

THE DOWN AND UP PATH™—NOIR INTO LUSH TWILIGHT™ 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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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,

Romance and Adventure.

Major D.H. Dale™
The Down and Up Path™

A Miniature Story™ from Stories We Are Telling™
for the Miniature Library™ of the Short Story Aficionado™

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The Down and Up Path™

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 Down and Up Path™

Join me now for *A Story I'm Ending*—and savor *aBit of Mystery, Romance and Adventure*™ while renegotiating *The Down and Up Path*™ from *Noir into Lush Twilight*™.

Immerse yourself in the theater of the night, where the curtain both falls and rises—not consecutively but rather in an odd harmony of sorts. It is a nighttime marked by mind bending ebony—the latter punctuated by a sharp, piercing starlight whose finale lies just this side of a *blazing gold sunrise* and its humble and respectfully descending horizon.

Morning twilight awaits you somewhere out there soon—so be prepared to gather your whole self together and embrace it!

Noir into Lush Twilight™

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SUBTLE MUST BE the closing stroke of the writer's pen—that final blend of water and dry ink that seeks to *seal the fate* of any wandering wonderer such as myself. For such is the single most

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fragile inking executed by any storyteller—usually declarative in nature, but also on occasion a frank and open interrogative that leaves one to speculate ad infinitum.

I'm referring to that final act of thoughtful penmanship, whose delicate execution is ultimately responsible for ensuring that any *accidental twist of fate* comes up just short of interfering with *destiny's inevitable certainty*. It makes little difference whether that certainty stems from the original assurance of life's winding route and destination—or whether some new meandering path might at first glance seem as if it can reverse the intended order of things.

In keeping with that, here is something certainly worth remembering in the reiterative vein. As unpredictably revealing as both providence and coincidence may appear to be—it is the inherently unbreachable barrier between the two that straight away soaks up the very last drop of ink from the penman's well.

Are you yet wondering what all of this is leading up to? Well, here is the best way I can explain it.


Having for a long time crossed, explored and searched a goodly number of my generation's seemingly divergent paths, I believe the end of any road to be predetermined. That is, the future neither falls afoul of nor even faintly mingles with anything beyond the unavoidable nature of destiny's mutual exclusiveness.

May I also interject at this point that the ending to any story must have a beginning. And so it is that I find myself pursuing a converse yet parallel path toward tomorrow's inaccessible horizon—while distancing myself from yesterday's. This, in order to reach my final destina-



tion at the very moment when the safety of morning twilight is certain to engulf me in all its lush grandeur—just this side of a blazing gold sunrise.

And let's not forget what is always lingering and seeking to play an active part both along and within the dynamic periphery of any storyteller's mysterious, romantic and adventurous rendering.

That would naturally be the sometimes familiar and oftentimes ominous atmosphere foreshadowed by dark forests and moonlit meadows; robed kings and ragged ogres; shadowy battlements and dimly lit corridors; gowned queens and seductive sorceresses; empty thrones and glittering treasure troves; coming of age princesses and princes; scrolls, books and prophecies; affectionate lovers and fluttering faeries; solitary knights and paladin justice—all of them enhancing one's innermost fantasies, dreams and forebodings. 

Later on, I'll pause for a moment to dwell on the foregoing in a bit more detail—particularly should any be encountered during my conceivably perilous trek.

Though never indicative of a randomly successful *twist of fate*, every will-o'-the-wisp that I encounter can lead to a purposeful yet always intended *change in fate*. Even so though, one must constantly be on guard as each wisp flutters in the wind—thereby having the potential to waver from its originally intended purpose and destination. Naturally, *fate's certainty* will itself ensure the who, what, where, when, why and how of one's unfolding future—no matter what.

But of course, the telling of any story should not be eclipsed by its ending—nor even by the start thereof.



So, I must now proceed along the course that is set for me—whilst I mull over and delight in the wonder of it all. Along the way, it is imperative that one keep a certain focus at all times. This, in order to maintain some semblance of control. I'm not addressing the control of others that emanates from wealth and its inherent power and privilege though. Rather, I'm making a simple statement as to the ultimate control exercised by each stroke of this writer's pen.

Said another way, it's my story and mine alone— which by the way I sincerely hope will not end in the interrogative.

