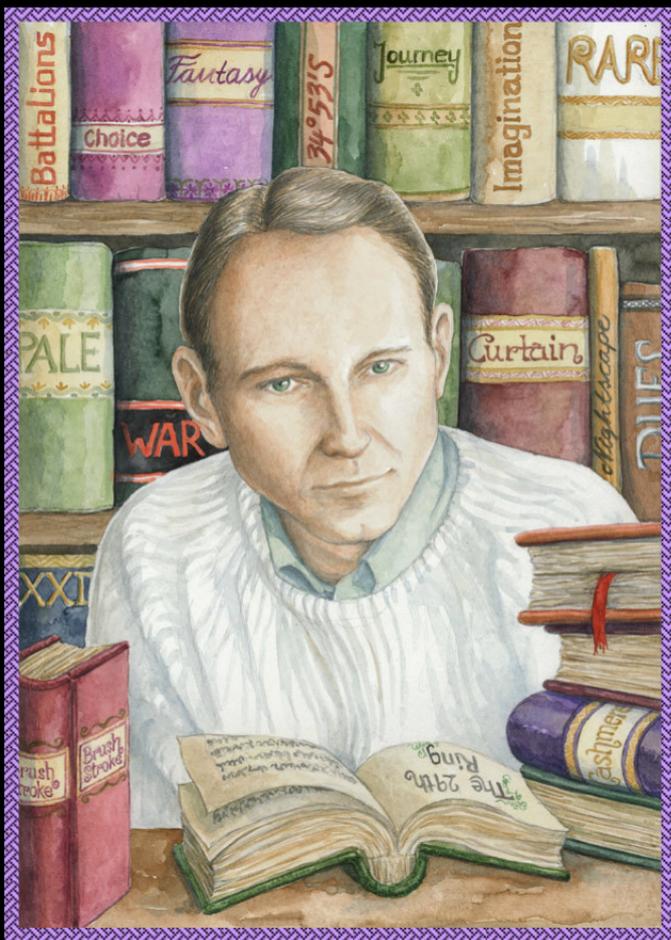


THE HAZYRN—A WINTERESS CALLS— by D.H. DALE—
A MINIATURESTORY— from STORIESWEARETELLING— for the MINIATURELIBRARY— of the SHORTSTORYAFICIONADO—

The SHORT STORY AFICIONADO™ PRESENTS



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

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The Hazyrn - A Winteress Calls™

Having Evolved into the Quintessential
MINIATURE STORY™
a Bit of 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

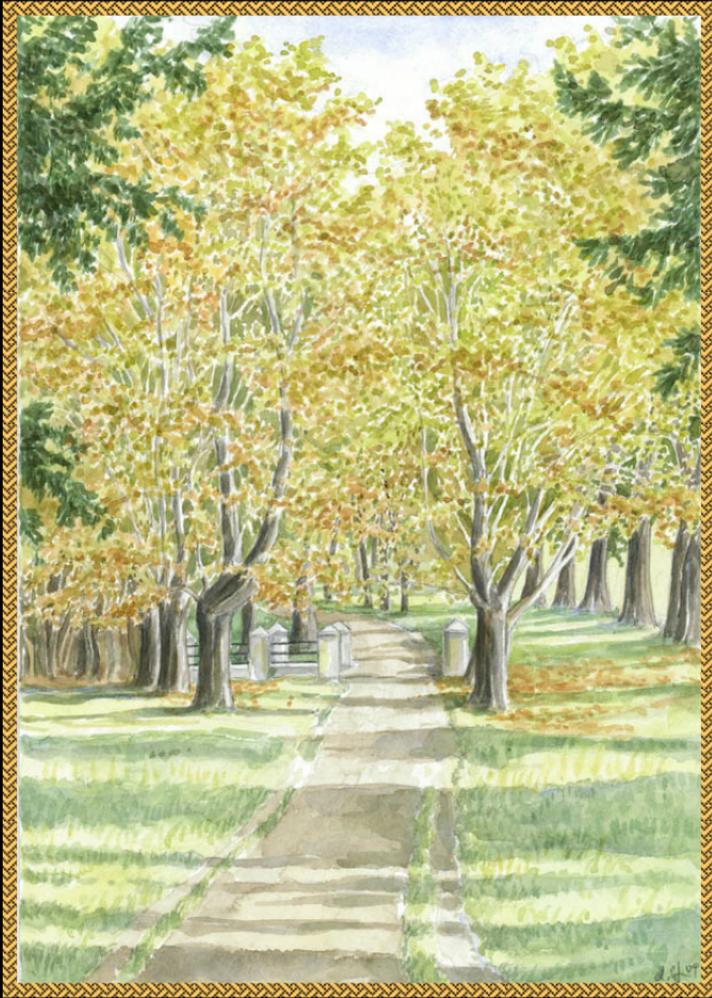
My LOVING and FAITHFUL DAUGHTER
You're the Best!

