

Nicole Gregory



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The Fall: A Holt Universe Short Story

Full Trigger Warning List

Non-Spoiler Overview

The Fall is a short work of dark literary fiction about active opioid addiction, told from inside it over the course of a single night. It depicts withdrawal, drug use, overdose, drug-induced psychosis, sexual assault, and childhood abuse, all on the page and in close first person. The narrator is unreliable, degrading toward women, and does not intervene in the harm he witnesses. There is no recovery arc within these pages and the story ends in crisis.

Reader Notes

- This story runs alongside the final days of *Terms of Surrender* and reveals how that book ends
- It stands alone and requires no knowledge of the series
- The story ends in crisis. There is no recovery arc within these pages
- The ending is deliberately ambiguous
- Content here is depicted rather than referenced, which is the opposite of how the *Terms* books handle their hardest material
- If addiction has touched your life, this may be one to skip, and that is okay

Questions or Specific Concerns?

If you have specific content concerns, feel free to reach out at nicolegregoryauthor@gmail.com. I'm always happy to help readers make informed choices.

Detailed Content Notes (May Contain Mild Spoilers)

Addiction & Withdrawal

- Active opioid addiction, depicted on-page and sustained throughout
- Physical withdrawal in detail: pain, nausea, vomiting, sweating, muscle spasms, temperature dysregulation
- Compulsive drug-seeking behavior, including searching floors for lost pills
- Pill use, intravenous drug use by a secondary character, and needles depicted on-page
- Heroin preparation and use, including melting and injecting
- Overdose, depicted on-page
- A secondary character's near-fatal overdose witnessed by others
- Theft of drugs
- Drugs exchanged for sexual acts
- Prior arrests, prior overdoses, and a long history of relapse referenced

Drug-Induced Psychosis & Dissociation

- Sustained auditory hallucinations, including voices repeating the narrator's name and speaking to him directly
- Visual hallucinations, including insects, a spreading stain, shifting shadows, and a face in the wall that speaks
- Tactile hallucination
- Command hallucination
- Persecutory delusion and paranoia in public settings
- Depersonalization, derealization, and loss of time
- The narrator does not reliably distinguish hallucination from event, and neither does the text

Sexual Content & Sexual Violence

- Explicit sexual content between characters in active addiction, deliberately unerotic and not romantic
- Rough sex including forced depth, gagging, and impact, framed as joyless rather than consensual play
- Sexual coercion, with drugs offered as payment for sexual acts
- Sexual assault on-page: a woman's head held in place during forced oral sex while she struggles for air
- A second on-page sexual encounter obtained through coercion, witnessed by a room of onlookers
- Both assaults are witnessed by the narrator, who does not intervene
- Questions of capacity to consent while heavily intoxicated, unresolved by the text
- Transactional sex

Degrading Language & Misogyny

- Sustained degrading and dehumanizing internal narration toward women
- Slurs directed at women, spoken aloud and in narration
- A woman explicitly compared to a farm animal in an extended passage
- "Good girl" and similar language used degradingly rather than affectionately
- Self-directed degradation throughout, including internal repetition of contempt

Child Abuse & Domestic Violence (Flashback, On-Page)

- Graphic depiction of domestic violence witnessed by a child, including significant blood
- A father's physical assault of a mother, rendered in fragments and images
- Verbal abuse of a child by a parent
- A child hiding during violence and remaining silent
- A child beaten by other children while his brother is unable to stop it
- Lasting guilt over childhood inaction, central to the narrator's self-concept

Suicidal Ideation & Self-Destruction

- Passive suicidal ideation, including statements about dying alone and being unable to continue living
- Deliberate escalation of drug intake during acute distress
- A fall from height, with intent and outcome both left ambiguous
- Belief that no one would notice or grieve his death

Medical Content

- Overdose and its physical progression

Religion & Faith

- The Lord's Prayer intrudes during a traumatic sequence and is depicted as unanswered
- Explicit despair regarding God's absence and indifference
- Prayer depicted as futile

Physical Squalor & Body Content

- Graphic depiction of unsanitary living conditions
- Vomiting on-page
- Malnutrition and emaciation described in detail, including a woman's visible ribs
- Self-neglect and physical deterioration
- Public stigma, staring, and open avoidance of the narrator and his partner

Additional Content

- Firearms present in a scene, not fired
- Family estrangement, including theft from family members and pawning of gifts
- Strong language throughout, sustained and explicit