

Flash Fiction: 'The Five Stages'

by: Suzanne Brazil July 21, 2014 in Books, Flash Fiction



Why did Daniel insist on coming down here today? She wasn't ready. They hadn't set foot in the place in months. She wasn't interested...in anything. Sheila shook her bangs out of her eyes and pushed open the oversized, wooden door. It creaked a little, stiff from disuse. She reached for the light switch to her right and felt the soft, cool cobwebs on her fingertips. She shivered, wiped her hand on her leg and looked around.

A lone bale of hay next to the feed buckets smelled moldy and listed to the right. Flakes of it falling into the five-gallon buckets stacked on the wood plank floor. Gray, everything was gray in here. Gray wood, gray dust, and moldy, cement gray hay. She looked down the aisle off to her left. The four stalls on this side were in shadow. The lucky horses (as if she still believed in luck) got the right side, four stalls, and four windows. Even the light seeping through the dirty panes was a dull gray.

His footsteps echoed behind her. The door screeched. She felt like shouting "leave the damned door open!" If she wanted it closed, she would have shut it herself. It wasn't worth it. She walked between the stalls approaching the door at the end that led to the paddock. It was gray, too. The wood hadn't weathered overnight. The barn was decades old. They'd made a good show of maintaining it over the years. Holes were repaired, boards replaced, new fittings installed on the stall doors. It was shocking how fast everything took on an abandoned air.

Continuing down the walkway, she looked into each empty stall. The rough, dusty boards of the low slung roof pressed down on her. It seemed so big before. She pictured Sundae Sioux in the first stall, shiny and black, tossing the black mane and demanding notice. Now, just a faded halter with a snaffle bit hung on a rusty nail; vibrant royal blue nylon withered to a blue-gray.

Something had chewed or clawed a hole into the bottom right corner of the door at the end. Cloudy light from outside leaked in as if from a flashlight with a dying battery. She turned around, avoiding eye contact with him, reviewing the empty space. She'd always loved the smell in here. The manure, the sweaty lather, the hay. *He* thought it was weird. To her it smelled alive, like wind and grass and dirt. She inhaled trying to detect a trace of she didn't know what.

She could feel Daniel staring at her. She remembered an article she'd read when they were in the funeral director's office just days after the accident. Experts reported parents were twice as likely to divorce after the death of a child. At first, she didn't understand how that was possible but now, it didn't seem far-fetched.

She knew Molly was his, too. He was her *father*. He was supposed to protect her. "You're not the only one who misses her," she heard him whisper into the empty gray. Forcing her to come down here today was a bad idea. She couldn't help how she felt. Nor did she really want to. She knew it wasn't fair to him, but she couldn't summon the energy to care.

She remembered the first night after the funeral. How good it had felt in Daniel's arms. She felt *protected*. And then she woke up. She couldn't escape the bedroom fast enough and headed out to the barn at first light. Hours later, she came in through the kitchen door, and he was having his morning coffee. He reached for her, and she recoiled. She saw the hurt look in his eyes and turned away. She waited, thinking she'd feel different in time.

Yet, all these months later, here he sat crying like a baby in their empty barn. A choking sob escaped his throat and she felt revulsion bubbling up in hers. She watched as he ran his flannel sleeve across his unshaven face, placed his hands on his knees and rose to his feet. He reached for the wheelbarrow and pitchfork and headed out into the paddock ahead of her. She wondered if the urge to slap him in the face was a sign of healing.

She stepped out into the muck, pulling the door shut behind her. The mud sucked at her navy rubber boots as she stomped toward the fence at the tree line. The brisk wind made her eyeballs tingle and her nose was running. His words came whistling on the wind, "I hate the smell of horseshit." Pumping her arms, she strode to the path in the trees and kept right on walking.






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About Suzanne Brazil



Suzanne Brazil lives in the suburbs of Chicago and enjoys writing and publishing both fiction and non-fiction.

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