

Tear Him to Shreds

‘Did it do anything for you?’ Tully asked Nora.

Nora immediately answered. ‘No. Boys have no idea how to do anything for a woman.’

‘I agree.’

Tully sat down on the toilet seat and rested calmly back against the cold porcelain. She kicked her shoes off, pointed for Nora to make sure the door was locked, and cosied into a position she clearly wasn’t leaving anytime soon.

‘Would you do something for me?’ Tully asked.

Girls help girls, Nora thought, but felt more, the need to help the other woman in the room, unquestionably. ‘Sure.’

‘Would you tear him to shreds for me?’

Nora cocked her head, unsure if what she heard Tully said was, in fact, right. *Tear him to shreds*. Tully had said it so casually, like tearing this guy limb from limb was an inevitability. She intended to do exactly as it sounded and was further intent on doing so after seeing the hint of intrigue her fellow woman showed in it, too.

‘In what way do you mean *tear him to shreds*, exactly?’ Nora asked.

‘Emotionally, I’m thinking. Like murder of the mind, or something.’

‘Murder of the *mind*,’ Nora repeated. She liked the sound of it.

Tully hummed in agreement. ‘Yeah. Actual physical murder is way too much. I’m not that angry.’

‘What are you even angry *about*?’

‘At men, mainly. But I’m going to take it out on him.’

Nora got it, the whole male-hatred thing. She was reminded of how entirely frustrated she was by them on the daily. But she’d never thought to do anything about it, let alone wage emotional warfare.

‘Are you not angry too?’ Tully asked.

‘What? About men?’

‘Yeah. About men.’

‘You’re acting way too cool about this.’

‘Thanks.’

‘You’re welcome.’

The girls sat in silence. Tully kept watching Nora. She watched the way Nora kept her lips softly parted all the time, the way Nora slumped over a little bit with bad posture, the way Nora kept straightening out her furrowed brow with her fingers, like she was trying to wipe away the echo of the wrinkles. She hadn't chosen Nora for nothing—her boyfriend had hit on several other girls throughout the night—but Nora held herself differently, like a little bit less of the world pushed down on her shoulders.

Hesitating, Nora asked, 'What do you want to do?'

Tully leaned forward, elbows rested on her knees. 'You know how men always leave women broken?'

'Well, I think that depends on what women you ask.'

'No, no. They do. Every woman. They break a little part of her, break it off for themselves, or let it fester and get worse in the woman.' Tully can feel the remnants of every man who she's known as she says this. 'Even if the woman doesn't know it. I didn't know it, for the longest while. He is holding onto a stupid part of me I'll never get back.'

'And so your idea is to then—what?—emotionally ruin him?'

'Something along those lines.'

It won't get that part of her back—hurting him—Tully knew that. She truly didn't even know what part of her was missing. But she knew he had something of hers, and that it was eating away at her. He looked at her, and she felt like she was in love for a moment. He wiped away a strand of her hair and her knees got a little weaker. He grabbed her hand while they're sleeping, and she instinctively rolled closer. But after the wash of desire, love, whatever, she was left with a little bit of her that ripped at her chest and didn't feel right and reminded her that she felt wrong.

'What do you want me to do, exactly?'

Nora, though seemingly sceptical of the idea, was entirely committed to the prospect of ruining this man. *Tearing him to shreds*. It feels like when your friend breaks up with a guy, Nora thought, and forever now the girls will scoff at his name whenever it's mentioned, and they'll have conversations about how horrible he is, ungrateful and bad in bed when they come across other women in bathrooms like this. What Tully wanted to do was just an extension of this loyalty.

'I'm thinking we go full dream girl scenario. You become the exact thing he wants. You watch *Pulp Fiction* and act like you don't have a problem with Tarantino's foot fetish. You eat like a pig—whatever that means—and drink beer over cocktails. You mould your love

language to his. You don't get clingy, but you're at his beck and call. You make him his lunch each day. You get along with his mates. Eventually, you're his perfect woman.'

'Eventually I'm the worst woman ever.'

'The perfect man in a woman's body, basically.'

'Great.'

Tully kept glimpsing herself when she wasn't looking at Nora. When she saw herself in the mirror, she had a straighter back, she zhuzhed her hair, she pouted her lips a little more. But when she brought herself back to Nora, she crouched over, clawed her hands, letting the veins pulse, with the sharp almond shaped nails painted like drips of blood pointing at the ends of her fingers.