Now, having already experienced the terrors and wonders that lay *Down the Up Path*™, I find myself retracing my steps *Up the Down Path*™—where any new horrors and marvels may as yet be found lurking!



The LABYRINTH of the TWILIGHTS

JOURNEYING between the two twilights from nightfall to dawn is to experience a magical looking glass reflecting the whimsical razzle-dazzle lying behind all the near misses witnessed by a mirror never cracked. It is a roughly twelve-hour moonlit passage that spans the three-dimensional landscape lying rearward and forward of *The Rim of the World*™—the past lit by the red of the setting sun, and the future by the gold of the rising sun.

As much as I prefer to sit and gaze at the blue moon after sunset, ultimate survival depends upon pursu-


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ing it as it slowly changes color to dove white and then canary yellow.

Grateful for a full moon's illumination, one must deftly use its limited candlepower in order to negotiate the innate medley of traditionally conventional hedgerows and similar obstacles that are rooted or otherwise embedded in the landscape's first and second dimensional planes.

It is those planes which spread themselves across the entire length and breadth of the labyrinth's blind alleys, hairpin curves and switchbacks. Additionally, there are water filled moats, thorny depressions and more—all of which seek to impede any view over higher natural or manmade structures. In this regard, there are no ladders, stiles or other forms of stairways available to render assistance to the wanderer who wearies in search of an exit with which to escape. 

I'm referring to a maze that under normal circumstances allows no more than one way in and one way out—or so goes the first scenario's tale. Once admitted, certain unfortunate travelers are simply left to wander aimlessly without ever being given the benefit of the doubt—that is, without ever being afforded the prospect of escape through either redemption or mercy.

Of course, the first setting's tale seeks to diminish any validity claimed by a second more flexible account—one that integrates gates and doorways that are undisclosed except on a moment's notice. I'm referring to avenues of intermittent ingress and egress that regularly appear and disappear—thus affording not only early escape but also the aforementioned and always intended *change in fate* for travelers deemed to be so fortunate.

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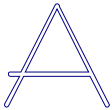


Does the second version risk the flight of those who in fact should be condemned to eternal wandering—or what might be construed as endless imprisonment? Yes, perhaps there is just such a risk—and I'm going to find out one way or another. At this point in time, I'm just not entirely sure which I am—that is, the flawed or the unflawed.

Along the way, however, I believe that I shall find destiny's intended exit. And in the process, I shall discover the whereabouts of the *lavender crystal*, and what its miraculous properties proffer in this life and even the next. No, not a reward of a pampered existence. Rather, what may be tendered is an island within a protective sea—wherein affection and loyalty are kept safe and secure from the exploitation of an overreaching and repressive outside world.

In the meantime, the secrets of securing such an island shall be kept under wraps.

The COOLNESS of PREDAWN



NATURALLY TRANSLUCENT MIST

settles more or less uniformly across the taut brim and cratered crown that together mimic and protect the conscious awareness I believe to be resolutely embedded in my psyche. In one form or another, said rigid cliff and dimpled peak are the two indispensables of any chapeaux illustrating the signs of trademark quality. And in the present case after all, one can quite simply conclude that my particular bit of headgear was devised by a master craftsman for the purposes to which only I the searcher desire to put it. Likewise, for the locations to which only I the explorer acquire the privilege of

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passage—whether by modern accommodation, or simply by foot or on horseback.

Presently afoot, I find myself with hat in hand so to speak—but only as a means of seeking some relief from the warm temperature of a cloudy morning’s twilight. So, one might term my actions as being symbolic of a marked humility toward the part of me that must do all my thinking and decision making.

In essence, I find myself pursuing a certain perspective of that old expression—that is, the one that refers to *keeping one’s cool*.

As I tilt my head and lift my eyes skyward, countless tiny droplets of fog envelop my face—and likewise come to rest on my hair, ears and neck. A slight breeze then fans the dampness to cool my thoughts and designs. Thus, am I able to keep my wits about me and not falter in my unyielding purpose—a burning curiosity to confidently explore any and every strange hinterland in which a pleasurable reverie may suddenly lift me up and deposit me. Of course, there is always the occasional intervening and frightening dream. But then, such nightmarish intrusion can have its positive side. That is, such fear-provoking encapsulation keeps me on my toes and invigorates my retaliatory capacity.

