

Breath of Fresh Air

by Kevin Myrick

Their situation could not go on like it had been. Ricky watched from the sidelines as their marriage spiraled downward over the past three months until finally one night Janet broke down and let the waterworks loose. She buried her flour-covered hands in her face and was a mess when she came back up for air. Her tears caked onto her face for all to see.

"I don't know what this is all about anymore," he said. "What is wrong with you?"

"I don't know," she said through heavy sobs. "I just can't keep living like this."

Ricky sat his beer on the table and then took the chair next to her. "What do you want to do?" he asked. "Do you want to give up on us? On all this?"

"I don't know," she said. "I just don't like being this way."

He lost his patience and began ranting and raving, angry that he had to come home every night and feel like he was being smothered by a pillow. "I can't make it stop," she said. "I can't make myself stop feeling this way."

"Yes you can."

"Tell me, how do I do it then? How to I make myself feel better."

"You have the will to do whatever you want. But all you want to do is cry, cry, cry. You can't cry over every little thing."

"What do you know about it?"

"You don't like feeling the way you do, then do something about it," Ricky spat back. Ricky didn't expect Janet to actually do anything, but when he woke up and found his head was bleeding and the shattered pieces of a beer bottle, he figured out quickly what happened. "That loopy... I can't believe..." he said aloud. But no one was left at home to hear his complaints.

Ricky cleaned the blood out of his hair, then looked at the cut and decided he probably didn't need stitches. He stretched out on the couch with an ice pack on his head and a beer in his hand. He stayed

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there for hours and stared at the television and waited for her to come home. Ron Popeil was selling yet another gadget - the rotisserie oven - on every other channel. Nothing of worth was ever on in the middle of the night.

He knew she would come through the door, with her arms folded over her chest hugging herself tenderly and she would apologize for the cuts on his head.

"I didn't mean to do it, I just got...I got too emotional in the moment. You were screaming at me." He could hear her voice as clear as day in his mind.

"I wasn't screaming," he said. "I was yelling."

She would want to kill him with her eyes, those eyes full of tears she always brushed away with a handkerchief she kept in her purse. "I just don't know what is wrong with me."

It went exactly like he thought it would for a few minutes when she walked through the front door at 4 a.m. Streaks of flour still covered her cheeks from where she'd been crying earlier. He asked her where she had been all these hours, but didn't answer. "What is going on with you? Are you on something?"

She said she was sorry, sorry for everything. She just didn't know how to handle things anymore. "I feel time ticking away, every second of the day," she said. "My body is going crazy."

Janet announced she wanted to have a baby. She said a baby would make everything better. "I need something to love."

"You don't love me?" Ricky asked. She stared at him and looked down at her shoes for the right words that just wouldn't come out. They stood there like that for a very long moment before Ricky lost his patience again. "Then the hell with you."

He didn't look back when he walked down the hallway and slammed the bedroom door behind him. When he woke the next morning, he knew she was gone for good. He was glad to finally feel like he could get a breath of fresh air.

