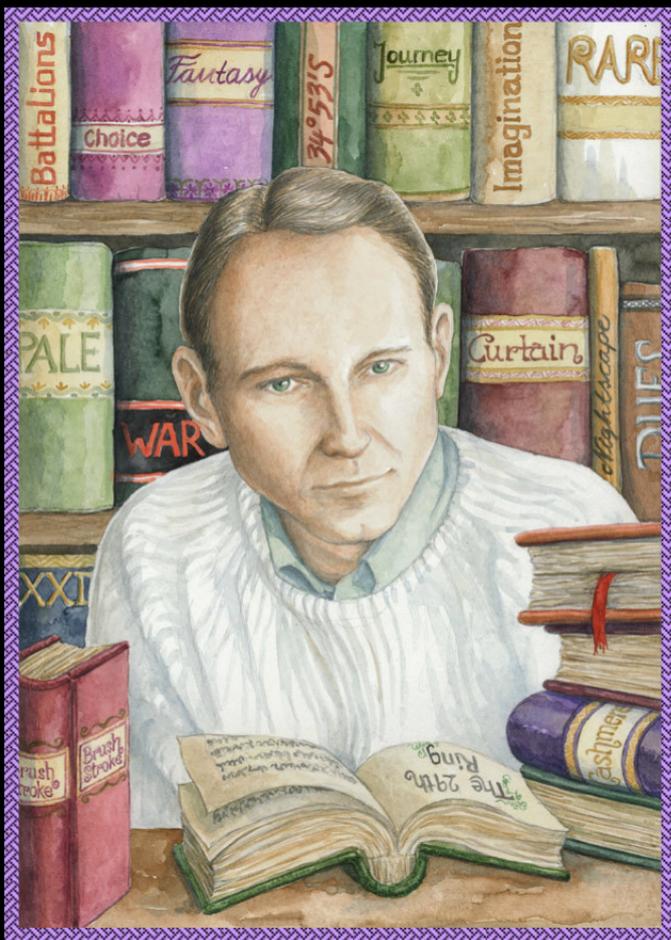


THE CASHMERE COAT™ by D.H. DALE™
A MINIATURESTORY™ from STORIESWEARETELLING™ for the MINIATURELIBRARY™ of the SHORTSTORYAFICIONADO™

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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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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The Cashmere Coat™

Having Evolved into the Quintessential
MINIATURE STORY™
aBitof MYSTERY, ROMANCE and ADVENTURE™
is Dedicated to

My FAMILY
Then, Now and Always

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

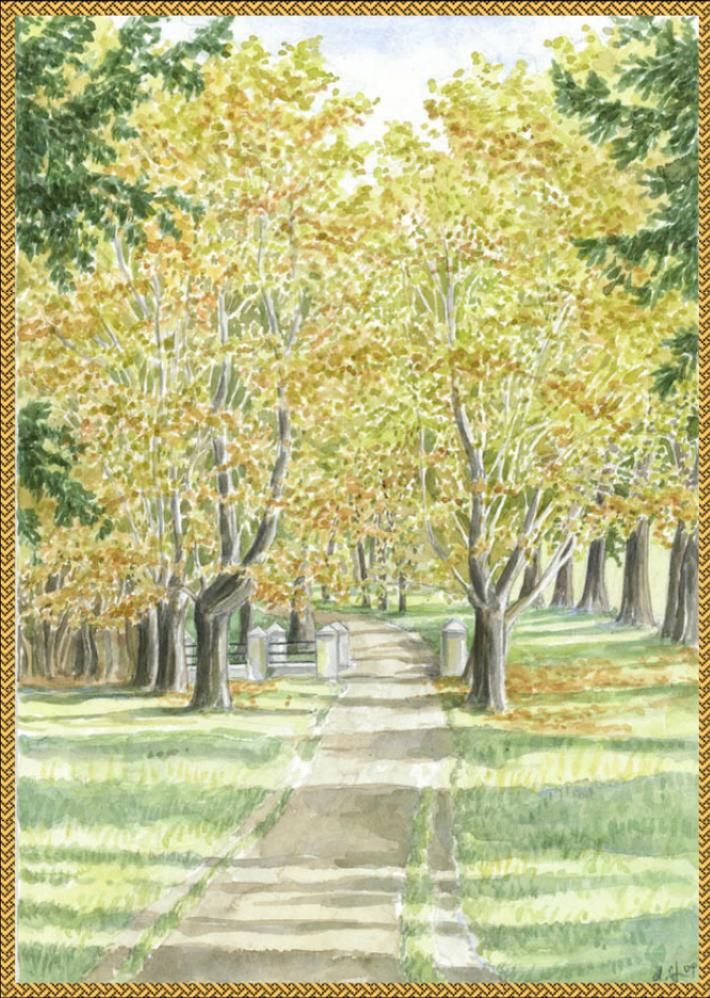
My LOVING and FAITHFUL DAUGHTER
You're the Best!