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 Hazyrn - A Winteress Calls™

Join me now for *A Story I'm Beginning™*, and savor *aBitof Mystery, Romance and Adventure™*—this, as *A Winteress Calls™* from *Whispering Twilight™* in the guise of *The Mistress of the Pale Woods™*.

DHD GTT G SSA™

STRAIGHT AND TRUE are the *Jaguarasquars™*. Sadly and predictably though, it is they who become only fleetingly indispensable when called upon to implement their unparalleled talents—skills that are essentially without equal when neutralizing external and internal threats against successive regimes of the aristocratic ruling class.

Yes, once they have neutralized the foregoing threats and fears associated therewith—these matchless *hunter-slayers* are almost without exception relegated to the fringes of the political, economic and military arenas. This, until yet another regime finds itself exposed to some imminent form of danger that diplomacy's soft and vulnerable underbelly invariably cannot defend against.

Though venerated as military saviors of the bodies politic and economic—many are they of the *Jaguarasquar-*warrior class who now lie shamefully unrevered in forlorn repose, and without the faintest epitaph of remembrance and gratitude.

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These graves lie somewhere beneath derelict burial grounds that are dotted with the unmarked graves of similarly long forgotten soldiers—they, whose martial station in life obligated them to be rarely forgiving and nearly always merciless on behalf of their medieval lords.

And why was it that they were obligated to sacrifice their human side—that is, forego the traits of forgiveness and mercy? Well, the answer to that question seems manifestly obvious. Bloody and terrible violence must be swift and unquestioned on any battlefield—this, if success is to be assured.

Yes, it is shameful that the aforementioned dishonorable state of affairs exists—that is, an appalling neglect of commemoration that just so happens to be of greater prevalence in the northern *Land of Ochre*™ than in the more enlightened southern *Land of Lavender*™. The shame of it all lies primarily in the fact that without these practiced and capable professional soldiers, the bloody conflicts that the soft hands of aristocratic diplomats instigated and yet can no longer even recite the reasons for—would not have been triumphant in the first place.



A great majority of these once living, breathing, speaking soldiers succumbed to the mortal sureties associated with advanced age or disease—this, as opposed to the

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bone crushing and body cleaving blows that their great battlefield skills enabled them to sidestep during any number of bloody and terrible assaults by forces of the dark side.

Even so, only a bare few lie beneath sturdy and long-lasting well intentioned markers—and even less than that benefit from the perpetual repose afforded by stone coffins sealed within windowless marble walls, floors and ceilings. For the most part then, all memory and remembrance of this handful of river voyagers, mountain trekkers and cave explorers is forever lost it seems.

Geographically speaking, most lie interred or in-urned *In the Land of Granger's Birth*¹. This, beneath the soil of the many cemeteries that dot the cities and surrounding forests—and within the boundaries of which only these men happened to stumble across the veiled gateways leading to a sphere not unlike that of the fourth dimension.

WHISPERING TWILIGHT



OVER THE DECADES, the rare breed of explorers who chanced upon the existence of just such a dimension, have come to recognize its remote and little known dominion by name.

