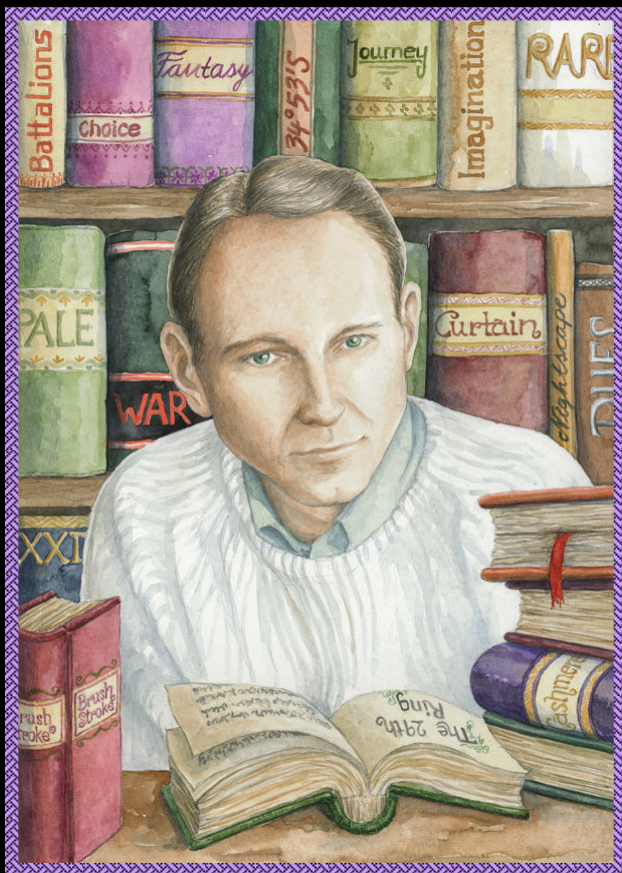


LEFT, AT THE END OF THE HALL™ by D.H. DALE™
A MINIATURESTORY™ from STORIESWEARETELLING™ for the MINIATURELIBRARY™ of the SHORTSTORYAFICIONADO™

The SHORT STORY AFICIONADO™ PRESENTS



THE MINIATURE LIBRARY THE SHORT STORY AFICIONADO™

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Out of the Imagination and Mind's Eye of the Short Story Aficionado™

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Welcome to A STORY I'M TELLING™ from Far Beyond the Threshold of Imagination!

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Reader...

Spurred by the crisp coolness of any chosen Autumn afternoon...and before the violet blush of twilight fades to starlit night—hasten to find a comfortable easy chair...one where you may be warmed by the welcoming embers of a glowing hearth. From there, your imagination shall lift you up and whisk you down the narrow drive ahead—through the gateposts and beyond.



Once round the bend, you shall find yourself in a hitherto unseen quarter—as Far Beyond the Threshold of Imagination™ as you can ever hope to be!

It is there and then that you shall have the opportunity to reach out for one brief moment in time—to grasp the offer of an outstretched hand that is a Bit of Mystery,

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Left, at the End of the Hall™

Having Evolved into the Quintessential
MINIATURE STORY™
a Bit of MYSTERY and ADVENTURE™
is Dedicated to

My FAMILY
Then, Now and Always

My DARLING and DEVOTED WIFE
You of Starlit Nights Come and Gone

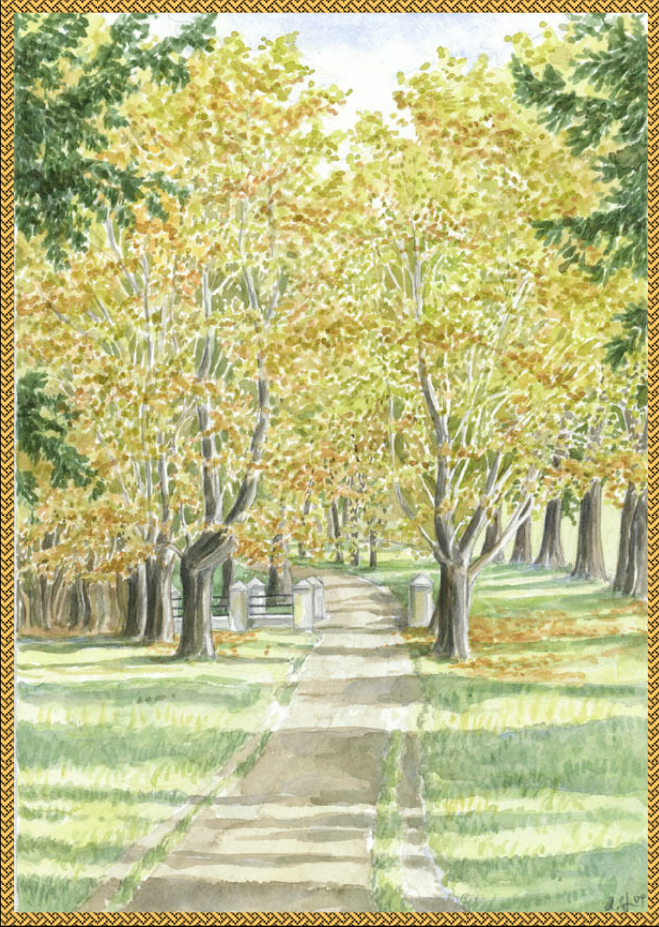
My LOVING and FAITHFUL DAUGHTER
You're the Best!