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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The Cashmere Coat

Join me now for *A Story I'm Beginning*—and savor *aBit of Mystery*™. This, as your imagination holds sway—and you slip into a sidewalk café that offers a brief respite from the outside world. While here, you shall soon discover that there is someone else who also seeks and finds breathing space—in this case, an attractive and mysterious woman in black. The odd thing is that once you get over your breathlessness—it is not she who holds your attention. Rather, it is the question of why this woman is out alone at such a late and lonely hour. Thereafter, it is *The Cashmere Coat*™ that reaches out to you, and gently puts you under its emerald green spell.

DHD GTTG SSA™

SINGULARLY EXTRAORDINARY are these sentries of the universe—though hardly friendless and alone. These are the lanterns that dot the night sky. They are the kaleidoscope of starlight that constantly looks down upon us from light years away—though generally overlooked by the naked eye. Unnoticed that is, until a relative few begin to appear in the twilight that follows sunset.

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Not long after, the cloak of darkness deploys—enveloping anything and everything that resides within the range of its extensive reach and grasp.

All at once a discordant and yet harmonious jumble, these sky bound sentinels emerge and converge—thereafter appearing to form vast meandering rivers in the form of stampeding mustangs.

At first wild and even frenzied—these great herds later engage in the tamer and more disciplined pursuit of jockeying for elbow room and position. This, as if they have been broken and saddled by the great vaqueros of the cosmos.

In a maddeningly silent chorus, all scatter and then reassemble, singly and in clusters of varying sizes and shapes.

Resembling handfuls of sparking diamonds, they transform themselves into something gaudy but not cheap. Rather, they adorn that overeager cloak of the night with an intricate diamanté—their ancient, burning character creating a range of captivately vivid colors.

These ruby reds, topaz oranges, sapphire blues, diamond yellows and whites and emerald greens blanket and burn across the firmament—twinkling as they seemingly come to rest. Settling within their transitory pastures across the vault of the nighttime sky, they have once again become what they have always been—a myriad of random patterns that defy prediction and description.

Closer to earth are the noctilucent clouds—momentarily passing the lustrous face of the full moon like luminous black veils of the Orient.



It is a round moon—one that has been advantageously suspended in the sky for the benefit of all those who are nurtured by its subdued sunlight.

While fleeting in overall glow and shape, the creamy tint and milky hue of the earth's only natural satellite can always be depended upon for warm reflection. After all, it is the patron of anyone who has a romantic notion—anyone who falls in love.

Conversely, there are those dark and shadowy lines that can be easily seen by the naked eye. It is they that interlace and disperse themselves across the moon's soft, pale face—and which account for the introversion that is eagerly sought after by those who rely on mystery as their source of emotional nourishment and sustainment.

Thus the great orb sits there—suspended overhead like the round, somber face of some long ago aristocrat whose portrait hangs on the dark and mysterious wall of some castle hallway far, far away.

And so it goes. Once the center of everyone's attention, twilight has both waxed and waned. Likewise, my life is but a shadow of what it once was.

The stars and moon not needing my companionship, or I theirs at this not so mutually beneficial moment—I leave them to their divine business.

Upon my return, I shall once again take the time to consider the part that they may yet play in my life. It is an existence of basic brightness—but also one that from time to time finds itself tarnished and in need of a good shine.