They and they alone call it *Whispering Twilight*™—a reflection of its most mysterious and adventurous nature, but not without shades of the purely romantic as well. Rarer still than the discoverers of *Whispering Twilight*—themselves, are those singular individuals who are still

¹In *the Land of Granger's Birth*™ — *Sunrise and Sunset at the Rim of the World*™ is an image of an original watercolor by Anke Eissmann – 2010, out of the *Imagination and Mind's Eye of the Short Story Aficionado*™.



mentally alert and young enough to recall the specifics of where and how to access said domain. It can be covertly revealed to those few who just happen to be reading this account though, that there are three reachable although difficult doorways to access—all of them *In the Land of Granger's Birth™*. The first of these is concealed within the *Forest of the Nymphs™*, while the second is hidden within the boundaries of the *Emerald Forest™*.



Let this be known also. It is no accident that today in the north, the least venerated of the aforementioned onetime explorers just happens to be *Wayfarer™ Lord Granger™*—who began his journey of discovery while still a boy.

During the course of his travels, *Wayfarer™* stumbled across yet a third gateway to *Whispering Twilight™*. This particular threshold is concealed somewhere in the *Hazyl Forest™* of the southern sovereignty known as the *Land of Lavender™*.

WAYFARER'S MIGRATION

A LONG WITH HIS GRANDPARENTS, *Wayfarer™* migrated southwest from the *City of Meziriaam™*—this, against the currents of the fast

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flowing *North Stream of the Rose*™ that empties into the northeastern *Sea of Pearl*™. Along the way, they passed under and through the *Turta Mountains*™—this, by way of the dark and mystical *Caverns of the Rose*™.

Experiencing many harrowing adventures before finally emerging from the caverns at the *Falls of Uvous Nuur*™ on the western slope of the *Turta*™ mountain range—*Wayfarer*™ and his family then sailed down the swift running *South Stream of the Rose*™, as it wends its way across the *West Darhan Steppe*™ and the *Battle Plain of Uvous Nuur*™.

After entering and merging with the raging currents at the convergence of the *Keruun River*™ and *Onon River*™—*Wayfarer*™ and his family arrived at a way stop known as the *Ancient City of Nuur*™. From that point on, the *Onon River*™ flows southward until it bypasses the shore of the *Cobalt Sea*™ of *Hadasan*™—and finally crosses into the uncharted and generally unexplored lands farther to the south.

The WRITTEN WITNESS

WAYFARER™ JUST HAPPENS to be the only one to have kept a written witness—this record being requisite to such a demanding and exacting journey. Likewise, *Wayfarer*™ is the only one of the aforesaid wanderers whose mountaintop estate remains intact within the three dimensions of the amethystine *Land of Lavender*™—this, the manor house at *Hope's Amethyst*™².

²Edge of the Stream and Roar of the Falls™ — *Hope's Amethyst*™ is an image of an original watercolor by Anke Eissmann – 2011, out of the Imagination and Mind's Eye of the Short Story Aficionado™.



The general location of *Whispering Twilight*™ is said to be somewhere below the *South Darhan Saddle*™—the latter passing through the *Hazyl Forest*™ along the route of the *Great Sea Trade Road*™. This stand of great timber includes the towering *Crimson Jade*™ that lies far up in the *Turta Mountains*™ above a valley floor that hosts the *Keruun River*™—this, before it flows off the recorded map into the unknown distant lands of the far south.

Therein lies a place beyond the third dimension. The portal to *Whispering Twilight*™ can be accessed only during a brief and certain window of opportunity. That window lies somewhere within the hours of evening twilight—but only before one falls into a deep sleep. It is a place that lies far outside the range of normal experience, where humankind's five senses are more or less powerless—unless integrated with the vigilance and guiding light of a sixth sense.

To those who look upon themselves as discerning observers—even the most subtle evidence of a portal to a place beyond the third dimension outweighs any suggestion to the contrary. The fascinating thing is that such an



entrance can be found only within one's subliminal thoughts—those that occur during evening twilight before falling fast asleep.

Naturally, whatever revelations may be in the offing, it is only the possessor of those subconscious thoughts who can foresee—or even explain them. By design then, this excludes the aforementioned observ-



ers. Even so, a possessory advantage is in and of itself no guarantee of certainty—or of finding the doorway to in-depth understanding. One must go well beyond the range of the normal five senses for such assurances.

Said another way, it takes a sixth sense to recognize and open the evening twilight portal that leads through one's subconscious to the fourth dimension.