My BELOVED WIFE and ALLY
You in the Autumn Blush of All the Afternoons Yet to Come
having been the First to Cross Over the Threshold into the
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Left, at the End of the Hall

Join me now for *A Story I'm Telling*—
and savor *aBit of Mystery and Adventure*.
This, as you surreptitiously observe those with
assassination on their minds about to step into
your life from unlit elevators and shadowy stair-
wells late on a dark and drizzly afternoon.

DHD GTG SSA™

HEREIN IS A COINLIKE COMMENTARY.
It reflects the bad luck of those who likely and helplessly lie in an ever expanding pool of their own blood—as well as the unlikely good fortune of those whom the flip side of fate sometimes delivers from the swoosh of the grim reaper's sweeping blade. In no case does one even begin to hear the scythe's approaching swing until it is far too late to prevent its fatal send-off to the world of the dead.

To paraphrase the foregoing, there are the doomed who powerlessly fall prey to unnatural murder. And then there are the rare few who find themselves somehow unexpectedly and swiftly rescued from the shadowy figures who come sniffing and scratching at their apartment door late on a dark and drizzly afternoon.

Soulless are the executioners who are dispatched from the rank and file of a coolly vicious gangland infantry. After all, such armed intruders serve no real purpose

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in their otherwise pedestrian lives than to administer the sentence of death—or have it administered to them.

As to the latter, it is fitting that they themselves are apt to receive the reciprocal and decisive coup de grace from those of us who now and again find it gratifying to intervene on behalf of their would be victims.

Said another way, we are the hunter-slayers who can be spurred to action on no more than a few minutes' notice.

The DAY of RECKONING

THE NORMAL SCENARIO DICTATES a greedy yet weak-kneed underling. He's the fellow who skims several hundred thousand dollars in unmarked and untraceable small bills—and when inevitably discovered, informs on his underworld bosses in a desperate and futile bid for his own personal survival.

Likewise though, this is the chap who is never quite clever enough to pull the whole thing off on his own.

And besides—once his underhanded and oft repeated misappropriations are finally detected, it is simply not customary to grant forgiveness.

Ever.

There is no second chance—and the day of reckoning is merciless.

In effect, the overconfident and outdone minion ends up being tagged with an automatic death warrant that he simply cannot evade.

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Unfortunately, he resigns others to just as unlikely an escape from the underworld executioners who are presently punctuating the already musty air of the apartment's hallway with the impending stench of death—this, each and every time they exhale.

Yes, death is the assassin's only real legacy— notwithstanding his own eager craving for the birthright of his mother's milk. Said another way, there is no real reconciliation between the bequeathing of death and having been bestowed the gift of life.

Such lack of validation applies to us as well, of course— notwithstanding the fact that we consider ourselves to be the lethal redeemers of otherwise innocent life.

FATEFUL EQUALIZATION

WHEN IF EVER does chance intervene? Today perhaps? Yes, equalization shall be liberally meted out on behalf of providence by we the unpretentious messengers from down on the *Left, at the End of the Hall™*—anomalous interventionists who are about to utterly blindside the gangland emissaries presently lurking hereabouts.

In no way, shape or form trigger-happy, we of fate's lethal ambassadors are crack shots. Each of us keeps a round chambered in a PPK/S—with seven more to quickly follow from each of the Walthers' spring loaded magazines. We also each keep a Sterling close at hand for close range backup directly to the heart or to some other vital organ.

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Notably, we as equalizers for the helpless present an unassuming and ordinary appearance by keeping our cool and a low profile. In this way, the odds greatly favor our tactics. That is, we are not recognized or suspected by any party to a bloodbath—nor by the investigators and rubbernecks who generally follow.

Simply put, we melt back into the building's wood and plaster landscape, just as quickly as we appear to those who receive no mercy of any kind from the proverbial smoking gun.

Once we level the playing field and dispense our redemptory brand of fatal justice, the targeted apartment occupants simply effect a well funded disappearance into the woodwork—never knowing to whom they owe their lives and their once cloudy futures.