Perhaps tonight is a time for both—that is, bright reflections, and also the softness of a polishing cloth. We'll take a look and see.

HOT JAVA CAFÉ!

MOMENTARILY FADING TO BLACK—I, like a mist from the darkness of the outside's concrete and asphalt manage to reappear just inside the harshly illumined threshold of an all-night café—one that in years gone by was tastefully art deco.

As seen from the sidewalk, the green neon sign continues to blink on and off.

HOT JAVA CAFÉ!

Once inside, I find that I must get used to the bright light. As I wander through the orderly, staggered arrangement of tables and chairs, my dilated pupils finally come to adjust to this artificially lit inside world.

Almost immediately, I find myself mentally questioning the total emptiness of the establishment. One would think that there would be others seeking an oasis at this particular hour—and for the same reasons. As for me, this stopover takes the load off my feet, and warms my weary skeleton with a jolt of hot java.

While settling in at one of the several unoccupied ersatz marble tables, I absentmindedly do what I always do to get comfortable in any typical restaurant chair. I cross my left leg over my right below the knees, and then tuck both feet back under my chair seat. The final part of



my routine is when I wedge my left shoe tip against the floor.

STARKLY BLACK and WHITE

GRADUALLY feeling more at ease with my surroundings, I spend a few brief moments inspecting the overall layout, furnishings and equipment of the café.

From where I'm now sitting, I can easily glance around and take in the entire length and breadth of the small cafeteria that I've chosen as a momentary evening respite.

To briefly digress—it is quite possible, of course, that it chose me instead though. Perhaps it has hidden eyes that spotted me as I walked down the street. Or perhaps I'm meant to meet somebody here tonight. Regardless, both prospects are no doubt intriguing—and certainly mysterious.

Clockwise from left to right, I take in everything that resides within the horizontal plane. For some reason, my plane geometry days automatically clock themselves into my thoughts.

I recall the hard covers of my freshman book being a subdued red. My sophomore year's solid geometry text had an equally restrained binding—but was green instead. Perhaps green meant that I was home free. This, while red meant that I might not make it—and would end up right back where I started. That is, if I could not comprehend what geometry was all about in the red plane—I would not

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progress to the green of the third dimension perhaps. I did though, of course.

Green is a good color. It's the color of mystery too—and of romance and adventure as well. As a matter of fact, green is my favorite color. So, I'll stick by it anywhere I can find it.

Now, momentarily opting for the vertical—I tilt my head all of the way back and look up at the high ceilings. If you don't mind though, I'll come back to the perpendicular a bit later.

Returning my eyes to the horizontal, I find myself warming to the barely heated cafeteria—even residing as it does against a stark backdrop of black and white. These are surroundings with which I am thoroughly familiar—and by default am just as comfortable with.

The plainness of it all runs the gamut from unconditional freedom to the just as absolute nature of complete confinement. Naturally, I opt for the former and condemn the latter. Yes, freedom. This and romance are two of life's great enhancements—although both are quite unpredictable I've found.

I next look down at the bare-bones place setting in front of me. And when I say bare-bones, I mean strictly the basics.

The cup and saucer are the common heavy restaurant type. Cafeteria white just like the tabletops, the dishware is just like half the floor and all of the ceiling—in fact, just like roughly half of everything in the place.

As a means of stark contrast I suppose, the other half of the floor is black. In other words, the floor is tiled from wall-to-wall in alternating black-and-white squares.

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Capping off the aforesaid contrast, a shiny lacquered black trims out the whiteness of the doors, chairs and table frames.

All of the preceding succeeds in toning down the pale motif somewhat, and giving it a semblance of clarity—even of purpose.

"Yes, the sharply yet begrudgingly defined contrast of just plain black and white," I think to myself. This is so unlike the blurred, grayish alternatives that we are forced by circumstance to actually choose from in our everyday lives.

Coincidentally, the cup to my front has twin, thin rings of gray just below and around the rim—likewise the saucer.

Gray it is—the real world of daily decision making.