From this point on, let's take a few moments to manage a rare and privileged look inside *Wayfarer's*™ mindful thoughts—shall we? After all, it is he who invariably explains it best—from the inside out. And after all, only he resides within his bodily and spiritual skin, and nobody else. Naturally, there will always be those who are superciliously inclined to think that they can perceive *Wayfarer's*™ thoughts without the benefit of communication through the normal five senses—and of course without the benefit of access to the narrative herein. Yes, this is insight that is meant only for us at this particular moment in time and history as we presently know it to likely be.

TWILIGHT'S FINAL GLOW

IT JUST SO HAPPENS that just before I, *Wayfarer Lord Granger*™ and former *Jaguarasquar*™, fall into deep slumber at twilight's final glow—I am in fact fully aware of my mind's subconscious thoughts. Naturally, the sole facilitator of this profound awareness is my sixth sense. It is preordained that this keenly intuitive power of perception hold sway over the remaining five senses.

Thereby, the latch of the aforementioned inner door is lifted—but only by me and for me. This in turn per-

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mits the whispers of the night to enter into my otherwise preoccupied state of subconsciousness. These nocturnal murmurs consequently negotiate the threshold that crosses over into the subliminal world—a supremely private place that is meant for me and me alone.

At this very moment then, I am cognizant of both the source, and the place from which these whispers spring. In essence, I can sense their presence all across the jade green lawn outside. First, they wend their way around and through the mighty trees that tower over the manor house at *Hope's Amethyst*. Not long afterward, their physical and spiritual presence envelops the lawn and grounds in total, from the border of the *Hazyl Forest* to the edge of the clear and swiftly flowing *Lavender Stream*—and in the final analysis, right up to the brink of the roaring *Violet Falls*.

Interestingly, during the course of their arrival and forward movement, they manage to divert my attention from their competitors—any other twilight voices and sounds, becoming superfluous to the point of being pushed farther and farther into the background.

By now then, I am acutely aware of the soft undertones of these visitors having arrived on the scene. Indications are that they have come to pave the way for visiting blue-green will-o'-the-wisps—those phantomlike creatures who ebb-and-flow, rise-and-fall and come-and-go at will. As such, the nocturnal whispers restrict knowledge of their presence to but a rare few such as myself.

On the face of it, the flurry of activity out on the manicured lawn appears to be vague and innocent. By the makeup of things, it seems to be designed for the mere purpose of competing in a recurring nightly race to see

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who can cross the landscaped and wooded grounds first. By all outward appearances then, their goal is to simply reach the manor's smoothly stuccoed stone walls, before evening twilight finally and completely fades away. Certainly then, this appears to be an enterprise that is harmless enough to *Hope's Amethyst*™.

As suddenly as they arrive, however, the visitors are all but overtaken—their vigor purposely targeted and diminished by wraithlike ebony specters in residence. Reaching what might be described as a quiet crescendo—this latest turmoil is marked by a myriad of feverish diving, twisting and darting about and through the surrounding air.

During the scope and course of such animated behavior, the conflict turns out to be conducted for a rather benign objective. Rather than bloodletting—the all consuming objective is to exude a victorious and overpowering effervescence. Much like the cool glow emitted from the soft abdomens of a multitude of fireflies about to end their lives—the goal is to be reincarnated and light up the night at this same place tomorrow evening. In my mind, there is nothing more exciting than to bear witness to intense behavior that causes blue-green wisps to burst into a myriad of intensely bright novas that almost as quickly return to their usual magical form.

After a while, visitors and residents alike settle down—all but vanishing in the bluish glow of a wintery pale moon.

It is then that the mood of the manor and all who dwell therein becomes hushed and restful yet once again—this, in certain preparation for the moment when *A Winteress Calls*™.

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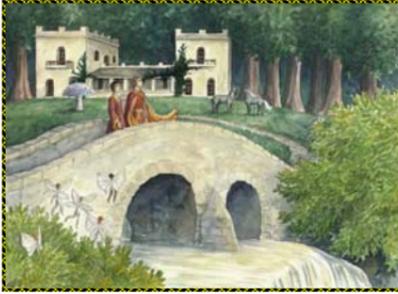
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The MANOR HOUSE at HOPE'S AMETHYST™

ON ANY GIVEN EVENING, a mild and gentle *Hazyrn™* wends its way through the immense stand of colossal *Crimson Jade™*—the majestically towering evergreens that provide shelter for the south side of the manor, and for the east and west as well.