'Then, when he thinks you're God's gift, when he thinks there's heroin in your pussy, when he thinks every other woman on earth is neurotic, crazy, narcissistic, too feminine, too masculine, you leave him. You leave him desperate for someone who will never exist.'

They let the idea sit between them. Tully was searching for a look of intrigue or excitement on Nora's face, hoping desperately the need to do something like this was just as strong in her as it was in herself. Nora, hiding her bottom lip in her mouth, bouncing her right foot excessively, had already figured out the first move.

She would approach him while he was just outside the flat block, alone, smoking a cigarette. She'd come up just next to him, enough for their shoulders to occasionally brush.

And she'd say:

'Dude, your girlfriend just confronted me in the bathroom.'

'Huh?' He smirks at her, like a dick. He's a dick.

She's hyperaware of how she needs to hold herself, the words she needs to use, the looks she needs to give. The memory of a man's hand pushes her shoulders back slightly, and the pad of his thumb pulls her lower lip down, then moving to graze the side of her cheek as he pushes her hair behind her ear, and she follows his prompts.

'Your girlfriend just told me to back the fuck away from her boyfriend.'

James offers Nora a drag. 'She's crazy, man.'

Women are always the crazy ones in a relationship, Nora's noticed. Women, like, actually *care*, in the relationship. They're always texting the guy, asking how his day was. That's so fucking *clingy*. Sometimes, they'll even say no to sex just because they didn't feel like it. Like, how inconsiderate can you be?

'No shit she's crazy.' It hurts Nora to say this.

'You're not doing a great job at staying away,' he teases, taking back his cigarette.

She looks up at him—he’s not even that tall, but if she looks up through her eyebrows, and softens her eyelids a bit, she can give this sultry look she thinks men tend to associate with blow jobs.

‘I’m not great at doing what I’m told.’

‘So, I won’t be getting rid of you any time soon?’

‘Nope.’

‘That’s good with me.’

He hands her the cigarette again, staring at her profile intently as she leans against the wall next to him. He’s watching for something—she knows it’s something sexual, anything that would make his tiny dick twitch. So, she sucks in her cheeks more than she needs to when taking a drag of the cigarette. She’ll let the man watch her cheeks hollow, her tongue curve around the cigarette, and hold the smoke in her lungs with her mouth still in a pretty pouted ‘O’.

‘He’s like a bunny,’ Tully had said to her before sending Nora out. ‘He’ll think everything you do it to tease him and hopefully get him off. He thinks the way every woman swings their hips as they walk down the street is purely for him. You’ll need to *actually* do everything for him. He’ll be watching. He’ll know the colour of your tongue before you even let him near you. Are you ok to sleep with him?’

‘Sure.’

‘You won’t get off.’

‘Wasn’t expecting to.’

Tully wasn’t wrong. Tully is never wrong. After mimicking the fantasies Nora sees in every film, James doesn’t let Nora hand the cigarette back to him herself, but steps in front of her to pull it from her mouth himself.

Taking a drag of the cigarette, Nora thought, was all it took for him to look at me sexually.

Men are so simple.

‘You know, Tully isn’t actually my girlfriend,’ James says, coming in even closer to Nora. At this proximity, hips bumping, breaths mixing, he just makes himself more unappealing. Nora supposes he thinks towering over a girl, letting her feel small and fragile while he makes his lust perfectly clear, flicking his eyes down to her mouth, tipping his tongue a little out of his mouth, will arouse the same things in her as it does in him. It doesn’t.

‘Oh yeah?’ she teases, softening her lips into an open-mouthed pout, letting him see her tongue slowly sear along the edges of her teeth.

‘Yeah.’

His hand pulls her into him. Nora feels a pang of guilt, finding herself liking how it’s a little bit hasty and desperate, liking the way his hand feels pressed against the small of her back, liking the way he can’t take his eyes off her lips. The body betrays when the mind doesn’t want to. The smallest feel of skin on skin, and Nora is struggling to stick to the plan, clinging with all she can to the idea of watching James suffer. Like a little kid unable to keep from eating a marshmallow put front of them, her hips push forward to his just a bit, looking for momentary pleasure, disregarding the potential for delayed gratification.

Tully’s words ring in her ears.

You won’t get off.

Her hips come back against the wall.

She thinks of getting another marshmallow if she just waits a little longer.

*

‘Tully!’

Nora shuddered at the familiar voice. The last time she heard it, he was pleading at her knees, and instead of his voice being full of rage, it was broken and aching and almost compelling enough for her to feel bad.