Never mind the aquamarine of the ever-spinning globe beneath our feet. The never-ending circle that we face from dawn to dusk remains the gray of an often dichotomous black-and-white world.

My attention next finds the flatware.

The stainless steel spoon is not exactly what I would call stainless. It is certainly not as clean as my requirements might normally dictate. That is, if my personal requirements could in fact dictate anything at all in this particular day and age.

I take a brief moment to look back in the direction of the front door and the cashier—now having returned from wherever she might have been. She was apparently absent from her work station when I first walked in. Either that or I wasn't paying as close attention as I usually do.



And as you may already have concluded, I like to think of myself as an observant person—very detail oriented as a matter of fact.

More or less plain looking, the cashier typifies an American working class woman in this new flapper age of the early 1920's. Fiftyish in age I would guess—she is of the generation that was too old to achieve upward mobility into the middle class—this, when provided with the opportunity to do so. The latter, enhanced by the advent of a constitutional income tax in the year just prior to the war to end all wars.

In other words, working class people escaped the income tax by virtue of the personal exemption. This was part and parcel of the compromise forged by business and government—the deal that would let billionaires off the hook, while obligating millionaires to pay the country's bills and minimize the national debt.

The idea was that the new middle class could thereby afford to grow and create national wealth for themselves and for the country—while sharing a bit of that national wealth with the privileged class business owners in whose urban factories they would work. The deal between the privileged class private and public sectors did not, of course, mean the elimination of the working class—just fairer treatment and the opportunity to join the middle class as an employee—or even as a small business owner.

The cashier—this still toiling working class woman is dressed in an unremarkable gray trimmed white uniform. She wears little makeup, and no jewelry that I can see from where I'm sitting. Perhaps she is a spinster with no children to comfort her and look after her in her old age. There is no such thing as a government old age pen-

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sion as yet—and there probably won't be for another decade or so. Not that I'm clairvoyant, of course. Rather, I'm just expressing an educated guess.

This cashier—this middle aged woman seems to be devoid of personality as she stands there formally and quietly behind the business's single cash register. My guess is that she will stand firm behind her machine—no matter how long the wait may be for the next customer to approach her with a check.

I know that I'm not in any hurry at this point. So, it certainly won't be me. Come to think of it, a waitress would have to bring the check to me in the first place—and there seems to be none anywhere in sight.

The heavy brass housing of the cashier's register stands out as quite elaborate among otherwise ordinary surroundings. This, primarily because the register housing is cast in an intricate, antiques design—the ridges highly buffed, while the valleys are darkly stained in contrast.

Dark, thin shadows set off the wavy creases and lines of the passing years—years that have etched themselves across the cashier's face. Interestingly, these indicators of age and hard work resemble those that follow the long, narrow cavities that some unknown artisan once so carefully designed into the mold of his lifeless yet artistic money changing machine.

It's as if the cashier and her register are meant to be together—the machine meant to be cared for, and the cashier meant to be the one to do it.

To the woman's lower left is an enclosed, see-through display case—its heavy, green tinted glass top at least a half an inch thick. Inside the case are inexpensive

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women's watches and similarly priced items such as engraved souvenir spoons.

There are also a number of portable notions and sundries intended for sale to an impulsive target market.

Such is often the case for couples when the man wants to demonstrate his affection for the woman with whom he has just had lunch, or more likely dinner. If one were to have access to the sales records of this small establishment, they would probably reveal that an equal amount of whimsical buying could be easily attributed to women buying only for themselves.

Against the far wall and several feet to the left of the cashier's counter is a large, shiny, stainless steel urn with a stainless spigot whose two-inch or so long, black plastic handle is pushed clockwise to the far left in the off position.



A tall glass tube of something less than a half an inch in diameter climbs straight up from out of the top of the handle. After some length, it reaches a short, stainless, ninety-degree elbow that disappears into the main body of the urn. The tube is filled with perhaps twelve inches of brown liquid, give or take.

I slide my feet forward so that they are once again flat on the floor below the front of my chair seat. I then send them a message through my knees to grip the floor.

Instantaneously, I mentally direct all that I am below my waist to push in a downward direction. As my muscles and ligaments obey my cerebral command, my chair slides backward across the marble floor—with me in it.



