What She Thought It Was

by JM Prescott

"Look again."

"But I've looked twice. Three times if you count the first time, which I do." Panic starts to rise underneath her skin and she covers her face before the tears come.

"Did you throw it out?"

"I told you, I must have." She can't watch as he sifts through the trash. "I thought I had it." Her voice barely manages the words as she looks at the piece of paper in her hands. The piece of paper she thought it was is long gone. She refuses to let her eyes cry. Her eyes played tricks on her and showed her one thing was really another. They don't deserve to cry.

"I took out the trash yesterday," she whispered. "It will be long gone by now."

He stops shifting through yesterday's apple peels and coffee grinds, and looks up at her, holding his hands out as if they were garbage themselves.

"Alright," he says, not bothering to wash his hands as he walks out the door.

She collapses into a kitchen chair, still holding the piece of paper that isn't what she thought it was. She can't do anythin else. Her hands that saved this paper don't deserve to work. Mistakes have consequences. Even accidental murder victims die.

He's gone a long time. He comes back not like a man who's tasted victory but a man who's tasted garbage. He's wet, tired, dirty but he

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has it, and tosses the crumpled, stained paper on the table. "I'm going to take a shower," he says.

She waits and listens to the water. She's ashamed to move. Ashamed to breathe. She wishes she could take a shower and wash away the mistake.

But she can't, so she sits and listens to the water. And she carefully lays the clean, saved piece of paper next to what she thought it was. She won't throw either away. She'll never throw anything away again. She'll even eat the apple peel.