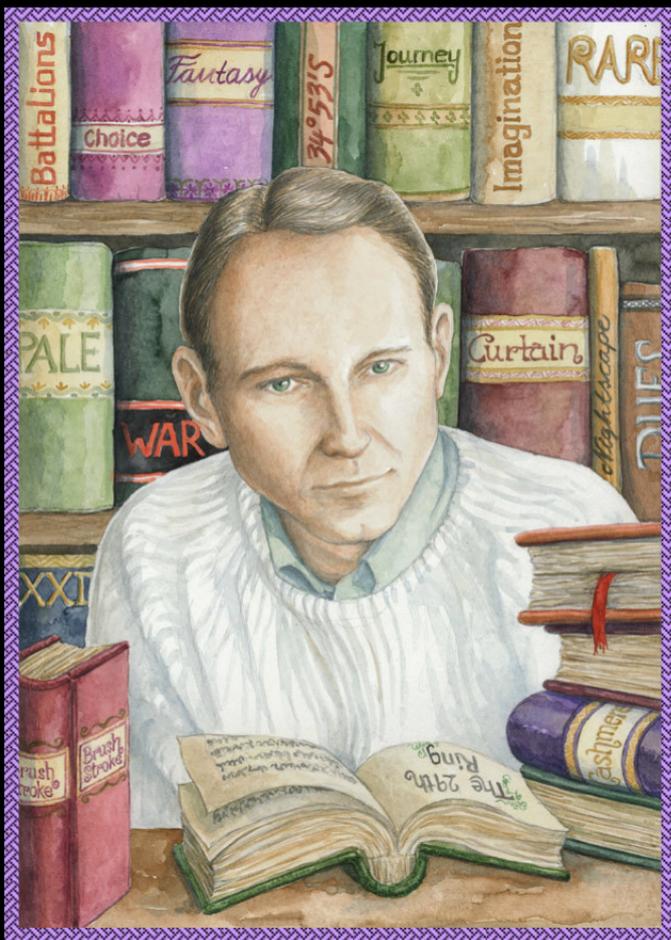


THE DOWN AND UP PATH—TWILIGHT INTO LUSH NOIR— by D.H. DALE—
A MINIATURE STORY— from STORIES WE ARE TELLING— for the MINIATURE LIBRARY— of the SHORT STORY AFICIONADO—

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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The Down and Up Path™

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The Down and Up Path™

Having Evolved into the Quintessential
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is Dedicated to

My FAMILY
Then, Now and Always

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

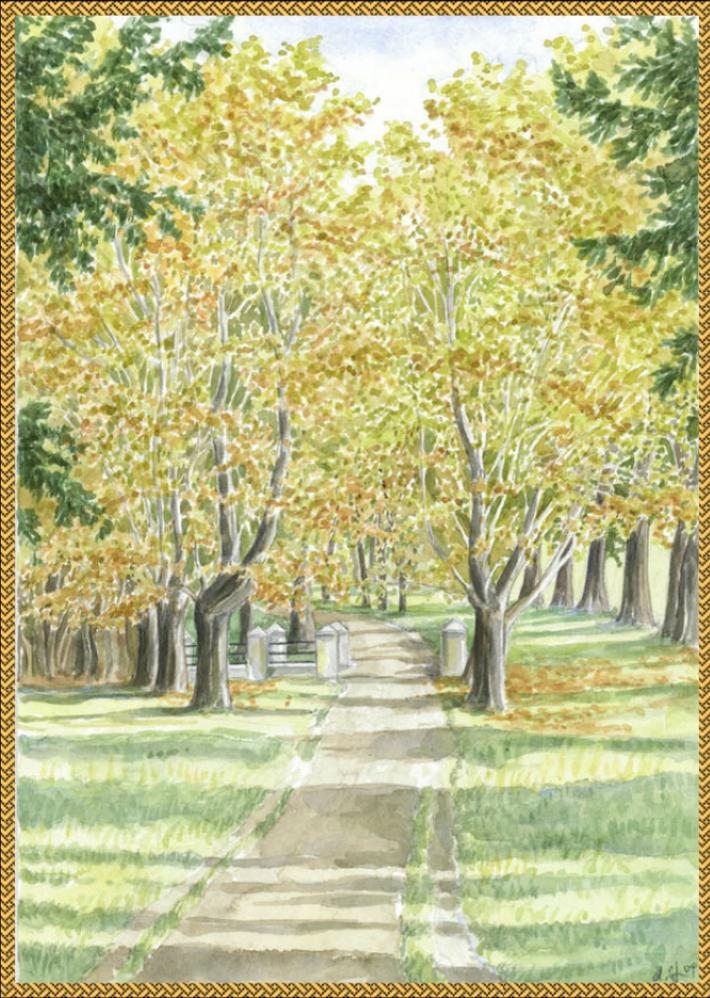
My LOVING and FAITHFUL DAUGHTER
You're the Best!

