

There was a new door in the library. Elaine had never noticed it before, and no construction had gone on that she was aware of, so it baffled her. By all rights, there shouldn't've been a door there. But there was, against all odds. It was a plain door of some dark wood, with a golden handle and hinges. Elaine stared at it, this anomaly of a door that wouldn't be given even a single glance had it been there under what she assumed would be normal circumstances for a door to be somewhere. But the door had not been there normally, and it perplexed her. She asked around about the door, but no one else seemed to notice anything strange about it. It had always been there, they told her. At one point she walked up to the librarian, and asked what was behind it.

The librarian frowned. "I don't know, actually," she said. "Storage, I assume? I'm new though, so I wouldn't be very qualified to tell you." Elaine sighed, frustrated. How did no one else not notice how very odd the door was? One day, a blank wall between shelves, and the next, a door. She resolved to check it out.

One night, upon trying the handle, she discovered that it was unlocked. She stopped short of opening it, however, and paused. Was this a good idea? Closing time was only a half hour away, and the lights were already slowly shutting off. She waited there at the door until all the lights suddenly shut off with a sounding *click*. She froze and checked her watch. The library was closed. How had no one noticed her? How had she stood so long by the door?

Elaine resolved to turn away and go back home, but then noticed the strangest thing. There were lights coming from inside of the door. She stared. It would have been hard to notice in the light, but now, in the darkness, she saw the brightness of fluorescent lighting. *Turn away*, she begged herself, but she was held rapt by the lights under the door. She didn't think, didn't unconsciously tell her arm to move. It simply moved for her, turning the handle.

The door glided open on well-oiled hinges, and Elaine stepped through. She hardly noticed the door smoothly shutting behind her, all of her attention on the sight before her.

Shelves. Dozens of them, perhaps hundreds, stretching off far into the distance left and right. As she gazed down the rows, she realized that she couldn't see an end that way either. The shelves were crowded with books, thousands of them, maybe more. The space seemed far too big to fit into the relatively small building that housed the library, but she didn't notice. Her breath was taken away by the sheer amount and vastness of knowledge contained there.

Elaine wandered forward in a sort of daze to the nearest shelf, picking a book at random and beginning to read. She consumed it at an almost frightening pace, tearing through the words, desperately, like someone drowning searching for oxygen. She finished it in what must have been only minutes.

Elaine dropped the book with shaking hands. She hadn't been able to stop, the knowledge searing itself into her mind. She didn't even remember what the book was about, only that... something inside of her had just been fed. Or- no, it wasn't inside her, it was around her, enveloping her, and it was she who was inside it. Hands shaking, she carefully reshelved the book. Her eyes glazed over the title, the words blurring, becoming foreign to her. She had to get out of here.

Elaine turned toward the door, only to run into another bookshelf. Confused and rubbing her nose, she turned around. She could have sworn it was that way. As she glanced around, she realized that the bookshelves had surrounded her from three sides. Her eyes

widened. It had been a straight shot down the lines of bookshelves, and she had only gone a few steps in.

Shaking, Elaine started down the only way she could. It was the only way to go, so why not? As she walked, she soon came to realize that the shelves created a labyrinth. Any illusion of order seen from the outside was cast aside here. The shelves twisted and turned unpredictably, and even though she tried to keep left, she became hopelessly lost. *Like a rat in a maze*, she thought blurrily. Thought was hard here, any thoughts in her mind quickly becoming tangled.

All she wanted to do was to collapse, to read one of the books whose titles, she now realized, were all written in a foreign language. Only one thought kept her moving forward: *she needed to get out*.

So Elaine walked, for what could have been minutes, or hours, or even days. Hunger became a dull and constant ache, and thirst was like a blade, sawing at her resolve. She had been swallowed whole by that thing that had forced her to read the book, and there was no way out of it now.

She saw things, in the labyrinth of bookshelves, inhuman things, with flickering shadowy forms that seemed to grin at her. *Join us*, they said, without words, perfectly still. She kept away from them.

Elaine couldn't help but compare this place to the library. The library always had this feeling of calm and quiet, a simple peace, with the faint smell of books permeating the place. It was lovely. The library had always been her escape.

This place, however. It was different, like an awful shadow version of the place she loved so dearly. It was quiet, yes, but an unsettling quiet, one that settled into your bones and sat there, weighing you down. The only sound was the faint hum of flickering fluorescents high above, long strips of blinding light that only seemed to cast longer shadows, rather than illuminate the place. It was so still and lonely, and the air itself seemed threaded through with a deep sense of dread. The smell of paper and ink was overwhelming.

At some point she started to cry. As she went to dry the tears, she stopped in her tracks and stared. She had been crying ink. She looked down at her hands and saw them becoming like paper, and she started to run. She didn't have enough breath to scream.

The books called out to her and the figures smiled, not really there, and the thing she was inside of waited. It knew that it was inevitable, and it relished in her terror, waiting with infinite patience.

Elaine stumbled, and fell, pages cascading off her body. She wept tears of ink, and gave in.

Much later, someone came along, whistling a soft tune, pushing along a cart of books.

*"Oh,"* they exclaimed softly. They bent down and picked a book off the ground, the title written in a strange script. *"Didn't realize that the door was opened."* They put the book on their cart, along with dozens of others, and returned to whistling their slightly melancholy tune, pushing the cart along the endless bookshelves.