

Tully (2018)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 39 min.

Our content ratings (1-10): Violence 1; Language 2; Sex/Nudity 2.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

*Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.*

*I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.*

Psalm 69:1-3



Night Nanny Tully (lft) watches as Marlo feeds her baby. (c) Focus Features

Although parenthood can be a joyful calling, it can also overtax our strengths and lead us to utter the desperate prayer of the psalmist. When it happens to Marlo, launched into her third pregnancy at the beginning of this film, her deliverance does not come from God but a present from her well-off brother Craig.

Marlo (Charlize Theron) and Drew (Ron Livingston) are immersed in the quotidian details of parenting young son Jonah, about to be kicked out of his school because of his undiagnosed quirky behavior, an 8-year-old daughter Sarah (Lia Frankland) who feels neglected, and a new baby in need of feedings and diaper changes in the wee hours of the morning—and whose name is not revealed until well into the movie.

Enter at last the movie's namesake, a 26-year-old exuberant woman working as a night nanny. It was Marlo's wealthy brother Craig (Mark Duplass) who had offered to pay the first month's wages for such a help, but his sister had at first refused. However, as she felt more and more the stress, especially after the school principal had told her that Jonah was not a good fit in her school, Marlo gave in and phoned the Tully.

Life immediately begins to improve, with Tully not only awakening her for the night feedings and then allowing her to slip back into restful sleep, but also cleaning the house instead of sitting idly by during the night hours. She even bakes cupcakes for a school event. As they talk Marlo finds her an enjoyable companion, full of wisdom that seems beyond her years. In a strangely bizarre scene that is understandable only later, Tully even reawakens the couple's sex life in a *ménage à trois*. One night at Tully's suggestion they return to Marlo's old Brooklyn haunts for a girls' night out. Marlo, in an alcoholic stupor, car crashes into river, and it is while Marlo is recovering in the hospital that there are hints of Tully's identity—which makes sense out of the weird bedroom *ménage-et-trois*. Soon after Tully abruptly tells her now dependent friend that she must move on

Director Jason Reitman and screenwriter Diablo Cody have given us a real teaser of a film that realistically depicts the daunting aspects of motherhood, especially during the initial months following a birth when the husband is so work-distracted that he does not comprehend what an overwhelming task motherhood can be. This is a good film for parents of

young children to see and discuss, providing that the husbands do more listening than talking. Although Marlo is not the praying kind, I think the psalmist words, uttered in desperation—" I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me"—express her own. And "Tully's" attempt to bolster her—"Despite what you may think sometimes, you've SUCCEEDED. You've succeeded in creating a stable 'boring life' for yourself with people who depend on you. YOU SHOULD BE PROUD"—suggest that Marlo is on the road to leaving that desperation behind.

This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the August 2018 issue of Visual Parables.