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 Down and Up Path™

Join me now for *A Story I'm Beginning*—and savor *aBitof Mystery and Adventure* while negotiating *The Down and Up Path* from *Twilight into Lush Noir*. It is an evening of mind softening indigo flooded by soft, brooding moonlight—whose calming prelude lies just beyond a *glowing red sunset* and its proud and confidently ascending horizon. *Evening twilight* is upon you—so let your whole self go to experience it, and perhaps to simply even survive it!

Twilight into Lush Noir™

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I CAN POINT TO SLEEP at its most disquieting, or at its least alarming. Like most people, I can differentiate between nightmares and dreams. The difference between scary stuff and the more pleasant variety of slumber rests with how I feel at the point of waking up.

As I think about it now, my innate ability to discriminate between nightmares and dreams has never to my memory been impacted by the depth, degree or frequency of any night's random and subconscious leanings.

Here's another thing about sleep – mine anyway.

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Dreams make me want to linger. I can even wake up from one, and then go back to sleep—easily picking up where I left off. I've heard that successive dreaming such as mine is quite rare. Perhaps it is. I can't be sure, of course. I only know myself.

On the other hand, nightmares leave me thankful that I am finally wide awake—particularly after wrestling to escape from their despair and pain through scene after weary and trying scene. While death has certainly never been my friend—pain on the other hand is an outright enemy. So much so as a matter of fact—that I would describe pain's nocturnal screenplay as one of another genre altogether.

Note that I did not say that my eventual earthly demise is something to be feared. I do fear it though—but only on behalf of my loved ones whom I must leave behind in their grief. 

My experience has been that grief can be a long and diversionary process. Even so, however, disability is a far worse fate for everybody. Disability be damned, as a matter of fact—and death be quick.

Note also that when death comes knocking, I must leave those I love in life to find their own way—something, it is hoped, that they shall have no trouble doing. This, simply because they shall have prepared for almost any eventuality.

I forthwith depart from my brief digression as to pain, death, disability and grief. Rather, as I continue my personal reflections on nightmares and dreams—I have to say that differentiation and recall are about as far apart as



say, the Arctic and the Antarctic. I might even say that they are mutually exclusive.

Simply because I awaken and know I was having a nightmare or a dream, is nowhere near being an ironclad guarantee that I can sit down and spell out the plot, characters or anything else about the entertainment of the night.

The IMAGERY of the NIGHT

METAPHOR, SIMILE AND ALLEGORY are not necessarily present or even certain in the my personal never-never land. However, there is in fact a form of discriminating imagery that is at all times present and asking to be recognized.

Once awake though, it is the "hard to remember" factor that generally causes confusion as to the presence of imagery in any form. This, even when the images of my mind's eye are more often than not simply recalled as "not being remembered" in the first place.

When waking up in a cold sweat, of course, I can pretty much comprehend what has been going on—even without a particularly special knack for retrieving short-term deposits from the memory bank.