Climbing the stairs to Tully’s room, James had no care for Tully’s neighbours, no care for his reputation—definitely no care for Tully’s—and so with all his might, he screamed up the stairs and down the halls and into walls for *Tully, you sick bitch! You fucking whore! You dark, twisted, bitch! Think you can fuck with me? Think you can fuck with Nora? Fuck you and your fucking ego, your fucking face, your fucking mind, and your fucking cunt.*

He sounded coked up, doped up, just like they’d wanted.

‘Does he think there’s heroin in your pussy?’ Tully asked Nora a few weeks before.

‘And cocaine, and opiates, and crack, and MD.’

‘Soon he’ll be so doped up no one’ll go near him.’

‘He stared at me the other night for, like, an hour. In a trance.’

‘You sure you don’t actually have a narcotic drug in the lining of your uterus?’

James would watch Nora every time she left his apartment, like she was the sunset until the last second it disappears below the horizon. He bought entirely new bedding the night before she first stayed over, his worn and torn navy-blue sheets and paper-thin comforter

swapped for crisp white sheets the saleswoman had recommended and a plush quilt he liked to watch her lay on like an angel floating on a cloud.

Nora hated his bed, hated having to sleep intertwined with him. He would run his fingers up and down her back so much the skin started feeling raw. His quilt weighed down on her like a tonne of feathers, pressing her further into his naked chest, clammy and unwashed after sex. The pillows, though soft on her cheek, were so flat and cushion-less it felt better to just rest her head against the mattress.

Though painfully uncomfortable, and never getting a wink of sleep, Nora did her best to play the pretty and perfect naked woman in bed. She'd lift her leg at a soft angle, so her ass looked sweet and plump and would imprint the image of a body with softened curves and perfect gradients that are only possible in paintings. She'd let him slide on top of her in the morning, teeth unbrushed and musty, and get a leg over before his day even started. She'd push her head back like a porn star, let him come all over her like a tube sock, and pretend to be freshly fucked and energised for the day ahead.

Most of the people in Tully's flat block had started locking their doors after a few minutes of James' screaming. One guy tried to come out and be all tough, calm him down with a soft *mate, chill out*, but it only made James angrier. He pushed the guy against a wall. A girl the floor below knew Tully from Freshers and texted her asking who the insane guy in the stairwell was, and if she wanted her to call the police. *Crazy ex*, Tully said, *I can deal with him*.

He was tunnelling everything in him towards Tully. It was easier for him to blame her, and hate her, because he still loved Nora. He thought maybe Nora was a little brainwashed by Tully. He thought that Tully must've dragged her in with all that sisterhood bullshit she used to spew. (He doesn't know why he put up with Tully, honestly. He thought the whole woman interested in sexual liberation would be fun, but it wasn't. She cared more about her own orgasm than his.) Nora would never have thought all those feminist things on her own. Not James' Nora. James' Nora didn't cry sexual assault when he touched her outside the flat block that first night; she didn't post infographics on her Instagram stories about the 97% or whatever; she giggled and kissed him when he asked why there wasn't an International Men's Day. So, James, in the wake of his rage, thought Nora might wake up from Tully's spell and come back to him and love him again.

He came to the conclusion that Tully was using Nora as a plaything only a few hours before his rampage. He'd been talking to his mates at the pub, and one of them said they'd seen Nora and Tully with their arms linked, walking through the uni campus with smiles on their faces that suggested no semblance of heartbreak.

‘What?’ he’d shot at his friend. *Tully’s taken Nora. Tully won’t leave me the fuck alone. Tully is such a fucking bitch.*

‘They looked like really good friends.’

‘Nora and Tully aren’t friends.’ James was adamant on this fact.

‘You sure about that, mate?’ one of the boys asked.

‘Nora would hate Tully. She wouldn’t go near her.’

One of his other mates, who had been sitting silently in the corner, spilled something he’d heard in whispers.

‘My girlfriend was talking about how she saw them in the bathroom at this party a few months ago, before you and Nora started dating.’

James said ‘and? Girls always go to the bathroom together in packs. Tully and Nora being there at the same time isn’t a coincidence.’

‘No, no. They weren’t, like, popping in and out and the same time or something. She said they held up a mass of people because they locked themselves in there together.’

‘Maybe Tully, like, coerced her. Became friends with her so she could ruin your relationship before it even started,’ one of the boys suggested, taking his mates’ side.

