway and then uttered a little cry of surprise. The pipe was there in his pocket, deep down in one corner.

"I must be getting old," Halliwell said to himself. "I could have sworn it wasn't there before."

For the first time now he was conscious that something was wrong with the road before him, but the truth didn't strike him until he had gone almost a mile. Then abruptly he realized that he was no longer

on black top but on hard-packed gravel. The familiar U. S. and State highway markings were absent, too" In their place Halliwell saw from time to time rustic placards with the words: *Gablewood Pike*.

Yet the surrounding landscape remained the same or very nearly the same. He crossed the bridge, and if it appeared somewhat newer and the river below narrower than it had before, he attributed these changes to the different slant of the sun which was low down in the west now.

He came at length to the town of Emit, and entering its main street, found himself looking absently for the Landon sign. He was glad to see that the sign was no longer there, but it occurred to him that he might have passed without seeing it. Somehow, the town looked older and yet in another way newer than it had before. The economy of architecture and plotting struck him as it had the first time, but with it came the impression that there was something perceptibly old-fashioned about the place. Quite suddenly it dawned upon Halliwell that no cars were parked at the curb; the vehicles were all horse drawn.

"Some sort of old-time festival," he remarked. But even as the words came to his lips, a vague inner fear began to rise up far back in a corner of his mind.

The town finally behind him, Halliwell fell to thinking over the day's events. Now that he had the four lots he wondered what he would do with them: Sell them, he supposed, though in their present condition a potential market would be doubtful. It was queer about Bederer, willing him that property in the light of what had happened.

In a way they had been mutual friends and mutual enemies for more than ten years, ready to argue at the drop of a hat, each holding to his own ideas and beliefs. Halliwell had hated with a deep inner hate Bederer's complacent acceptance of new fads and styles, just as, he was aware, Bederer was irritated by his clinging to the past. Moreover, Bederer had seemed to take a delight in parading his newest acquisitions. Halliwell remembered well the day Bederer entered his apartment, walked straight across to the opposite wall and tore down the Currier & Ives "winter scene" that hung there in its heavy gold frame. He flung the picture to

a corner where the glass broke in a hundred fragments and then mounted in its place some horrible work of cubistic art, replete with circles, squares and triangles.

"There," he said, standing back to admire the change. "I was getting sick and tired of seeing that crummy old chromo there. Improvement, eh?"

"Improvement! Get out of here, you blasted jazz maniac!"

**B**UT even as for no sane reason they had clung to each other's company, Halliwell had laid plans to gain retribution for the indignities he had suffered at the other's hands. He had thought of a number of things: applying acid to Bederer's chrome chairs, destroying his entire collection of worthless modern books, breaking some of his *classics in swing* records, but none of them seemed satisfactory. Then one day he hit upon it.

In his spare time Bederer was writing a monograph on what he called the "space-time coordinate." Some nonsensical drivel about the fourth dimension and another world impinged on our own. Bederer actually believed this. He said:

"We know that there are other planes of time, possibly two or three futures. I believe that this other world is a psycho-scientific one, and I believe my paper, when it is published, will arouse some comment."

Still smarting from the action taken against his Currier & Ives, Halliwell had slipped the manuscript in his own briefcase one night when Bederer was not looking, deposited it in the trunk of his car and left with a smug feeling of satisfaction. That manuscript was still in his car, though Bederer had asked him frantically several times if he had seen it.

"That'll teach him to mind his own affairs," Halliwell said. "The old fool!"

He had attempted to read the manuscript on one or two occasions when waiting for some appointment. But though he had studied the pages with care he could make no sense to any of it. Bederer had never quite got over the loss, and sometimes Halliwell caught him looking at him with eyes filled with suspicion.

Halliwell abruptly took his foot off the gas and applied the brakes. A wooden bar-

rier extending the entire width of the highway loomed before him. As he came closer Halliwell read the sign painted in bright red letters:

ROAD CLOSED. DETOUR.

Drat these construction companies. Why did they always select the summer months for road repairing? He hesitated a moment, noting that there was a choice of two detours, one leading east, one west. He chose the western, reasoning that it must lead in a direction closer to the city.

The road was a bad one, and soon he found it necessary to reduce his speed to a crawl, with the old car banging and rattling in a most alarming fashion. In this manner he traversed a mile of detour when suddenly he drew up with an exclamation.

Was he quite mad or was the scene before him the same scene he had left behind him, miles to the rear? But no, there was the lake, the timbered plot of land, and the signboard. The same crazy signboard with the broken section and the illustration within an illustration of the open doors. But there was a difference, he saw with sudden relief, a very great difference.

The sign here was larger. It covered the entire right-of-way of the detour, and the road itself, not a path, continued through the ragged hole in the wooden paneling. Halliwell sucked his pipe thoughtfully. It didn't make sense, this building a signboard directly across a roadway. Then a thought struck him. The detour was doubtless a new one and a makeshift. It had been laid in the shortest route possible.

He started the car again and drove through the opening in the sign. Once on the other side, he saw no difference or change in the surrounding landscape, and that rather surprised him, for he had expected a change. If anything, the detour seemed in somewhat better condition here, and Halliwell began to think of what he would do when he reached home.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later that the unforeseen happened. The car missed firing, coughed, sputtered and died. Scowling, Halliwell ground on the starter for several long moments before he thought to look at the gas gauge. Then he swore fervently. The needle of the dial rested on

the "empty" mark. Stalled miles from no place and night coming on. This *was* a predicament.