"Which one awaits me tonight?" I ask myself. Agony and nightmare? Ecstasy and dream? More than likely, I can expect the evening's agenda to include both—but only after sunset turns to twilight, and twilight fades to darkness.



After all, whether on the scale of a grotesque and frightening nightmare or that of a pleasing and delightful dream—the reflection of the first is a more or less out of the ordinary mirror image of the second. Some might even characterize a nightmare as a bizarre doppelganger of a dream.

Once my eyelids close—how possible or probable is misfortune or fortune in a subliminal dreamland that is hardly of my own making?

It might be constructive to know that.

But then, is that really an honest declaration? Perhaps not.

After all, how great or not so great could slumber's fantasy land be—without the factor that uncertainty carries with it?



In any event—what is doable or achievable shall ultimately depend upon nothing more obvious than timing and fate, each being of the most straightforward and uncomplicated variety.

Perhaps my nighttime travels will be subjected to random timing and evenhanded fate. I trust that will be the case for each. But I somehow doubt it.

More likely, my personal itinerary shall have to endure the impact of some meaningless variable. This, emanating from the proverbial left field that normally resides somewhere out there in the dominion of the absurd.

As to mere effect with no answer expected, "Who then knows what my destiny shall be on this night?"

I'll leave it at that—for now, anyway.



ILL-TIMED FATE REFLECTS ILL-FATED TIMING

ILL-TIMED FATE AND ILL-FATED TIMING are an unfortunate plight. This, when a seaman of the night embarks upon a heavy lidded voyage that ends up bearing the bitter fruit of nothing more or less beneficial than fitful and restless whitecaps of an angry sea. Those, the foaming waves that have a penchant for crashing down with all their might, and then sweeping across the deck of a frail vessel. The result is a sailor now wide awake—but in a disoriented, frightened and even fragile state.

Conversely, the nocturnally fortunate explorer is he whose fragile craft is carried by friendly currents and light winds around all bad weather and tortuous conditions. Once clear thereof, it is inevitable that he should then be exposed to nothing worse than mild breezes upon a quiet sea of undisturbed slumber. This advantaged traveler shall then be destined for those veritable safe havens of mystery, romance and adventure. Yes, those places of refuge that all seek and few are granted by the temperamental powers of the night.

And so it is then.

Whether at its worst or best makes little difference to the subconscious.

Rather, it is the unavoidable certainty of it all that manages to trump every hand dealt in its natural or unnatural state.

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At the end of the day, slumber's mighty sea laden estuary is that which summons every sleepy stream—and into which the mighty river of twilight dutifully flows.

The SPLIT PERSONA of a MIDSUMMER'S EVE

LATE IT IS ON A MIDSUMMER'S EVE. Unable to remain vigilant, I have no choice but to experience the downward slide away from wakefulness. In that same moment, I give up personal control of all that remains of my physical and mental self—but not of the emotional. That I shall retain—although what potentially triggers the sensations and passions therein shall depend upon just how nightmarish the charges and specifications of my nocturnal trial reveal themselves to be. Naturally, it is a test I would rather do without.

And so I let myself go. As a result, I fall under the doubtful protection of nothing more nor less than the well worn and cracked indigo blue leather of a loyal though uncomfortably old armchair—this, residing by the crackling fire of a sheltered hearth.

Not long after, all that I consciously am begins the long indeterminate and head over heels fall into a world not of my own making—a subconscious wonderland of both reality and fantasy.

The sum total of me floats away to be pursued by the tidal ebb and flow of magical enchantment. By default, it is a crisply black and white affair—but almost as often one of vivid, exhilarating full color.

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This brings me to the unavoidable spit persona of it all.

As to the straightforward and beneficent nature of sleep—well, I have absolutely no quarrel with it.