I then lean forward, placing my hands on my thighs at outwardly right angles.

Balancing precariously on my bent legs for a brief moment, I stand straight up—uncoiling from my chair like a serpent preparing to strike its prey. That movement allows my trousers to slip back down two inches or so to my ankles and to the tops of my low-cut, brown leather shoes.

Almost at the same time, I reach down for my empty cup and saucer. Picking them up, I carry them with bent elbow in my right hand and walk over to the urn, avoiding adjacent chairs and tables as I go.

Along the way, I steal a closer look at the cashier out of the corner of my right eye.

She has no rouge to brighten the pale, creased skin of her face. Her dress extends several inches below her knees—straight down in the direction of a pair of black, slightly scuffed, lace-up shoes with low, worn heels.

I notice that she is not standing as I earlier had supposed. Instead, she is seated on a stool that sports three horizontal black braces between each of two pairs of white legs. The seat is as gray as the trim on the dress that conceals the woman's slight frame.

She has both shoes firmly emplaced on the middle black rung. Perhaps she is aware of my movements out of her left eye, I do not know. Her dark, wavy, shoulder length hair likely obscures the peripheral vision that she would have needed in order to observe me as I arrive at the urn.

But then again, women possess a sort of sixth sense that somehow enables them to see through their tresses. So, who knows. In no event though, does the cashier turn

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her head to acknowledge my presence in any way, shape or form.

After pulling the urn's handle counterclockwise toward me and to the right, steaming hot coffee splashes into the empty white cup—I, having switched from my right to the left hand. After turning the black, plastic handle clockwise back to the off position, I lay down the cup and saucer on a clean, stainless counter just below and to the front of the urn.

After that, I stir in some cream—immediately and magically turning the color of the java from onyx black to a swirling brown and tan. The thin white liquid that this starkly surreal place calls cream is somewhat on the tepid side. I prefer mine cold, which always seems to me to make it more pure in some way.

A cube of raw, brown sugar later, another quick stir or two, and I bring the cup to my lips and contentedly begin sipping away. The coffee goes down as hot as it looks—and I start to perk up a bit.

Retrieving the brew and its saucer with the fingers of my right hand, I wheel around slowly to avoid spilling the now brownish liquid. With the cashier at my back, I head slowly back to my table.

Without going into the same excruciating detail that I have up to this point—I can simply tell you that I place the coffee back on the tabletop and reseal myself in the same position as before.

Finally looking upward yet once again, I observe two long lines of bright lights glaring down at me. I also see that the entire end of the dining room closest to the



street entrance is tinted plate glass—its single great expanse reaching from sill to ceiling and from wall to wall.

Besides the eternally blinking, green neon sign—only the reflection of the string of overhead globes is visible in the massive window. The street beyond is black as pitch—and just as full of mystery.

My eyes return to the neon sign, which I decide should cease its blinking. Don't ask me how though.

To me, color is the natural softener of some of life's harder edges. It was conjured up by Mother Nature in ancient times to brighten an otherwise black and white world. In modern times, it was duplicated by science.

Green especially, softens my outlook on life—if I can focus on it long and closely enough. The greener it is the more effective it is, as a matter of fact.



All in all then, the next best thing to natural green can only be the artificial emerald green in a neon tube—at least from my point of view. The softness of sapphire blue manages a close second. After that comes velvet's royal purple, and the lavender of an amethyst. For right now though, it is the soft green sanctuary I have recently come to know as the *Hot Java Café™!*

HOT JAVA CAFÉ™!

To my left, and adjacent to the black-lacquered entry doors, is a solitary steam radiator—obviously quite old, with bronze paint flaking away from its cast iron tubes and fins. It is the polar opposite of the cash register. This, insofar as their respective designs and degrees of upkeep are concerned.



Directly opposite, and across the cafeteria from its sole source of heat, are what I would describe as the upstairs ends of two tarnished brass handrails. They flank a staircase leading downstairs to somewhere, perhaps even to another place and time. In any event, I don't plan to make a visit there anyway. With all of the java that I plan to consume though, I just hope the restroom is here on the main floor.