ALONENESS



WHEREVER I AM AT THE MOMENT—it is there that I have been driven to diligently get my bearings and put my situation in order. Thus, I continue to look ahead. That in turn in-

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vigorates me and encourages my continued forward movement here in this place—regardless of how bizarre my situation may seem at any particular moment in time.

So far it seems, I am utterly alone—except for what I imagine can be gleaned and then diverted directly to the receptors of my five senses. Yes, in addition to sight and touch, there are hints of sounds, scents and even flavors. There may even be a suggestion of some sixth sense as well. However, I cannot as yet characterize it as such.

In the meantime, solitude alone is not presently the worst of my customary enemies. That's because any present and apparent lack of companionship is somehow shielded from the sheer isolation that can be only be inflicted by one's foes when engaged in exploration of the unfamiliar—and then, only when far, far from where one considers to be home.



LANDSCAPES

THE BLACK AND WHITE LANDSCAPE stretches out before me—extremes which have no particular appeal for me. They never really have I guess—in the sense that the far right and far left pit themselves against one another across a geopolitically oriented globe. Is that a self-admitted conclusion that such extremes do in fact exist—that is, in sense of good versus evil? I'm not saying, because I don't know. As a matter of fact, who in this world *can* say?

So, my mind exits the black and white world.

Rather, I choose to think across the full spectrum of color—and accept the graduations that accompany one's

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immersion in just such a continuum. Said another way, I literally think in color. That makes even a monochromatic glow of a lavender crystal better for me, of course—or any other single hue, shade or tinge for that matter.

At the moment, however, lavender is by all means acceptable.

Through sheer force of will, I cast away the bleak foreground for something more fertile to my color sensitive mind. My sense of sight reaches out beyond the black, beyond the white—and finds what it is looking for.

Voilà!

For the time being it seems, the tone is surreal purple in every direction I look. All my senses drink it in—immersing themselves in a dense violet cloud. My energy level rises rapidly. I pick up the pace, and walk vigorously toward the ever elusive horizon—never with any real hope of purging it from view, of course.

Probably not coincidentally, the scenery gradually shifts from the eerie monochrome to a more real and au naturel mix of emerald shades—this blend of greenness punctuated by a kaleidoscope of blossoming flowers, singly and in great and small patches.

As the flora finds its blooms, ghostly transparent will-o'-the-wisps in various hues appear—each one following behind the other in a well ordered yet elusive sort of way. I follow them through the lush underbrush, inadvertently and painlessly snuffing out each one as I catch up and pass through it—each time attempting to capture one or the other with my outstretched hand.

Eventually I can go no farther, and find myself once again in a state of flux. Said yet another way, I en-

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counter a possibly illusory obstacle—although it certainly seems real enough. Real or not, however, some cautious examination and assessment is presently in order.

To reiterate then, I must personally and individually resolve any issue that I encounter in or along the path illuminated by the violet wisps—which have by now transformed themselves into a deep, rich amethystine purple.

The FAR SIDE of a BREWING STORM

DARK IS THE SKY NOW and gone is the moon. A seemingly aging wooden fence towers over me. It is warped and dry—its paint long since having surrendered to neglect and in turn, to the underlying cedar's faded gray. Oddly enough though, the vertical boards are solidly attached to the rails extending from post to post—the latter, with no apparent signs of rot or weakness, anchored as they are in gray concrete footings.

There is a gate as wide as it is tall. But the rusted nature of its handle and hinges won't allow normal passage. Through a knothole though, I see what appears to be a storefront of sorts. There is one of those old fashioned façades—devoid of paint and without a sign of any kind. The exterior is painted a flavorless dark cherry. The glass windows are as dirty and cloudy as they are large. Unlike the fence, the window trim is not only peeling but is also succumbing to a murky decay—from the inside out.

There is an illumination within, which appears to highlight some sort of human goings-on. Needing to know more, I make up my mind to somehow breach this old

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boundary fence and explore the other side. Perhaps I can strike up a conversation and learn something of what goes on inside the storefront and beyond—where there are distant buildings for as far as the eye can see.

My first thought is to reconnoiter west to my left, and then east to my right—ignoring the momentary absence of heretofore ever present wisps. In so doing, I might find a way around my immediate obstacle. After all, fences are hardly ever endless. This, unless confidence is placed in a continuous boundary that simply brings one back to the point of beginning in most cases.