Whilst on the flip side, common sense may shepherd me—while also telling me that I might just as well go with the flow of sleep's often challenged, and yet undeniable characteristics. The first of these is the gauzelike façade that seems to give way without visible tearing of any kind—whether when falling into slumber or when waking from it. The second is the unavoidable world of nightmares and dreams lying in an often disguised state just beyond the murky transparency.

What lies just this side of the murkiness is a sort of split persona associated with the proverbial forty winks. As a matter of fact, I am at this very moment the heavy lidded embodiment of that divided personality—being as I am, half awake and half asleep.

Said another way, I am able to engage in a subdued form of conscious thought—while alternately passing into a completely submissive state—both of these appearing quite similar to the unsophisticated eye of the casual observer.

While negotiating the top of sleep's split rail fence, I often find myself falling off one side or the other. Fortunately, I then awaken high in the air on the end of a seesaw.

Almost immediately though, I awaken yet once again—this time having descended to the bare ground, but on the opposite end of the seesaw. In essence, I alternate back and forth and up and down, and sometimes in re-

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verse—while at other times whirling like a child's wooden top.

Does this make any sense at all? Well, about as much sense as any of slumber's imagery does—or doesn't.

The THEATER of the NIGHT

SLEEPY TWILIGHT is an evening phase of mind softening indigo flooded by soft, brooding moonlight—whose calming prelude lies just beyond a glowing red sunset and its proud and confidently ascending horizon.

Yes, the theater of the night, where the curtain both falls and rises—not consecutively but rather in an oddly concurrent harmony of sorts.

It is a nighttime marked by mind bending ebony, punctuated by sharp, piercing starlight—whose unrepentant finale lies just this side of a blazing gold sunrise and its humble and respectfully descending horizon.

At the appointed time, the nocturne of noir falls away, and the curtain of something entirely golden rises across the vault of the morning sky.

By this time, it should be fairly obvious where I'd rather remain—unless I'm prone to madness, of course.

Any natural preference I might have is of little consequence though—and so, choice becomes meaningless and pointless as well.

And so it goes—on into the night.

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The sleeping part of me continues to slumber and dream on—this, amidst fast evolving and retreating fantasies and realities. While on the other hand, the conscious part of me never quite makes it to the fully awake state.

Yes, sleep's state of affairs is at best a mixed-bag.

Slumber allows thoughts remembered in the half-awake state. On the other hand, the half-asleep state must wait for lucidness, only to very often result in dreams unremembered.

And of those dreams remembered, the most vivid are often nightmarish and prolonged—while those least intense and capable of detailed remembrance often reflect romance's exhilaratingly brief moments of vibrance and effervescence.

DOWN the UP PATH

SOMEWHERE within my present world resides the state of being unsure. That is, I don't know just yet whether I'm entering into a pleasurable dream, or falling into the depths of an unpleasant nightmare.

But I do know this.

I strongly suspect the latter—this, because a small piece of my psyche is literally struggling to retain some semblance of control over what remains of me.

Never mind that effort though.

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Both the state of my mind and the state of my body are both fast falling away from me—no matter the intense nature of the aforementioned struggle.

So, with control now appearing to be out of the question—my reactive resources switch to autopilot. Thereafter, I engage in the hasty switchover to self-defense—both of mind and body.

As a first line of self-defense—I simply assume a cavalier attitude toward my conscious state's progressively more rapid descension into the confusion and helplessness that reside in the deepness of a dark ebony world. Even so, my uncertainty and vulnerability soon evolve into a real mental and physical effort to remain stationary and right where I am—here in the deep indigo ambiance of twilight.

All my intentions though, are soon overruled by an influence that I can only describe as a power existing somewhere outside my own skin.

At this point, my feet and legs simply raise me up and carry me away.

No longer able to ignore nor resist my urgent predicament—I instead proceed in making an effort to identify with the surreal nature of it.

That is, I now accept what is apparently my new reality by integrating it as much as I can with a long ago story of a dreamlike state that thoroughly intrigued me—and which at that time drew me into a romantic mystery of sorts.