Subsequent to that, it becomes their sole and irreversible responsibility to maintain the newfound and last minute anonymity that the instruments of opportune fate have granted them.

Should they be subsequently pursued by a new wave of rank and file henchmen, we will simply not be available. That is, it is never prudent for us to risk revealing our identities by an ill-advised second venture into the potential limelight.

NO SUBSTITUTE FOR GOOD PLANNING

ROUTINELY TAKING ADVANTAGE of the double-door entrance to a contiguous apartment that we keep for contingencies and other

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purposes—we presently have a clear peephole view of the five hired gunmen down the hallway. There is never an adequate substitute for good reconnaissance and planning—and having the enemy in view is a definite plus.

Even so—like every apartment in the building, there is an exit to the outside fire escape—this, just in case some major flaw in our planning and execution unexpectedly surfaces at some inopportune moment.

Looking straight down the hallway on both sides and to the far end, we see one sentry stationed at the top landing of each of two stairwells—the first being sixty feet down the left side of the hallway, and directly opposite the elevator bank.

The second sentry is standing at the far end, unknowingly facing the one hundred and twenty feet back up the hallway in our direction.

Another sentry is standing front and center of the elevator bank opposite the first stairwell—thereby facing his counterpart on the landing across the six-foot wide hallway.

The two executioners themselves appear to be about to begin their final walk of sixty feet toward the apartment of their intended victims—the flat’s front door located at the far end of the hallway, and just six feet away from the sentry stationed at the dead center of the second staircase’s landing.

Only the two henchmen who are about to advance appear to have weapons—both of the foregoing death dealers being shoulder-fired, smooth-bore, pump-action shotguns. The shooters’ profiles are visible to us—as they casually load live shells at the elevator bank.

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The QUICK and the DEAD

THERE ARE ALWAYS three options for an assault. The first of these is to do nothing at first, and simply wait for the inevitable butchery to begin.

The remaining two options require surprise—and immediate and violent action. There are other options as well, of course. For instance, we could split our firepower.

For the moment though, let's assume a frontal assault from our end of the corridor. Putting the foregoing reconnaissance in perspective, we would have to first dispose of the two sentries on our left and right at the middle stairwell landing and the elevator bank—both of them sixty feet away. This, before we advance another sixty feet to take on the two with the shotguns, as well as the sentry who is already at the end of the hallway on the second stairwell landing. Because of the one hundred and twenty foot length of the hallway, the drawbacks are many.

Better yet then is to conduct a joint assault from the stairwell at the opposite end of the hallway—our best bet at the moment it seems. This, because we can commence our attack by taking the stairwell landing sentry from his rear.

But before we can do any of that, we're going to have to rush down one flight of stairs—as well as proceed quickly down the corresponding hallway to the bottom of the far stairwell. We then have to quietly climb those stairs before we commence firing.

The trick, of course, is taking out the far stairwell landing sentry while the two triggermen with shotguns momentarily remain outside the front door of their in-

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tended targets' apartment. The latter is likely, because there will be at least some delay while the triggermen manage some type of forced entry.

One thing is certain.

The apartment occupants are not going to simply open the door to their executioners—and at least one of the residents is more than likely armed with a shotgun as well.

So, here we go!

It takes us about two minutes to return to our apartment and get to the floor below by way of a third flight of steps. Another three minutes pass, and we're looking at the back of the far staircase landing and its sentry. It sounds as if the two shotgun toting killers have not as yet gained entry to the apartment of their intended victims. However, we cannot actually see them.

We're out of breath—but it's now or never!

Our safeties are off, and the chambered rounds ready to fire. We both get off one shot each at the upper torso of the sentry, and he lurches forward to the marble hallway floor—his body thus blocking ingress and egress by way of the landing.

Naturally, this is the point of no return!

We then take up firing positions on both sides of the step below the landing, and train our weapons on the two killers at the apartment's front door.

As they awkwardly swing the shotguns to their left to fire on us, we beat them to the punch with fire from our left. Two well aimed PPK/S rounds each impact their intended marks in the upper front torsos of both would be killers. As they fall, they drop their shotguns.

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That leaves the two sentries at the elevator bank and first stairwell landing sixty feet away. Although momentarily caught off balance, they now have their handguns out and are aiming in our direction.

We drop to the steps and fire from an angular prone position behind the crumpled body of the first would be assassin.

We each have five rounds remaining.

A couple of well aimed shots from each PPK/S find their marks in the legs of the two sentries. This causes them to fall forward to the hallway floor. Two additional well placed rounds each, and they gasp their last breath.

We have but one remaining bullet each—and our Sterlings as well! We also now have immediate access to two fully loaded shotguns and at least two additional loaded handguns.

Not one round was fired by any of the three would be assailants nearest to us!