After about a half a lap to my left, I decide to return to the gate, restate my strategy and try the opposite direction.

The wisps are proven true!

After only some two dozen or so paces to my right, I locate the last post at the end of the fence.

Almost immediately finding myself on the opposite side from there, I walk back in the direction of the faint yet beckoning illumination beneath the dilapidated storefront. A single will-o'-the-wisp awaits me there. I touch it with my hand to see if it is real. As I step up on the porch and approach the store's doorway, I hear sounds that appear to include muffled voices.

Then behind me, angry storm clouds suddenly turn pitch black and open up. Their contents disgorge themselves—sending a driving rain across the length and breadth of not too distant wood line. The forest is now dark and foreboding—the only sounds being those that beckon from whatever sinister beings may yet remain there.

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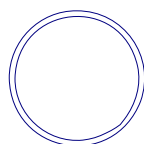


The gale blusters with a howl of terrible resolve—simultaneously whipping the downpour into razor sharp sheets. Even the tallest and strongest trees are propelled into a frenzied swaying.

At this point, the eternal symbolism of a pendulum is not lost on me. Whether backward or forward though, it seems that no amount of harmonic motion is finding a mood for rekindling tranquility of any kind—at least not while the violent side of nature continues to provoke the storm's fury.

Meanwhile, wood nymphs peer out of the darkness—pair upon pair of dancing lavender eyes longing for calm and for my company.

ALL in WHITE



ONCE INSIDE THE STOREFRONT, I am taken aback by the large size of the room. Within this great room, I find perhaps a dozen or so women of all shapes and sizes—none of whom look my way or otherwise acknowledge my abrupt entrance within their enterprise.

Each woman is costumed entirely in a bright white. As a matter of fact, white is the color of choice for the window sills and frames, ceilings, walls and the few doors within view. If it wasn't for the staff presence, I might think that I'm inside a food and beverage Automat dating from the 1920's and 1930's.

Each woman's virtually identical manner of dress begins from the floor up. First, there is a pair of flat soled leather shoes—followed by conservative white hosiery

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similar to that worn in a hospital environment or in a clean room manufacturing facility.

Likewise, each is wearing a tight fitting, light-weight white uniform whose hemline ends abruptly just above the knees. Beginning at that same hemline, there are several buttons running straight up the front—supplemented by a simple white fabric belt and enameled white buckle. A large open pocket adorns either side of the uniform at about the middle of the waist. This, to accommodate a white plastic ballpoint pen and order pad. Finally, an old-fashioned white headband tops off each woman's ensemble.

All of the women are hustling and bustling about amongst white enameled tables that outnumber them perhaps four to one. Each square tabletop conceals four neatly arranged white chairs sitting squarely on a wall-to-wall, white pigmented linoleum floor.

The women appear to be ensuring the proper arrangement of the place settings and menus. Together with the aroma of fresh, recently prepared food, this leads me to believe that a large number of patrons are expected—and very soon perhaps. But where are they I wonder.

Apparently, it was these women in white from whom I earlier heard the chorus of muffled voices. Interestingly, the voices remain muffled even now. It is as if they are all either murmuring, or what they have to say is not intended for me. In any event, it is virtually unintelligible from where I'm standing.

I walk amongst the tables, chairs and multitude of table services. Still, I receive not even a glance of acknowl-




edgement or recognition from the large group of scurrying and scampering women.

I am eager to make an inquiry about all that I am encountering. So I look for a cashier or hostess. However, there doesn't seem to be one available.

Now the inviting aroma of rich, black, freshly brewed coffee reaches me.

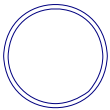
I'm tempted to sit down at one of the fifty or so empty tables—if for no other reason than to scan the bill of fare that accompanies each place setting. Like everything else within view, the menu covers are white. The black print proclaims a name, which I presume is that of the establishment.

I can just make it out.

Bright Moon Café! 

As I reach what appears to be a rear exit near the kitchen, an unknown hand touches the back of my shoulder and elbow—apparently to indicate that I should use the door and continue on my way.

SOMETHING to RUN FROM



OUTSIDE the white, cafeteria-like atmosphere now, I am once again alone and about to map out the next destination in my nighttime journey.

Unluckily, there are no purple wisps to guide me from the spot in which my feet seem to now be rooted.