"Well, I'll just have to stop a passing car and beg a lift into town," he told himself.

He waited in vain. The detour remained silent and deserted, and in the fast-thicken-gloom no approaching lights showed in either direction. But old-fashioned though he might be, Halliwell was also a realistic individual. He went around to the car trunk, opened it and took out a pillow and a vacuum bottle of cold tea which he always carried. He also took out Bedering's sheaf of manuscript which still lay in a far corner of the trunk where he had left it almost a year before. Might as well do a little reading to pass the time, he thought. If worse came to worse, he could sleep in the car and walk to town in the morning. He settled himself, turned on the dome light and began to read.

**A**S BEFORE a noticeable spell of depression settled down upon him the moment his eyes fell on the first page. For a while he was impressed by Bedering's apparent erudition. Then he reached the following passage and re-read it several times.

In 1874, La Prelo, the Spanish mystic, formulated a theory which in my opinion crudely antedated Einstein. La Prelo reasoned that time must be a variable dimension, extending into infinity from a common center like the spokes of a wheel. He who leaves point A, the hub, and advances along the time channel will as a matter of course arrive at point B. Yet if something were to disturb the existing coordinates—let us say a psychic impulse—who is to say he would not arrive at point C or even D?

La Prelo further postulated that if visual stimuli were placed before a receptive subject and that if that subject were contacted by certain mental impressions (outlined in what he called his "tempus diagram") the psychic residue might exert sufficient power to force the subject into a subsidiary time channel, regardless of his personal will.

"Balderdash," muttered Halliwell, "pure drivel." He tossed the manuscript into the

rear seat of the car, leaned his head against the pillow and went to sleep.

When he awoke the sun was high, but the road was still void of any sign of travel. Halliwell rolled up the windows, locked the door and set off at a brisk walk. Finally, the road turned, and there before him was a town. Halliwell gazed at the familiar street and buildings and with an inner bewilderment that knew no answer, saw at once that it was Emit again. Like a man in a trance he headed into it, eyes casting about for a filling station.

He saw none. Neither did he see any cars. The few citizens he passed were dressed in antique fashion, and the street was lined with watering troughs and hitching posts. Well, if there were no gas stations, perhaps he could get a can of fuel at one of the general stores. He entered one and asked for the proprietor.

WHEN the man approached, Halliwell restrained a cry of astonishment. At first glance he was his old enemy, Bederling, in every detail. The same high forehead, the same bulbous nose, the same mocking twinkle in his eyes. Even as he saw that there were slight differences, Halliwell found himself voicing a question:

"Is . . . is your name, Bederling?" he demanded.

"Yes, it is. What can I do for you?"

"Not Guy W. Bederling by any chance?" Halliwell held his breath while he waited the answer.

"That's my son. He's in school."

"In school!" cried Halliwell.

"Yes, of course. Where else would a twelve-year-old be at this time of day. What was it you wanted, sir?"

Halliwell mumbled some vague reply and stumbled out the store into the street. In heaven's name, what was happening to him? Had he gone quite mad or was he still back in the car, dreaming a fantastic dream?

He entered a second store farther on and asked the clerk if he had any gas.

"Gas?" repeated the clerk slowly.

"Gasoline," snapped Halliwell.

"I've heard of it," the clerk said, "but we don't have any."

"Heard of it!" stormed Halliwell. "What

is this, the state asylum or something?" He turned and strode out.

He paced rapidly out of town and onto the smooth expanse of Highway 56. He breathed easier when the buildings were behind him, but the air over the roadway was curiously hot and quiet. Not a leaf stirred; not a breath of wind was apparent. On and on, he walked, his car forgotten, with a long-gaited stride that ate up the miles. A profound silence hung over him. He could hear the grating of his steps in the gravel and the creak of the leather in his shoes, but that was all.

At the end of an hour Halliwell became aware that the road was growing narrower. The low stunted trees pressed close on either side, and weeds and brush began to appear in the center of the hard-packed surface. The emerald green of May foliage had lightened perceptibly, too, and he seemed to be moving in a pastel world with no definite boundaries or outlines. And then he saw it. A cry of consternation rose to his lips.

No, he was not mistaken. Before him, extending from right to left side of the road was that sign, the same mad sign with the door opening upon a door and the torn ragged hole at the bottom through which the road ran. As Halliwell advanced upon it, the sign seemed to grow in size until it was as tall as a three-story building. He was fighting two emotions now, a wild desire to turn about and run and an irresistible compulsion to pass through the opening.

A moment he wavered; then he stepped through and continued on the other side. He moved automatically, his brain and body filled with a strange numbness. The hills and trees which had been all about him were gone now. In their place his eyes seemed to trace invisible rectangles and ellipses piled like some monstrous tesseract on the surface of a barren plane. Yet the way before him was vague and indistinct like a scene viewed through water. All save that steadily growing dot at the limit of his vision. He began to study that dot as he walked on, and the fear within him multiplied at each step.

For he knew that it was another sign and that beyond it would be another and another and another and that he must keep on going into infinity.