These sage old trees of the vast *Turta Mountain-range* have cared for themselves and for one another over five millennia or more—the center of their southern range lying deep within the mighty *Hazyl Forest™* on the north shore of *Lavender Lake™*.



They say that this is where the *Terrestrial Architect™* now and again dwells—keeping mostly to himself and rarely communicating except with the *Designers™*. It is also said

that he might occasionally but purposefully wander to the manor's periphery to confirm the wellbeing of my private world.

The trees at the edge of the great woods serve the health of the surrounding environment. However, they also maintain a constant vigil over the manor house at *Hope's Amethyst™*—created and constructed more than a century past.

My compact mountaintop estate lies hidden near the headwaters of the *Lavender Stream™* and *Violet Falls™*.

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There it encompasses grounds that end abruptly at the western precipice of a great plateau—the meandering boundary of which is a sheer rock face looking down a mile or more to the valley below.

I never tire of soft, murmuring evening breezes—no matter how weary I am. In fact, their myriad of rustling sounds makes for splendid company—particularly when the echoes are turned skyward toward the summits of so many towering spires of *Crimson Jade*™. This miracle of nature is achieved by the carpeted forest floor—just above which hovers a shadowy mist of deep and warm blues, reds and purples.

The nearby soaring forest is where I spent my childhood. Here I wandered, explored and discovered much concerning the grandeur of that which is ordained for tenure in and of the natural world.

Of course, splendor is ever marred by peril—usually hideous, but often stunningly beautiful. So, I am acutely aware of certain rare species—and of what consequences can befall me should I exhibit a careless and cavalier attitude toward those dangerously inviting hues that are reflected deep in the *Blue Bark of the Cobalt Tree*™.

I am given to a strong penchant for the wonderment granted to me during my boyhood years—a period of my life that I sorely miss. Not surprisingly then, my present physical maturity is but a clever and fortunate façade.

As such, it masks an abiding quest to retain and rediscover the imagination and fantasy that remain rooted in the advantages afforded by childhood—and in a youth's trust in surroundings that are in an of themselves fundamentally serene.

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Even in today's later life, any global undercurrents that exist outside the boundaries of my fields and woods do not appreciably alter the lush, verdant landscape that continues to flourish around and about the grounds of my private estate's crown jewel.

The AWAKENING

THE HAZYRN'S™ GENTLE DANCING and swimming currents put on a magical display—enjoying as they do their freedom to vigorously exercise a myriad of twists and turns afforded by unimpeded access to an almost limitless, breathable sea. It is these wafts and gusts that effortlessly orchestrate numerous collected assortments of hanging brass and porcelain.

It just so happens that one such ensemble is suspended from the decorative awning protecting a certain vaulted window—one of several such crescent capped, leaded cathedrals. The faces of these great windows were long ago carefully emplaced in the exterior walls of my home—thereupon becoming the windward visage of the west wing of an imposing manor's quiet sleeping quarters.

It is within one of those large rooms that I momentarily lie—having adjourned for the evening on the lee side of one of the aforementioned handsome windows. At the base of my window is a box or seat that accommodates a *Miniature Library*™. In my youth, it was a place for daydreaming about mist enshrouded lands—and for my serious attempts at describing my surroundings and the events in my life.

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While I prefer to remain in a state of suspended animation so to speak—the rhythmic harmony of it all induces me to make a sort of loosely constructed, dreamlike assessment. That in turn leads me to render a ruling from the nerve center that resides deep within the center of my subconscious.

Said another way—as much as I am enjoying a wind chime’s symphony of woodwinds, brass, strings and percussion, I choose not to delay further. The decision-making part of me finally gets around to performing the function that its creation and birth meant it to do.

So, even though inclined otherwise, I manage to shake off my nightscape—that dark immersion that leads to one’s sleeping thoughts being simultaneously discharged in all directions. This, much like a Roman candle that all at once spews forth a restated past and a recalled future—along with one or more iterations of the present.