‘How would she even know James was into Nora?’ another boy asked.

‘She’s a psycho, that’s how,’ James said.

The guy who broke the news spoke up again. ‘My girlfriend thinks they planned it. Together.’

‘What? Planned for me love Nora?’ James spat. ‘No one can plan that.’

‘Tully hates your guts, man, and she’s a smart girl. She’d do anything to ruin you, my girlfriend says. Not to be rude or anything, but you look like shit now. And suck. All because Nora said she doesn’t love you.’

‘Well, she fucked with Nora, too, then.’

A collective ‘huh?’ sounded over the table. None of the boys had followed his train of thought.

‘She manipulated us into loving each other, and then broke us up. That fucking bitch.’

‘You don’t think maybe Nora was a part of it?’

‘Don’t be fucking ridiculous.’

James stood up, knocking a girl behind him carrying drinks and spat at her to *watch where she’s fucking going* before he was off, definitely not watching where he was going, to let Tully be the recipient of a temper tantrum.

Once he reaches Tully's door, the girls make him stand outside for a moment, watching him through the peephole, his head warped as he stood as close as he could to the door to bang and bash. Over and over, paired with the sound of his fists, James just keeps yelling *Tully, fucking Tully, open the fucking door, Tully*, and then he tries something sweeter, softer, faker, like *Nora? Baby? Are you there? Nora, open the door, I wanna see you, Nora*.

'Will you be a good boy if I let you in?' Tully said.

'Shut the fuck up, Tully.'

He lost his balance when the door was rapidly pulled open, falling to the ground pathetically. He got up immediately, pushing up off the raggedy flat block carpet to grab Tully, hit Tully, just *something* to Tully, but before he could lock his hands around her throat, or squeeze her face in his hands, he saw Nora, standing with the doorknob in her hand, looking at him. Her mouth pulled like she'd just eaten something sour, eyes blank of any remorse, and James felt his gut twist and tie in knots.

Looking at James was nauseating for Nora; she never thought what she did could bring him to this. He was entirely unfamiliar to both girls, nothing like how he used to be, with a smile fuelled by blissful ignorance, and a carelessness that only privilege can breed. They found themselves confronted with a terrifying stranger, fucked up and on the verge of tears. Tully was glad she didn't recognise him. To see his usually perfectly conditioned mop of curls kinky and crusty atop his head instead, and his cheeks flush with uneven spots of red, like temporary pimples, was invigorating, and Tully devoured the sight of it.

James' suave ability to maneuverer social situations—getting himself next to a girl, always being near the bar when he was about to finish his drink—had fallen away. Before they did all this, the girls thought it was unlikely that he'd ever been confused about how to act. He was confused now, wondering: *maybe I'll choke Tully out; maybe I'll smash Nora's head into the chest of drawers and then suffocate Tully in the blood; maybe I don't have the guts to do anything at all?*

Finally in the room with the girls, he can't deny the way they've changed to him. Rather than seeing Tully and Nora as hot girls, skinny girls, great-ass girls, doe-eyed girls, pink lipped girls, he saw their (*fucked up*) brains, their (*annoyingly complex*) emotions, and their (*sexless*) bodies. He broke at this a little, whimpered at this a little. Why weren't Nora's breasts as perky anymore? Why weren't Tully's lips as red? He couldn't stop seeing past them, their physical forms, and wondering how did their minds do this? How do they think like that? Why do they think like that? But he'll never be bothered enough to actually find out. He misses just looking at a girl's lips, a girl's ass, a girl's chest. Would he always wonder about their minds now?

They've really fucked him up. He just won't ever be able to treat a woman with the same kindness he did Nora, not after all this.

The three of them didn't bother to move from the tight hallway into Tully's room. Stood in a triangle: two deadly points, hands held in unison, with a blunt tip about to sever from the configuration. James strikes first, stepping towards an unwavering Tully. Everything that comes out of his mouth is guttural and gruesome. *You're a sick fuck, Tully, thinking of all of this. Dragging Nora into all of this.* The words were empty and stupid, but the sounds of them coming out his mouth hurt. *You can't let anyone be happy, can you? Can't not be the centre of fucking attention.* The sounds are like metal: metal scratching metal, a bullet hitting metal, metal slicing and piercing the skin of Nora and Tully's ears. *You were going to be rejected someday, you're just pissed off it was by me, and pissed off it was Nora who I liked—loved—better.*

He tried to swap his voice to something sweeter—to appeal to Nora, to stop scaring himself—but it just came out sickly and mawkish. It felt like alcohol being poured straight into the gashes of her ears.