I am inside a long building which stretches for as far as the eye can see—a distance of some ten football

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fields as a matter of fact. All along the length of it is a glaring string of dangling suspended lights.

Unlike a loading dock or warehouse, the floor is not composed of reinforced concrete. Rather, its construction is for some reason entirely of wood.

There is no ceiling.

Rather, I look up to see exposed, the framing members that support the roof itself. It is much like looking into a loft or garret that is waiting to be sealed by such a ceiling—and perhaps even finished with walls, windows and other amenities that fit the usual profile for human occupancy.

In the case at hand though, the only occupants appear to have been animals—most likely birds or even bats. Over time, the rafters have therefore become covered in foul smelling excrement. 

I perceive all of the preceding to simply be yet another part-and-parcel element of the out-of-date surroundings that I find myself dealing with in this land that seems to exist between dusk and dawn.

Returning my eyes from the vertical to the horizontal, I look out ahead of me—straining to see what if anything may be moving at the very end of the building some one thousand yards away.

And something is stirring as a matter of fact. Whatever it is, it's apparently quite large—and is moving very fast in my direction.

My first inclination is to move from the spot I'm standing upon. However, I am so focused that I find myself strangely incapable of doing so. Besides, a thousand



yards is quite a long distance away. Therefore, I don't think that I am in any real danger—not at this point in time anyway.

What's coming in my direction is so tall that it collides with the rafters above it—thus extinguishing the lights and appearing to cause the roof to collapse behind it as it goes.

Because of the preceding, my perception is rapidly changing now. It won't be long, and it will certainly reach me.

I look behind me, and think about retreating back into the tasteless dark cherry storefront. However, the equally bland dark lime exit is now locked.

In any event, my curiosity continues to tell my legs and feet not to budge. This, as I once again gaze down the length of the building—fixated on my oncoming antagonist.

Who knows though. Maybe it is something I can communicate with.

Closer and closer it approaches.

I can *hear* it too now—and the roar of the locomotive and its path of splintering destruction is maddeningly deafening!

By this time, I can even make out what it is. This, based on an all too familiar silhouette.

It is a steam locomotive belching black smoke from its funnel. The track upon which it runs is presumably hidden beneath the timber floor. So, the floor is also being shattered as the engine closes on my position.



I conclude that the wooden floor is wooden because it was constructed to cover up the steel tracks and wooden ties of what was once associated with a railroad passenger depot arrival and departure platform.

At a point that is only about fifty yards away, the situation suddenly transforms itself. A once aggressive locomotive halts all forward movement. The main sound now is hissing steam from the boiler.

What's left of the string of lights swings to and fro below the remaining intact rafters above me.

A line of purple wisps appears yet once again. Thus, there is no reason for me to formulate a plan for where I'm going to journey next.

Rather, the wisps guide me to a short flight of steps which descends to the tracks. Once at ground level, I walk alongside a 1930's style passenger train. In so doing, I glance upward at the windows of the first Pullman sleeper car that I encounter.

The passengers seated in first class are facing one another. However, they seem oblivious to all that has just transpired. Like the storefront dining room staff before them, they all simply ignore my presence.

That is, all except one couple who actually turn their heads and look down at me in a sort of melancholy curiosity. I acknowledge their presence. However, their response nothing short of being profoundly impassive.

That's when I hear the voice of a conductor calling out a familiar refrain, "All aboard!"

That presents me with a sense of urgency.

Even so, there is no conductor in sight!

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On my right, an open entryway presents itself. And so I ascend a short flight of stairs to find myself in a Pullman car's companionway. Once inside, the door closes behind me. This, without the benefit of any human presence other than my own.

Almost immediately, I get the feeling of movement. That's because the train is pulling out of the "station". It seems that I'm on my way toward the twilight of dawn—but at a faster pace than I was before.

This suits me just fine!

The question now is where can I go to sit down, relax and recover from my recent traumatic experience. I proceed along the companionway toward the end of the train to which I earlier saw the locomotive attached.

Perhaps I can locate the engineer or fireman and find out exactly what is going on!

It doesn't take long to reach my target.

Interestingly though, I find myself standing in the rear observation car. Either I'm confused, or the locomotive is now at the other end of the train. Regardless of that, I decide to sit down. As I do, I notice something with which I am now quite familiar.

