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NO CHOICE

"**WE HAVE NO CHOICE,**" her husband told Alice. "When the time comes, someone has to do it for both of us. Don't worry—I'll be quick."

That's what worried her. What if it were so quick that she didn't know it happened? One second she would be here, the next she'd be gone, without a chance to object or say goodbye. She hated the way the thought always overshadowed other things she wished to recall. But now it was all she could think about—that single moment when what little memory was left to her would be obliterated.

She had never actually agreed to it. But her husband was a proud man and couldn't bear the thought of being a burden to anyone. "What happens when I can no longer take care of you, old girl? What will become of us? I don't give a rat's ass what your brother George says. I'm not letting him put us in one of those places. I'd rather die. They won't take us alive!"

Alice stared at the locked bedroom drawer where her husband had stashed a small pearl-handled pistol. She had seen it only once, but its image still haunted her. She had always hated guns, and so had her husband. But he had bought it quietly about the same time she had lost the ability to speak except in pitiful grunts.

"What are you staring at, Alice?" as if he didn't know. She smiled, or thought she did—it was so hard to tell—at him sitting in his wheelchair. "Come on, what's wrong?" he asked. So it *wasn't a smile, after all*.

She glanced at the mirror and changed her face. That's better—smile. She didn't want him to get suspicious.

"That's my girl," he said. "We'll get through this, together. There's so little time left, so let's just try to be positive."

What does he mean—"so little time left?" Is he planning on doing it tonight? What if he tries to do it while I'm asleep? Alice glared at her husband.

"What's the matter now?" he asked. I swear, Alice, I can see the way a thought crosses your face. "What are you thinking about?"

I wonder—does he suspect? No, he couldn't. That would be too much for even his powers of perception. I wasn't even sure myself until now. But her husband was right about one thing. There was little time left.

That night, she kept one eye partly open until she knew her husband was fast asleep. She knew his snore cycle by heart and calculated how much time she had. She rose quietly, lingering one last time over the sleeping form of her beloved husband. Despite their many differences, their marriage had survived, and she remembered—or at least chose to remember—more of the good times than the bad. He was a good man who loved her. It was not his fault that he couldn't imagine another reality.

Quietly she unlocked the drawer—her husband was never good at hiding things, including keys to locked drawers—and took out the gun. For a moment she studied it as an artifact whose elegant nickel-plated design

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belied its primitive function. Yes, it would be a fitting tool with which to kill someone you love. Her mind swirled as she stood over her husband. In the darkness she could just make out the shiny bald head she loved to stroke. He was snoring again. There was little time. Her hands trembled. She must get closer.

She dressed with deliberate calmness, savoring the feel of new garments against her skin. Then she pulled a packed suitcase from the back of the closet. It was a plan she had rehearsed many times, and she was ready, though she could not remember for what. She only knew there was no choice. Looking at her husband, who was no longer snoring now, she closed the bedroom door and slipped into her new life.