As a result the foregoing dilemma prone resolution, an exhausted yet wakeful sort of contentment rolls over me. With both the melodious interlude and my decision point behind me now—I roll onto my back and bolt upright. This, all in the same rapid movement.

Subsequently and deliberately, I turn my head toward the high window—a less than conciliatory veneer determined to reflect my somewhat confused state in the form of an exposé of sorts. Naturally, a goodly portion of any theatrical effect in my reflection is totally unintended—it originating in a face that hasn’t been awake long enough for the heart to pump life into it. It’s a similar façade to that which I momentarily face in the mirror each morning.

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Still a bit bleary-eyed from fatigue—I nevertheless focus on what might lie beyond the leaded glass. At first, I see a pale and scarred creamy moon—the backdrop and stage for which is hidden by an ebony curtain sequined with a myriad of twinkling stars. Just as quickly, that ever-present orb of the night transitions to a fantasy blue softness—this, while suspended in a starless sky and occasionally veiled by the passing of noctilucent clouds.

MISTRESS of the PALE WOODS

COMPELLED by autumn's falling leaves to relinquish the warmth of her russet, red and gold apparel—*A Winteress Calls*™.

All at once breathlessly cold and breathtakingly warm, the caller is at the same time aloof and yet approachable. Always expected at winter's first hint of snow, she retains an air of mystery still. Even as she draws near through a faint shower of tiny snow crystals—personal access is therefore finitely limited for any who reside outside the aura of her world.

As for me, however, no such boundary ever seems to apply. In that regard and even tonight, I find it difficult to conceal my anticipation and excitement!

Attired in a seamless cloak from head to foot—her manner of dress is emblematic of those who customarily accede to the refined mantle of beauty, grace and charm. The fabric itself is traditionally conservative—comprised as it is of thick velvet with infinite shades of gray reflected across every fold and pleat. All is precisely accented by a chiffon lining of pure champagne white.

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Accordingly and therefore certainly not coincidentally, the visitor's silhouette is gray. Likewise, her shadow grows longer as the diminishing twilight of sunset gives way to a moonlit powdery snowscape. Along this fragile pathway, an otherwise branded field of loose snowflakes finds itself being painted with a wondrous trail of soft blue sapphire blooms set atop crisp emerald green stems—the invisible roots thereof having sought and found refuge in the rich brown soil that lies beneath a frozen white blanket.

Who is this gossamer being of an oaken woodland—this spectral gentlewoman who is never far from thought and dream? She, who so effortlessly defies nature by bringing a kaleidoscope of autumnal color through winter's backdoor?

Could she be the *Mistress of the Pale Woods*—this delicate creature of such vulnerability, who is so intent upon braving nocturne's icy chill as to hover trembling and shivering at my windowpane?

Giving the impression of being in perfect step with my wintry imp's single-mindedness and purpose, there is a deeply rooted and well-heeled guardian who at all times stands firm—vigilantly reaching heavenward. As such, it seems to peer through and beyond the light of night.

Whether puzzling little bough or perplexing faerie imp—even after all this time, I remain unable to discern with any great degree of real certainty. I do know, however, that she is the one visitor that I can depend upon to come calling at the shift of seasons to winter from autumn.

She typically arrives in the guise of a woman whose soft and mysterious cloak reveals not much that is

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clear—except from her face. However, I freely admit that I'm not completely sure of any of that. Beyond her appearance—if she has a name, she has not seen fit to share it with me. As a matter of fact, the sound of her voice remains vaguely faraway and dreamlike—surreal at best.

I must say though, that she is neither shy nor nervous when it comes to expressing an effervescent and stimulating personality—one that remains consistent in every way as each year passes into the next. What I especially rely on is the burst of personal encouragement that she never fails to pass along to me—albeit, always after darkness settles over the estate.

As the sole delicate resident of an otherwise jaguar inhabited forest—she seeks, yet is too apprehensive to take advantage of the warmth and shelter that lie just inside the glass and past the surmountable hurdle of my windowsill.

And what might happen should this delicate and vulnerable *Mistress of the Pale Woods*— actually escape the cold and somehow pass through my windowpane? Would she then melt away and disappear—never to keep me company again? Such possibilities do not bring me joy. An arctic chill goes straight through me, as if I my heart has been suddenly pierced by a winter-hardened, knifelike icicle.