You may be familiar with the story's twilight setting. That, an overgrown moonlit pathway wending its way through a misty and forlorn stand of trees—a small forest if you stand well back and look at the big picture.

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EERIE is the GATEKEEPER

SUDDENLY find myself in a strange place—awake or asleep, I know not. Regardless, I walk slowly and deliberately down a dewdrop washed path—apparently long laden with creeping saint augustine.

The air around me is thick with what I initially perceive to be a richly sweet and nectar laden honeysuckle. It is a sweetness that triggers and enhances sudden reverie—the kind of vivid yet shadowy recollection that exists only on a warm summer evening of a childhood long ago.

The air is so thick in fact, that I am charmed and captivated into a state of near intoxication.

I'm certain that I'm in a moonlit clearing surrounded by tall, shadowy trees. My two feet pad along upon a forest floor carpeted with thick grass. Not only does this luxuriant greenness envelop the soles of my feet in a dichotomously cool sort of warmth—but there is also the exuberant exudation of a compellingly deep hue and tint that only accompanies the deep, dark indigo of soft twilight.

Yes, I admit to a certain measure of intoxication. After all, I find that I cannot deny a sort of rapture.

My eyes are rapidly adjusting to the starlight. I can see that I'm about to traverse what appears to be a long, downward sloping trail laid out before me. It begins where the clearing ends.

I don't seem to be breathing, but I'm certain that I must be. After all, where my walk is taking me requires effort—and although the enveloping mist is deep and thick,

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I'm certain that it hasn't lifted me up. That is, I'm sure that I'm not floating above the ground.

Perhaps this is what tireless feels like. It is so spellbinding in fact, that I feel as if I should and could do it more often — if only intermittently.

Each step replicates and then succeeds the last, one foot in front of the other. Down the incline I descend. And as I do, I confidently focus on what my eyes can make out ahead of me.

Whilst approaching the bottom of the long slope, I see a swinging gate though the impending darkness.

There is but a single gatekeeper.

When I finally reach her, she does not ask me my name — or even why I am here. Neither does she ask me why I want to enter. Rather, she simply and quietly swings the two halves of the gate wide open. This, as if I have every right to continue on — and also as if she had every intention of doing so from the outset.

As I come abreast of the her, the lone keeper of the gate lowers her head in seeming respect. As she does, I cannot make out her face.

Once I pass through the gate, I see the shocking carnage!

It is then that I know that the gatekeeper was in reality bowing her head in reverence for the dead and the dying — my presence being merely consequential.

A_n APPALLING STATE

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HERE HAD BEEN A BUILDING HERE. It seems to me that if it were still standing, that it would be an apartment house of some sort. "How strange!" I exclaim under my breath.

The apparent explosion did not blow it into pieces exactly. Rather, the blast was just forceful and severe enough to carefully dissect it.

What now lies here before me are certain integral but separate and motionless subsets of a sort of original set—all of the parts somehow remaining intact right where each landed.

One such section presents itself totally in miniature, as it lies directly at my feet. I look down at it, all the while wondering from what floor of the building it had come. As I do, my next thoughts are of how odd it seems that the apartments and their respective front doors and windows remain all in a row, just as they should be. It is simply that they are all lying at a sort of bizarre angle.

The doors are dark orange, and the windows outlined and trimmed in a dark lime green. The section of building that I happen to be intently examining at the moment, has an intact roof that is also green in color.

Therefore, logic tells me that I am looking at a part of the top floor. This being so, after being torn asunder and then falling all this way, its occupants must at the very least have suffered severe distress and great shock.

My next thoughts are worrying even to me, for they and my imagination begin to extend themselves into the interiors of the apartments lying before me. It seems to me that behind each door and its respective front window



is a person or people, the hearts of these once animate human beings now surely still and lifeless.

What my two eyes next spy succeeds in elevating my anxiety level even more.