There appears to be one bright spot in the otherwise restrained and common décor of the place. A large bowl of fruit intently looks back at me from the exact center of the far windowsill. Reds, yellows and oranges there are, the only appetizing items around. But alas, they are mere wax imitations of the real world.

Interestingly enough, during this, my latest survey of my surroundings, I notice the cashier suddenly staring at me. However briefly, I can now see plainly that she has bright, steel blue peepers. They contrast with everything that is patently and sadly gray about her.

Her eyes briefly meet mine before she demurely lowers her lids and turns her head back in the direction of the brass cash register—the contents of which are in her sole charge.

GREEN CASHMERE

AM MAKING PRETTY GOOD PROGRESS with my java at this point. As I get about half way toward the bottom of my cup—I am delighted to see another member of the fair sex enter the establishment.

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Here is a living, breathing human being who is not so plain as the one I've been describing.

Without looking at me or at the cashier, the new customer skips looking for a table first. Instead, she immediately and directly strides over to the stainless steel coffee urn and its adjacent rack of cups, saucers and stainless spoons, forks and dinner knives.

She is femininity in motion!

Deftly, this very womanly woman removes a black leather glove from her right hand—this, as she makes her way around and through the tables and chairs. With each step that she takes across the marble floor, the heels of her shoes confidently click her toward the next destination—a consistently crisp and clear, alternating staccato.

It's kind of like the sound one hears when riding on a passenger train. You know, the echoing sound that accompanies the same end—the achievement of expeditious travel or movement from one point or place to another.

Unhesitatingly choosing a matched set and a spoon, the woman quickly dispenses some of the hot liquid, and turns back toward the center of the room—heading straight for the table nearest the front window. It is one which has no setting already placed, but which does have cream and sugar containers at its center. She puts the cup and saucer down with her bare hand, and slings her black purse on the side of the back of her chair with a still gloved left hand.

She then opens her slightly more than knee length, *green cashmere coat* and sits down directly facing me. As she does, her waist and hips just naturally pull her black

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dress's hem up above the knees. I notice that she is wearing nylons. I can always tell about a woman's stockings—this, because they exhibit a certain sheen in any light.

At this point, the woman reaches down with her still gloved left hand—this, while simultaneously lifting her body momentarily off the chair. Also at the same time, she grips the hem of her black dress and firmly and modestly pulls it straight outward and back down over her once bare, nylon covered knees.

After having adjusted both her dress and her coat, she very quickly crosses her right leg over her left—still managing to ensure that her knees remain covered.

Briefly and nonchalantly glancing my way with large, luminescent, yet soft brown eyes—she reaches toward the center of her table for the sugar dispenser, and then the creamer. This no doubt interesting and appealing woman then pours a bit of each into her cup, stirring the coffee gently with a stainless utensil—while once again looking me straight in the eye.

I'm as breathless as she is breathtaking! Although I could be hallucinating right about now—it may in fact be possible that this woman in the *green cashmere coat* has managed a slight smile.

Oddly though, the question I find myself asking at that particular moment is "Why?"

That is, why is this very feminine woman here at this hour of the night? After all, the lateness of the evening is not usually recommended or suited to a member of the opposite sex. This, particularly when the woman finds herself out on the street alone in the middle of the night.



Then, for some reason quite unknown to me—I find myself completely under the emerald green spell of *The Cashmere Coat*™.¹