With a threadbare air of respectability then, this impish flight of my imagination reaches out yet once again—with determined yet seemingly lifeless fingers.

Sometimes when she is really near, I can see her breath upon the pane.

The little face itself is as usual difficult to discern. That is, except for the warm, steady glow that radiates

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from her lavender eyes—piercing the darkness and my heart as well. Thus, I secretly hope that they don't ever fade—thereby providing me with the time that I need to study and reflect on her subtle, translucent features.

The glow reminds me of that which one discovers within the bright red and orange embers of a crackling hearthstone-laden fire. In the case of real embers though, once having escaped from a smoldering fire, they invariably cool and turn ashen. In the end, they become harshly cold—thereafter taking on the distinctive odor of bitter charcoal.

Sometimes, I rub my own eyes in disbelief. Yet there she is. Whether illusionary or not, the affirmation of her existence is totally dependent upon my state of mind, and what my mood happens to imply.

And right now at this moment, I'm simply not in the mood to affirm anything—particularly my own delusionary circumstances. Besides, I'm asleep. Even so, the little frozen bough shows absolutely no signs of being discouraged in any way, shape or form.

Bowing deeply from the waist, the *Mistress of the Pale Woods*™ stretches downward to scratch the hoarfrost from one of winter's icy windowpanes. There are four, but she selects the one at the northwest point of the compass. It is through this thin and translucent viewfinder that she silently gazes—appearing to scrutinize the topsy-turvy heap of pillows lying in disarray near the head of my bed.

Knowing that my own head resides somewhere in the vicinity of the crumpled border of a nighttime quilt, the leafless, limb-like faerie hopes to get my attention. I'm half awake by now, but have absolutely no desire to look

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out at the snow laden landscape. After all, that would mean opening my eyes—ergo, waking up completely.

It would also mean acknowledging the little mistress's presence in my personal space—and then having to pretend that she's nothing more than an odd curiosity, or someone who is not really deserving of my attention at all.

I am sorry! I take all of that back!

What I really mean to say is that recognizing her presence implies shortening her visit—something I seek to avoid at all cost!

To circumvent all of that—I simply return to my reverie in an attempt to find the place where I was forced to close a dream story's covers and leave off. The problem with that is, I can't find my bookmark. So, my concentrated effort is in vain.

This entire state of affairs leaves me in a drowsy netherworld somewhere in that tiny space that some like to casually refer to as insomnia.

So, here I lie—somewhere in the four dimensions of the space and time continuum that lie compressed between wakefulness and sleeplessness. Believe me when I say that such a small bit of room is a very tight squeeze—even for a mind less its body.

It's kind of like the predicament that faces the headless horseman in a way. Except that in his case, he has a warm place to tuck his head—when he can stay focused long enough to hang on to it, of course. In a way, he's the sort of fellow whose misfortune is to be pitied. Well, sort of pitied anyway. Unfortunately after all, he engages in activities that lead to the misfortune of others.

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A TUMBLING PERHAPS?

AS TO this snowy season's faerie imp—she who yet once again comes faintly scratching at a frost laden window.

It seems that acknowledging her tiny presence resolves little if anything. She is consistently determined to interject herself into my reverie. This, until I gaze upon her face and more—that is, until I stare directly into her eyes. At that point, of course, I find myself tempted to engage in a momentary lapse as to her fate—and to mine as well.

Do I take such a tumble—that is, one that might permit her to risk the instantaneous journey through the looking glass to the warmer clime that is this side of the windowpane?

Perhaps—although there are many a naggingly vague happenstance that I feel certain will intervene on behalf of us both.

