

The Passage

After my wife died I bought a large estate in the country. It was quite isolated, but I wanted to move as far away from the city as I could. I wanted to be alone. To ensure that I would have no visitors I kept the gate locked. I didn't want to see anyone.

The house was enormous. Most of the rooms remained empty and unused. To avoid having to go to a bedroom on the second floor, I set up a bed in the sitting room and slept there. The kitchen, which was adjacent to the sitting room, was well stocked, so I never had to leave the house. After settling in, I never went anywhere inside the house except for the sitting room and the kitchen.

Day after day I sat in my chair with the curtains drawn, thinking about the sun-filled days my wife and I had spent together. It would be not quite accurate to say I had loved her. It was more than love. Or maybe less. It was a craving. One glance from her large, dark eyes, and I would be ready to do anything she wanted. I was her slave. I had absolutely no control over myself. None whatsoever. I'm ashamed to think now of the things I did at her bidding. I would lie for her, steal for her, and—yes—even murder for her.

I never used to drink, but after moving to the estate there was always a bottle of wine on the stand beside my chair. I was constantly drunk. In my more sober moments I could clearly see her face, her long black hair, her deep-set eyes. At other times her face would dissolve into pools of dark colors. I could sometimes hear her calling to me, inviting me to join her. But I remained riveted to my chair, the bottle close at hand.

I had what I thought was an inexhaustible supply of wine in the kitchen. But one day when I went to fetch another bottle, I found that I'd run out. I knew the house had a wine cellar, even though I'd never been down there. Chances were slim, but there might still be an old bottle of wine in the cellar. I decided to have a look.

The cellar door was stuck and I had hard time trying to open it. It wasn't locked, but the wood was warped. I went back to the sitting room to get the poker from the fireplace. I worked for a good quarter of an hour at the door, but with no luck. Then, just as I was about to give up, the door suddenly opened. I followed the steps down to the cellar but found that it wasn't a cellar at all but a tunnel with damp, cold stones on all sides. There was no light switch. The passage was completely dark.

I began walking forward, making sure with each step that there was solid rock beneath me. I put my hands in front of me, feeling the way ahead, occasionally brushing my fingers against the cold stone walls.

The deeper I went into the passage, the smaller it became. At first I had been able to stand up straight as I walked. Then my head began bumping the stones of the ceiling, and I had to bow down to continue walking. As the passage narrowed even further, I found myself on my hands and knees, with the walls closing in around me on all sides. Finally, the only way I could continue to make any progress was to crawl on my belly.

At each point the stones became smoother and less cold. By the time I was slithering on my belly, the walls had become flesh-like, wrapping themselves around me and forming themselves to the shape of my body. I pushed ahead, not knowing where I was going or where I would end up.

The passage continued to become smaller and smaller, pressing itself more tightly around my body with each inch forward. The walls were soft and warm. I had no desire to escape. I was enveloped in darkness and could no longer distinguish between myself and the passage. At last I could not breathe. There was one pulsating moment of ecstasy and then I died, knowing that I would be reborn, not as myself but another.