For to the right of this miniature section of building is a row of people all lying upon their backs—some with twisted feet, but most with necks twisted at a slight angle in my direction. For some unknown reason however, none seem to have their arms twisted or contorted in any way.

The faces of all of these people are visible to me—even in the evening shadows.

Some have eyes whose lids are halfway open. Through these slits, I can see dull, faraway pupils staring out at what seems to be nothingness.

But it isn't that at all.

Rather, what I imagine they are really intent upon are sunsets and other people—and all that they will never see and be again. All of these things speak of life still there, yet now unseen.

A SPARK of LIFE as DEATH RETURNS

THE TEETH of some of these people are visible through lips that are parted in a kind of tranquil yet absurd grin. Suddenly, they move ever so slightly and seem to come awake. One and then another murmur to themselves and to their neighbors—they, who also begin to speak in soft tones and whispers. It seems

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oddly droll to me that those who once again possess the breath of life are mixed among the dead.

I leave the spot where I have been standing and walk up the long row of those people now moving amidst the many who still lay motionless.

As I do so, a strange and appalling premonition takes hold of me.

Am I being forewarned that something even more terrible than what I have already experienced is about to come to pass?

That seems the case alright. Yes, something is indeed happening!

BEYOND the APPALLING



LARGE MASS of heavy, thick fog is creeping down the line of people and obscuring those that once were, and those that are still. It's as if those who managed to draw in the breath of life yet once again are now to have their existence snuffed out and stolen from them by something dark, sinister—something apparently filled with black humor.

I try to call out, but the life is choked out of my words by the horror that confronts me. Helplessly, I watch as whispers are muffled. Murmuring turns to gasping.

One by one, all succumb to weakness, unable to succeed in yet one final and mighty struggle for life. Quietly, they slip away into oblivion yet once more.



The billowing fog covers my feet and ankles, and it seems to me that it is rising even farther.

This is not going to be a happy ending. I'm sure of it!

In a panic, I try to wake myself up.

That failing, I turn awkwardly to my left and run back in the direction from whence I came—this, on what I think of as *the down and up path*.

Unfortunately, the gate is now closed and locked, its keeper no longer within sight.

Do I have a one-way ticket? I certainly hope not!

Making an about face, I gather all my strength and run back into the black mist. By this time, it has risen to the height of my knees. My heart is pounding and I am gasping for air as I dash up the hill ahead of me. It is but a few moments later, and I'm almost totally out of breath.

Then I stop and look down at the ground in front of me. What had been murky surroundings is giving way to mere harmless shadows.

The shadows are accentuated by oddly remaining rays of an evening sunset. Filtering down through a stand of tall trees, these rays find their way to the damp, soft forest floor.

My breathing begins to slow.

I seem to have reached an oasis of coolness and tranquility—at this point finally and effortlessly awakening from something truly eerie and frightening.

I must say that no longer do I have any intention of again reliving such a nightmarish experience.

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But then, what help are good are intentions when
sleep is always so close at hand?¹