In the meantime, the debut of yet another spring is just around the corner.³

³The 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 Hazyrn™ — A Winteress Calls™. 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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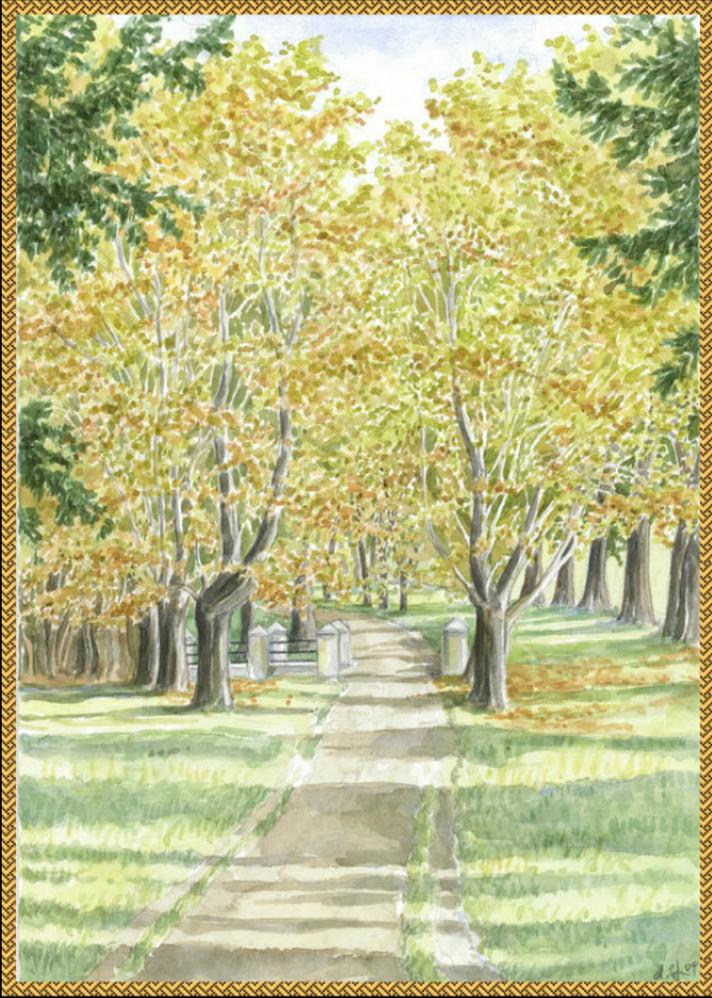
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FAR BEYOND the THRESHOLD of IMAGINATION
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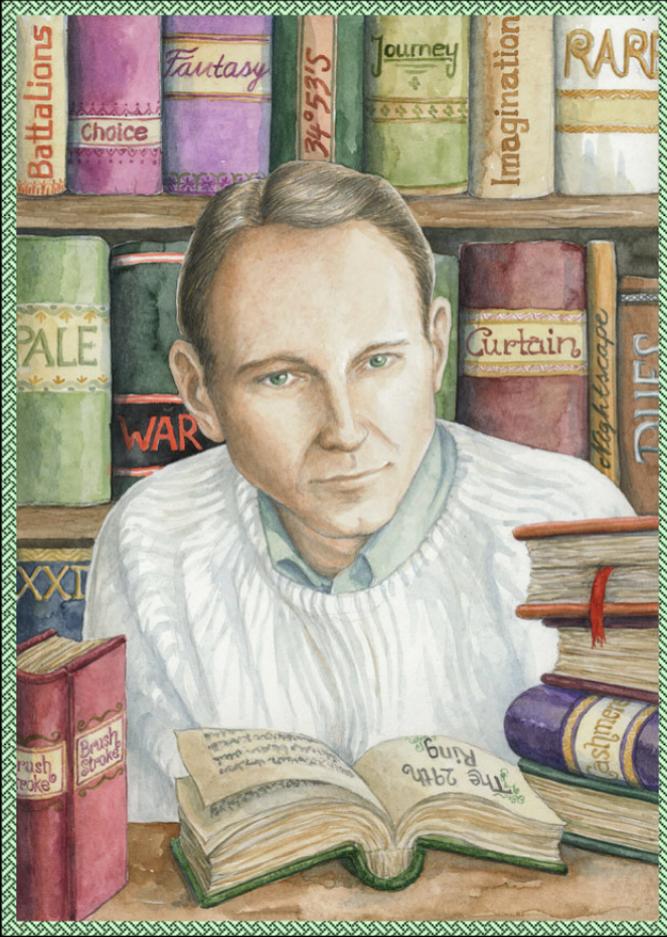
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