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Major D.H. Dale

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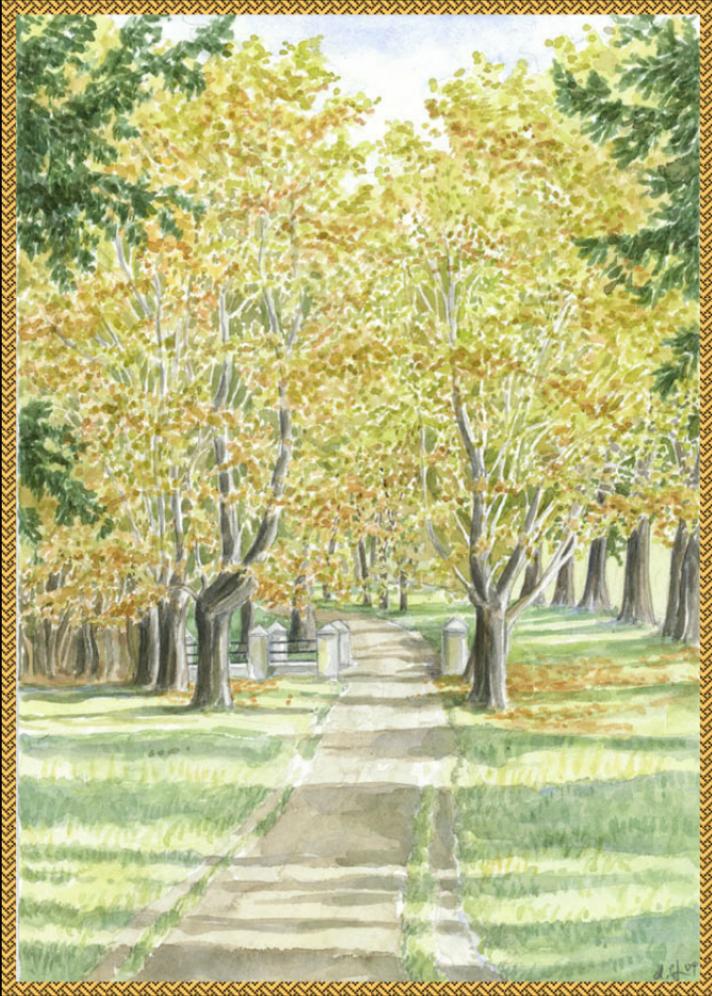


¹The freewheeling imagination and evocative storytelling of D.H. Dale™ crown otherwise commonplace themes with *aBit of Mystery, Romance and Adventure*™—a bejeweled and magical coronet not shackled by convention. Herein lies the work of a self-styled painter of the written word—the full kaleidoscope 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 *The Cashmere Coat*™.

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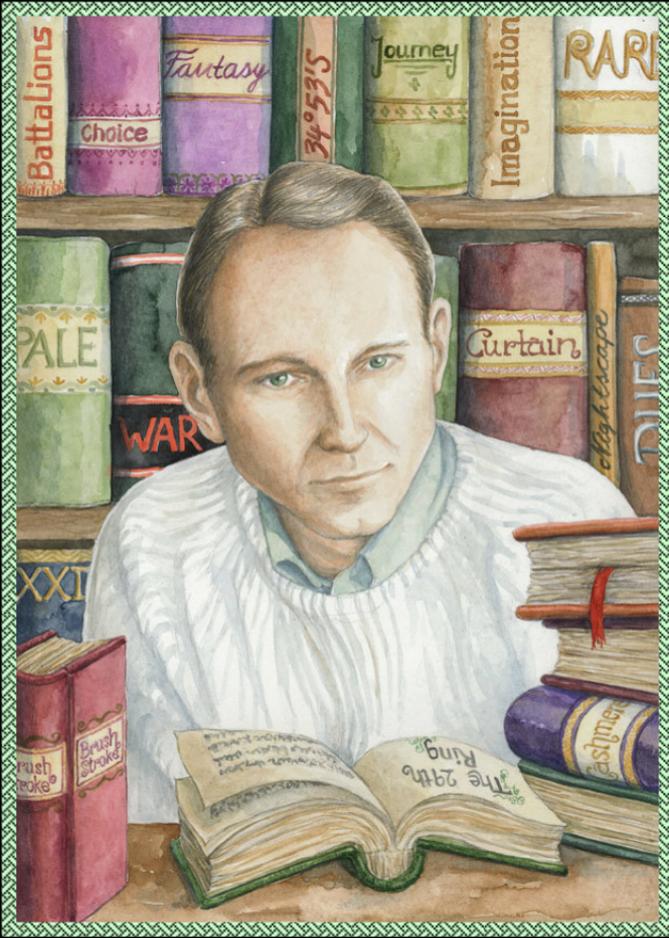
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