I am once again utterly alone.¹

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™*. The storyteller's thread of events, like all praiseworthy accounts, is a manifestation of the routine yet exceptional practice of observing, analyzing and drawing heart-felt 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 meas-



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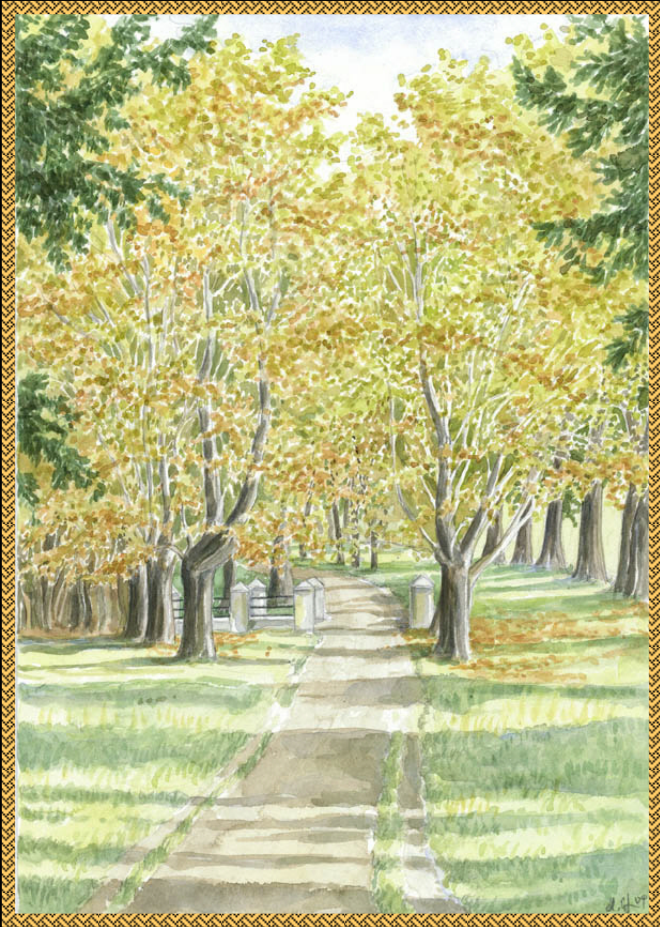


ured and mixed with just the right amount of imagination from the well of reflection—thereby maintaining the fragile flow of creativity that the pen can never completely manage on its own.

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FAR BEYOND the THRESHOLD of IMAGINATION
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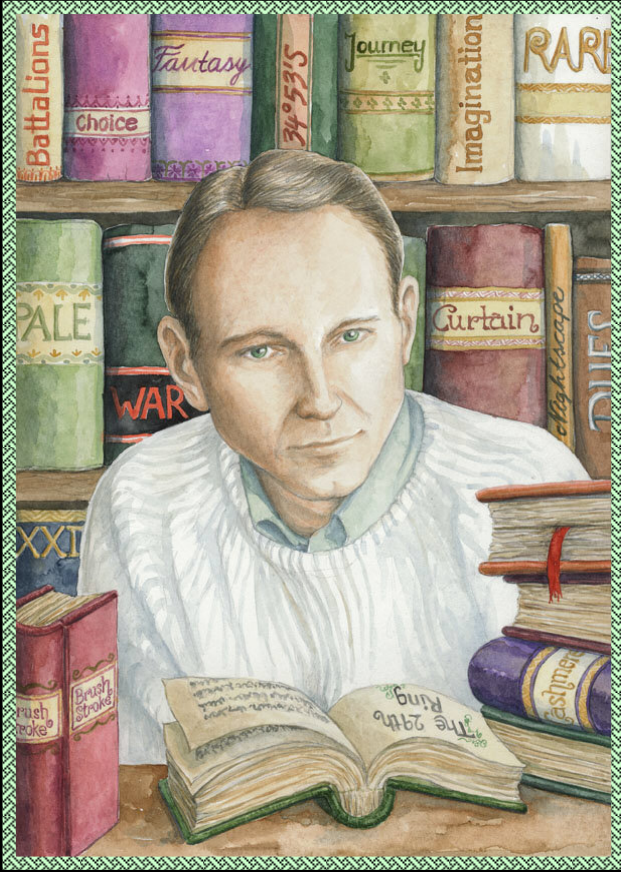
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