

Started by a Sudden Change

by Dianne McKnight-Warren

Erma's last task, as it happened, was washing the globes of the gaslights in the foyer, wiping the soot from them in a basin of warm water. They looked like exotic creatures coming back to life as she bathed them, iridescent rainbows blooming out to fluted edges as if breathing had been completely restored.

But Luke was not to come for her through the foyer. She was to wait for him in the long shadow of the lilacs out back.

Her employer, Mrs. Pynchon, had fired her this morning, assumed the worst, accused her of stealing a silver spoon she saw on Erma's night table. It had fallen off the saucer last night when Erma broke the rules and brought a cup of tea to her room. "Thief!" Mrs. Pynchon had screamed.

"I knew you'd come around," Luke said when she found him at North Pond and told him she'd decided to accept his offer of marriage.

An eel wound through his fingers like a sliver of light. Erma watched as he threaded a hook through the eels mouth and out its eye. The eel stopped dead then exploded into motion, thrashing, writhing in and out of fetal knots.

Luke threw it in the water, pulled her to him. His fingers shaped her lips round and he clamped his mouth on hers, his tongue alive in her mouth, in her throat to make sure she got the point, and the eel slapped the water trying to die.