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Noir into Lush Twilight™

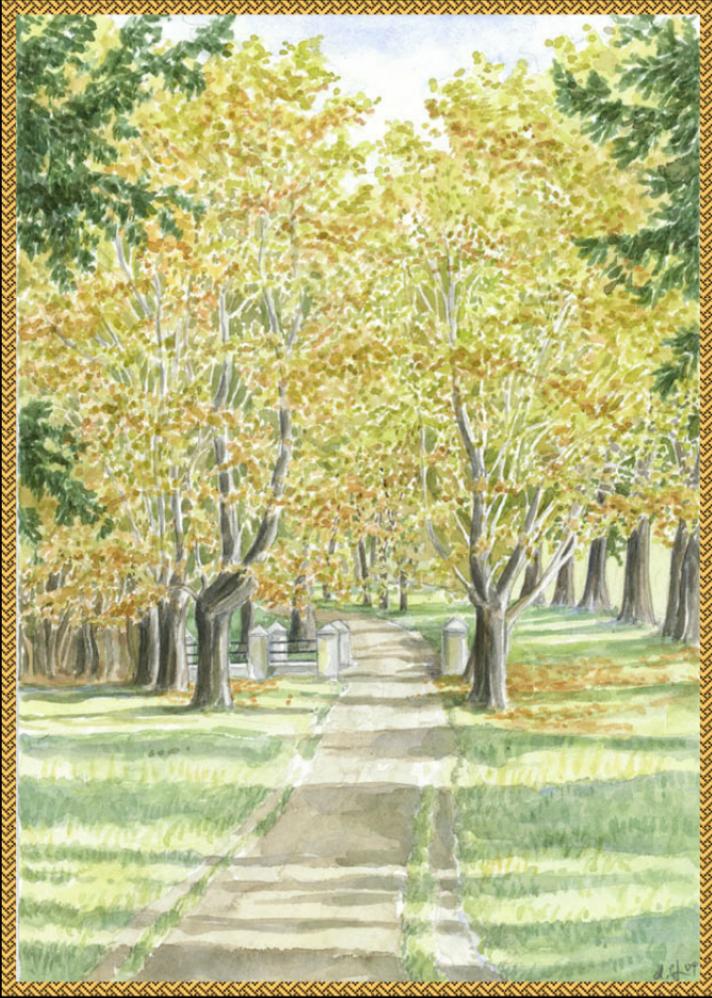
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¹The freewheeling imagination and evocative storytelling of D.H. Dale™ crown otherwise commonplace themes with *aBitof Mystery, Romance and Adventure™*—a bejeweled and magical coronet not shackled by convention. Herein lies the work of a self-styled 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 Down and Up Path™—Twilight into Lush Noir™*, followed by its sequel, *The Down and Up Path™—Noir into Lush Twilight™*.

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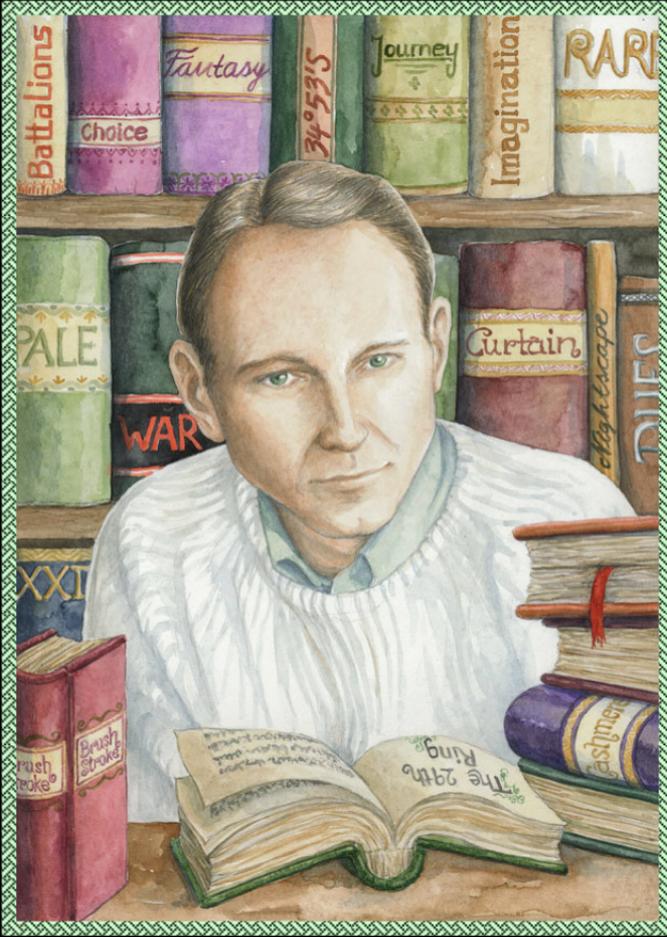
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