The two assailants at the elevator bank and first stairwell landing did manage to get off a shot or two. However, our low silhouettes obstructed their collective view—thereby likely preventing us from being hit.

It was close to say the least!

But then, it seems that it always is. It's the closeness of it all that sends a massive rush of adrenaline coursing through our bloodstreams.

Just as swiftly as it all started, it's over.

Then comes our *just compensation*—as the Constitution refers to it.

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Just as we are about to return down the staircase from whence we came, a leather satchel comes hurtling out of the front door of the apartment—thus flying over the corpses of the once wanna-be triggermen.

Keeping a low profile—one of us quickly retrieves the valise!

Naturally, our very first thoughts are that it contains misappropriated loot.

And we're correct!

Well—it turns out that it's not *all* of the skimmed funds. However, as we retreat back down the staircase from whence we came, our minds are put at ease. On balance, it appears to be more than enough to compensate us for our time and trouble on this particular day.

And after all, we saved everybody that counts—and managed to leave no eyewitnesses to tell the tale.

All we have to say about the underworld masters who issued the unexecuted assassination order, is that they really ought to think twice when it comes to checking the background of the next minion to handle their money. Likewise, they might consider paying more than “minimum wage”.

Finally, they should encourage their hired guns to be less cavalier in their planning and execution.

At the very least, one should always consider that the blindsiding impacts from a pair of Walthers can be severely numbing to both body and mind. This, to the point



LEFT, AT THE END OF THE HALL™ by D.H. DALE™
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of permanently interrupting the life giving function of one vital organ in particular — that of the telltale beating heart.¹

Your Storyteller in Miniature
Major D.H. Dale

Left, at the End of the Hall

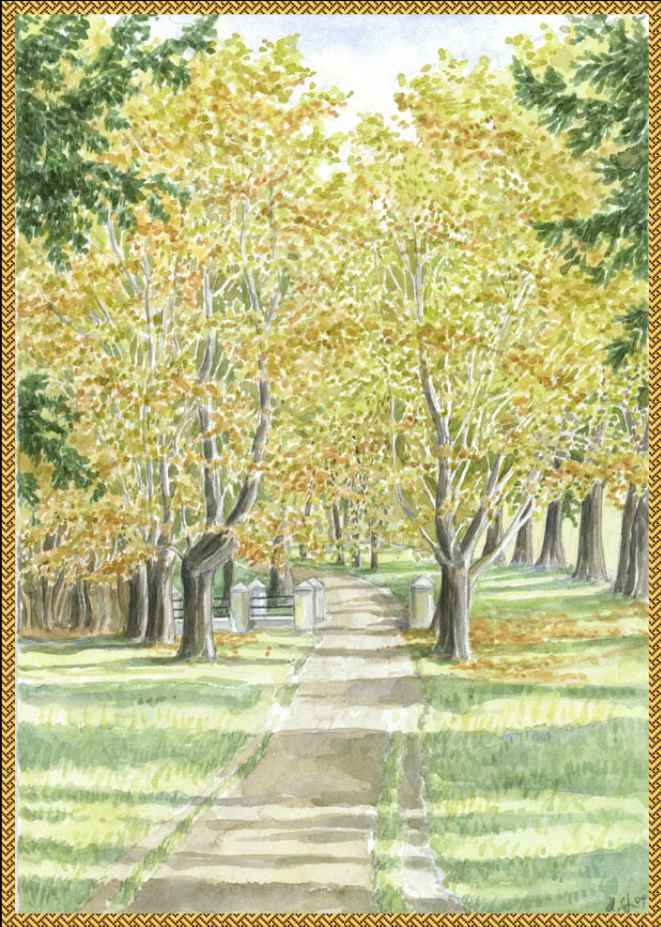
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¹The freewheeling imagination and evocative storytelling of D.H. Dale™ crown otherwise commonplace themes with aBit of Mystery, Romance and Adventure™—a bejeweled and magical coronet not shackled by convention. Herein lies the work of a self-styled painter of the written word—the full kaleidoscope of hues, blushes, shades, tones and tints flowing from the storyteller’s inkwell to parchment. It is upon these leaves of paper so unselfishly bestowed by some mighty tree—that the teller has penned this Miniature Story™ entitled Left, at the End of the Hall™. The storyteller’s thread of events, like all praiseworthy accounts, is a manifestation of the routine yet exceptional practice of observing, analyzing and drawing heartfelt as well as compelling conclusions. Inevitably, the finalities reflected in such reasoned judgments can be said to draw themselves up out of a shallow inkstone. After all, that vessel is the lone crucible in which the dry ink of deliberation is measured and mixed with just the right amount of imagination from the well of reflection—thereby maintaining the fragile flow of creativity that the pen can never completely manage on its own.

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