



## A TRICK OF THE LIGHT Chapter 1

*Oh, no, no, no,* thought Clara Morrow as she walked toward the closed doors.

She could see shadows, shapes, like wraiths moving back and forth, back and forth across the frosted glass. Appearing and disappearing. Distorted, but still human.

*Still the dead one lay moaning.*

The words had been going through her head all day, appearing and disappearing. A poem, half remembered. Words floating to the surface, then going under. The body of the poem beyond her grasp. What was the rest of it? It seemed important.

*Oh, no no no.*

The blurred figures at the far end of the long corridor seemed almost liquid, or smoke. There, but insubstantial. Fleeting. Fleeting.

As she wished she could.

This was it. The end of the journey. Not just that day's journey as she and her husband, Peter, had driven from their little Québec village into the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Montréal, a place they knew well. Intimately. How often had they come to the MAC to marvel at some new exhibition? To support a friend, a fellow artist? Or to just sit quietly in the middle of the sleek gallery, in the middle of a weekday, when the rest of the city was at work?

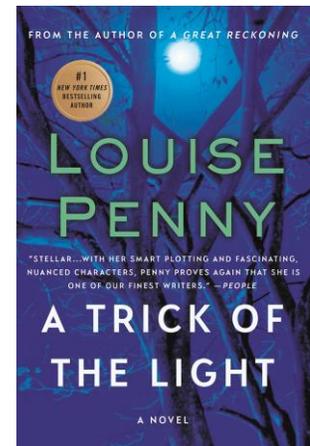
Art was their work. But it was more than that. It had to be. Otherwise, why put up with all those years of solitude? Of failure? Of silence from a baffled and even bemused art world?

She and Peter had worked away, every day, in their small studios in their small village, leading their tiny lives. Happy. But still yearning for more.

Clara took a few more steps down the long, long, white marble hallway.

This was the "more." Through those doors. Finally. The end point of everything she'd worked toward, walked toward, all her life.

Her first dream as a child, her last dream that morning, almost fifty years later, was at the far end of the hard white hallway.





They'd both expected Peter would be the first through those doors. He was by far the more successful artist, with his exquisite studies of life in close-up. So detailed, and so close that a piece of the natural world appeared distorted and abstract. Unrecognizable. Peter took what was natural and made it appear unnatural.

People ate it up. Thank God. It kept food on the table and the wolves, while constantly circling their little home in Three Pines, were kept from the door. Thanks to Peter and his art.

Clara glanced at him walking slightly ahead of her, a smile on his handsome face. She knew most people, on first meeting them, never took her for his wife. Instead they assumed some slim executive with a white wine in her elegant hand was his mate. An example of natural selection. Of like moving to like.

The distinguished artist with the head of graying hair and noble features could not possibly have chosen the woman with the beer in her boxing glove hands. And the pâté in her frizzy hair. And the studio full of sculptures made out of old tractor parts and paintings of cabbages with wings.

No. Peter Morrow could not have chosen her. That would have been unnatural.

And yet he had.

And she had chosen him.

Clara would have smiled had she not been fairly certain she was about to throw up.

*Oh, no no no*, she thought again as she watched Peter march purposefully toward the closed door and the art wraiths waiting to pass judgment. On her.

Clara's hands grew cold and numb as she moved slowly forward, propelled by an undeniable force, a rude mix of excitement and terror. She wanted to rush toward the doors, yank them open and yell, "Here I am!"

But mostly she wanted to turn and flee, to hide.

To stumble back down the long, long, light-filled, art-filled, marble-filled hallway. To admit she'd made a mistake. Given the wrong answer when asked if she'd like a solo show. At the Musée. When asked if she'd like all her dreams to come true.

She'd given the wrong answer. She'd said yes. And this is where it led.

Someone had lied. Or hadn't told the whole truth. In her dream, her only dream, played over and over since childhood, she had a solo show at the Musée d'Art Contemporain. She walked down this corridor. Composed and collected. Beautiful and slim. Witty and popular.

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Into the waiting arms of an adoring world.

There was no terror. No nausea. No creatures glimpsed through the frosted glass, waiting to devour her. Dissect her. Diminish her, and her creations.

Someone had lied. Had not told her something else might be waiting.

Failure.

*Oh, no no no*, thought Clara. *Still the dead one lay moaning.*

What was the rest of the poem? Why did it elude her?

Now, within feet of the end of her journey all she wanted to do was run away home to Three Pines. To open the wooden gate. To race up the path lined with apple trees in spring bloom. To slam their front door shut behind her. To lean against it. To lock it. To press her body against it, and keep the world out.

Now, too late, she knew who'd lied to her.

She had.