'I love you, Nora.' She shuddered. The love of men is so selfish. It takes more than it gives. He doesn't want to love Nora—he wants Nora to love him.

'Do you know who you love, really?' Tully cut past his words, pushing Nora behind her dismissively. 'You love a girl who fucks when you want, who likes the way you know nothing about her, who eats like a pig and doesn't weigh over sixty kilos, who you've never seen without make-up, who thinks your tiny cock amazing, who is everything you fucking want and *nothing* like who she really is.'

James is only looking at Nora—not listening to Tully, why won't he fucking listen to Tully?—not looking even slightly guilty. He still thought he was right: that Nora actually loved him, and he loved the actual Nora.

'How long did you think it would last—you doing nothing and being loved?' Tully says.

'Not that I ever actually loved you,' Nora finally says.

James drops to his knees, like a child who can't be a big boy and keep standing when he hears bad news. He can feel his whole world spinning, his dick shrinking into him.

'I didn't do noth—we *are* in love—I love you!' James is spitting out incomplete thoughts. 'I was kind to you—I bought new fucking *bed sheets* for you.'

Nora briefly finds herself liking the sight of him on his knees, too weak to stand tall and face her. She likes seeing him like a coward. So, she steps in closer, makes him look up at her

at a tougher angle, and washes in the power for a moment. His eyes are bloodshot, his lips are quivering, and his hands, previously balled up in a tight fist, have lost all strength and pull together in a weak grip.

Bending to his height, she grazes his poorly shaved cheek with her hand. In reflex, his head tilts into her soft palm, searching for the same tenderness she made up for him.

‘You love me, I know,’ she says sweetly and with a tone so genuine Tully worries she might like him and show him a kindness they didn’t plan for.

‘But that was the plan.’ The tenderness is irradiated in a second. She pinches his ear tightly between her index and middle finger, eliciting an emasculating shriek from James.

‘I made myself into everything you could love. All I had to do was shut my mouth and open my legs and look at you: all sad and delusional because I denied you something you were stupid enough to think you deserved in the first place.’

‘You can’t—’ Nora pinches his ear a little tighter. ‘—fake that. No one can fake that,’ James says.

‘That’s not true.’ She forces him off his knees, pulling his ear back towards the door, and straddles him as he sits like a ventriloquist’s doll, limp against the door frame.

‘Women fake it all the time. Fake liking beer. Fake orgasms. Fake flirt for a free drink. I’m not sure anything women do is real.’

Nora’s hair—too soft to stay put—is hiding both her and James from Tully’s view. Without a clear view of James looking like a lovesick idiot, Tully worries that this closeness is starting to appeal to Nora like it used to for herself. The touch of someone who loves you—even if unrequited—feels like all your worries wash away, like the patriarchy suddenly isn’t suffocating you, and the suffocation feels a little better because it’s followed up by a kiss on the lips and a bouquet of flowers on special occasions. She keeps a close eye on his hands, making sure they don’t graze her hips, cup her cheeks or touch her hair. He needs to stay limp and lost with Nora in control.

‘Have you ever raped someone, James?’

Nora wants him to answer, wants him to say the words.

‘What the fuck, Nora?’ James says.

‘Go on. Have you?’

He can’t focus with her on top of him, the pain of his ear between her fingers, the rush of her on top of him.

‘No,’ he tries to say strongly.

‘I know you’ve grabbed a girl’s ass without asking. I know you’ve convinced a girl to not use a condom because it doesn’t feel good. I know you’ve crept in when a girl was sleeping a started to touch her when she was unconscious. So why does rape seem so far off, huh? Where do you draw the line, James?’

Nora starts pounding James’ chest into the door, his shirt balled up in her fists. He finally feels like he can touch her, taking hold of her wrists, not in an attempt to stop her, or push her off him, just holding them to his chest, feeling each hit against the door reverberate through him to her. She hates being violent, the thing in her that tells her to hit and punch and slap every time she’s hot-tempered, but each thud of him against the wooden door takes a little bit of her anger away. Feeling James swallow and try to breathe deeply with her hand around his throat, applying pressure at the widest part of his neck, helps her calm. She could never get this out with only words.

