

The End

by Corinne Kalet

Betty dropped down on the bed, forgetting it was about as comfortable as a cement slab. She winced as her tailbone hit the mattress. Her hand splayed out on the striped bedspread, mindlessly stroking the rough fabric. Her eyes stared straight ahead, unseeing.

I can't keep doing this. I can't keep doing this. "We can't keep doing this, John."

She stood and walked through the sliding glass door to the small enclosed patio. It was the best part of the motel room. There was air out on the patio. Her lungs worked out on the patio.

Betty sat on one of the padded chairs at the glass patio table. She lit a cigarette and noticed her hand was shaking as she brought the cigarette to her lips.

They had met at this motel for the last six months, every Tuesday at lunch and Thursday after work. Her husband knew nothing, but his wife suspected. Maureen would probably be happy to let John go. John wanted Betty to leave Matthew. She couldn't. John threatened to tell Matthew everything. Betty couldn't let that happen. She wouldn't let that happen.

She took a slow drag on the cigarette, breathing deeply. The smoke puffed out of her mouth and she watched it fade away into the sky. She sighed as she sat back, leaning her head as far back as it would go.

"Oh, John," she said. "What do we do?"

Betty frowned at the worn shag carpet on the other side of the glass door. Such a distasteful room. Mismatched furniture, cheap and tacky bedspread, a rickety arm chair

that didn't quite sit straight. She was tired of sneaking around. It was time to end this whole thing.

John didn't agree. He glared at her from where he lay, sprawled on the floor. His expression was so different than his usual smile for her. He always smiled when he saw her. She assumed he smiled because he was picturing her naked. It wasn't in anticipation of the scintillating conversation, that was for sure. They barely talked anymore, just checked in to their usual room with their usual pseudonyms, arriving ten minutes apart and leaving ten minutes apart. Jumped into bed, same moves, same sex every time. Same cigarettes at the after, out on the patio. Same hasty shower that never quite made her feel clean.

John continued to glare at her, not saying a word. She stood and slowly moved back into the room. Suddenly remembering the "no smoking" rules, she stubbed out the cigarette on the bottom of her high heeled pump and tossed the butt into the plants lining the far edge of the patio. Avoiding John's glare, Betty slipped into the bathroom. She could feel his eyes on her, even through the wall. She leaned over the clamshell sink and took a deep breath, coughing shortly.

"Maybe it's time to stop smoking," she said to her reflection. She fluffed her hair and noticed a spot on her white blouse. Upon closer inspection, she saw it was reddish brown. Luckily it was only noticeable when she raised her arm. So, she would just keep her arm down until she could get the shirt into the wash.

Betty stepped out of the bathroom and gingerly sat back down on the cement bed. She finally looked down at John and met his glare. "It's time to be done, John. I'm sorry. I know you don't agree, but I can't do this anymore. You just wouldn't let me go. I had no other choice."

She crouched down and gently placed her hand on his cheek. His skin was cool, when he was normally so warm. Her fingers slid over his eyes and closed the eyelids. She stood and stepped back a step before the pool of blood reached her shoe. She finished rubbing the gun free of her fingerprints with the towel she had taken from the bathroom and placed it in his hand, closing his fingers around the handle.

She tossed the towel into the bathroom and turned back to look at John one last time.

“Goodbye, John.”