‘I knew someone who didn’t think there was any line. To him, I was like a little barbie doll, with wider hips and smaller tits, that he could bend the legs of, shave the hair off of, dress up, strip down. Anything he wanted. Anything. And once he was done, and I didn’t look like the pretty barbie that came in the box anymore, he told me right to my face that no one would want to play with me ever again, because apparently what I *let* him do to me was slutty, and shameful, and *my fucking fault*.’

One hand is firm on James’ throat, the other loosely holding her own, as though to feel the words before they come out, the pain of them before they leave.

‘I believed him, for a long while. Wanted to die because of it. So many women, victims to these fucking male fantasies. When you asked me to do this—’ She doesn’t even bother to look back at Tully. ‘—I thought it would help teach them something. They wouldn’t get away with it anymore—any of it—none of the gaslighting, the catcalling, the sexual assault, the *rape*, because they’d maybe finally know a woman, and love a woman, and know we are more than a body.’

Nora forms two fists, right in front of James’ face, her sharp cut manicure piercing into her palms, trickles of blood staining her nail polish.

‘But I’m still a body.’ The words screech out of her in pain. ‘I’m still someone *he* wants, *he* loves, *he* gets. You can’t learn anything. In all this pain you’re feeling, you’re still degrading Tully, and trying to own me. There’s no clarity. And that sucks for you, because you won’t get stronger. I got stronger.’

‘I’ll get stronger,’ James says.

‘Will you learn, though?’

‘I can learn.’

‘*Can.* But didn’t.’

‘Who cares if I didn’t? I *will.*’

Tully cuts in: ‘There’s no teaching you, or anyone like you.’

‘Never.’ Nora punches a fist into James’ chest. *Never.* Punch. *Never.* Punch. *Nevernevernevernevernevernever.* James takes the hits like a champ, like a real man, like the punching bag Tully wanted him to be. Nora cries like a boss, like a strong woman, like the one Tully moulded her into.

Tully feels accomplished. Finally, she sees the only image of a man she’s ever wanted: broken and ruined by a woman. James was loving every touch Nora gave him, even if it was her fist to his chest; her hand on his throat felt like a caress; he wanted her tight fists to meet his jaw, knock some blood out of his mouth, wipe it off with the tip of a finger. Masochist like the rest of us.

Tully gave him Nora, made Nora for him, and then took her from his grasp.

Tully does it again—she takes—and moves from her distanced stance to cup Nora under her shoulders and lift her from James’ feverish hold. His hands grab at her like a toddler, and he blubbers something about Nora being sad, Nora needing him right now.

‘No,’ Tully says.

She holds Nora to her body, rubs her back, stokes her hair, but she’s looking at James the entire time. *Look at what you don’t get.* She wants to make sure she remembers what she can do to him—to any man. *Look at what I can do.*

He won’t look. He knows she wants him to look. So, he fixates on her ankle, her dainty little ankle. He remembers watching her shave it, sitting at the edge of the bath with suds just on the lower half of her leg. She’d take it slow, using a safety razor she’d kept in pristine condition since high school, pulling the blade up her skin delicately. She never missed a spot.

James wraps a hand around this tiny ankle, this pretty ankle, and lets his skin meet her own for a moment, no hair no barriers, before bringing her to the ground. Her head hits the floor so hard a crack forms from the left brow bone to the top of her forehead, and blood immediately starts seeping into the carpet.

Nora watches as the blood surrounds her vintage loafers and wonders how she can still feel the warmth of Tully’s hug when her life source is draining into the flat below. She wonders if James is taking the warmth from her body, feeling her skin get cold, as he keeps his hand wrapped around her bare ankle. Can he feel her in the blood that stains stupid preppy chinos?

Does her death feel as good as the life he sucked from her, like the silk of her skin when he'd nestle in her chest?

'Fuck. You,' he says, looking at the way Tully's body mimics the way she used to lie in bed: arms up, like they're under a pillow, her lips relaxed like they're taking in even, drowsy breaths, and her eyes and brows relaxed without the tension of the day upon them.

'Fuck. You,' Nora says. She grabs his head and tries to bludgeon his skull with the doorknob, once, twice, three times, the blood splattering out like a shitty hose.

James' blood starts to mix with Tully's. The floor is overwhelmed by a sickly red colour that looks darker and thicker than the blood that rises to clot a cut or falls to shed uterine lining. Nora kneels, to run her hands through it, to cover herself in it, to see if it feels like Tully's warmth, or James' love. But it just feels like gelatinous water, like crimson buttermilk, like a muddy puddle of haemoglobin and plasma and platelets.

He's choking on her blood, she thinks.

Good, she thinks.