



one

They had flown from England to Minneapolis to look at a toilet. The simple truth of this only struck Annie when they were actually inside it: apart from the graffiti on the walls, some of which made some kind of reference to the toilet's importance in musical history, it was dank, dark, smelly and entirely unremarkable. Americans were very good at making the most of their heritage, but there wasn't much even they could do here.

"Have you got the camera, Annie?" said Duncan.

"Yes. But what do you want a picture *of*?"

"Just, you know . . ."

"No."

"Well . . . the toilet."

"What, the . . . What do you call those things?"

"The urinals. Yeah."

“Do you want to be in it?”

“Shall I pretend to have a pee?”

“If you want.”

So Duncan stood in front of the middle of the three urinals, his hands placed convincingly in front of him, and smiled back over his shoulder at Annie.

“Got it?”

“I’m not sure the flash worked.”

“One more. Be silly to come all the way here and not get a good one.”

This time Duncan stood just inside one of the stalls, with the door open. The light was better there, for some reason. Annie took as good a picture of a man in a toilet as one could reasonably expect. When Duncan moved, she could see that this toilet, like just about every other one she’d ever seen in a rock club, was blocked.

“Come on,” said Annie. “He didn’t even want me in here.”

This was true. The guy behind the bar had initially suspected that they were looking for a place where they could shoot up, or perhaps have sex. Eventually, and hurtfully, the barman had clearly decided that they were capable of doing neither thing.

Duncan took one last look and shook his head. “If toilets could talk, eh?”

Annie was glad this one couldn't. Duncan would have wanted to chat to it all night.

Most people are unaware of Tucker Crowe's music, let alone some of the darker moments of his career, so the story of what may or may not have happened to him in the restroom of the Pits Club is probably worth repeating here. Crowe was in Minneapolis for a show and had turned up at the Pits to see a local band called the Napoleon Solos which he'd heard good things about. (Some Crowe completists, Duncan being one, own a copy of the local band's one and only album, *The Napoleon Solos Sing Their Songs and Play Their Guitars*.) In the middle of the set, Tucker went to the toilet. Nobody knows what happened in there, but when he came out, he went straight back to his hotel and phoned his manager to cancel the rest of the tour. The next morning he began what we must now think of as his retirement. That was in June 1986. Nothing more has been heard of him since—no new recordings, no gigs, no interviews. If you love Tucker Crowe as much as Duncan and a couple of thousand other people in the world do, that toilet has a lot to answer for. And since, as Duncan had so rightly observed, it can't speak, Crowe fans have to speak on its behalf. Some claim that Tucker saw God, or

one of His representatives, in there; others claim he had a near-death experience after an overdose. Another school of thought has it that he caught his girlfriend having sex with his bass player in there, although Annie found this theory a little fanciful. Could the sight of a woman screwing a musician in a toilet really have resulted in twenty-two years of silence? Perhaps it could. Perhaps it was just that Annie had never experienced passion that intense. Anyway. Whatever. All you need to know is that something profound and life-changing took place in the smallest room of a small club.

Annie and Duncan were in the middle of a Tucker Crowe pilgrimage. They had wandered around New York, looking at various clubs and bars that had some kind of Crowe connection, although most of these sites of historic interest were now designer clothes stores, or branches of McDonald's. They had been to his childhood home in Bozeman, Montana, where, thrillingly, an old lady came out of her house to tell them that Tucker used to clean her husband's old Buick when he was a kid. The Crowe family home was small and pleasant and was now owned by the manager of a small printing business, who was surprised that they had traveled all the way from England to see the outside of his house, but who didn't ask them in. From Montana they flew to Memphis, where they visited the site of the old American Sound Studio (the studio itself having

been knocked down in 1990), where Tucker, drunk and grieving, recorded *Juliet*, his legendary breakup album, and the one Annie liked the most. Still to come: Berkeley, California, where Juliet—in real life a former model and socialite called Julie Beatty—still lived to this day. They would stand outside her house, just as they had stood outside the printer's house, until Duncan could think of no reason to carry on looking, or until Julie called the police, a fate that had befallen a couple of other Crowe fans that Duncan knew from the message boards.

Annie didn't regret the trip. She'd been to the U.S. a couple of times, to San Francisco and New York, but she liked the way Tucker was taking them to places she'd otherwise never have visited. Bozeman, for example, turned out to be a beautiful little mountain town, surrounded by exotic-sounding ranges she'd never heard of: the Big Belt, the Tobacco Root, the Spanish Peaks. After staring at the small and unremarkable house, they walked into town and sipped iced tea in the sunshine outside an organic café, while in the distance the odd Spanish Peak, or possibly the top of a Tobacco Root, threatened to puncture the cold blue sky. She'd had worse mornings than that on holidays that had promised much more. It was a sort of random, pin-sticking tour of America, as far as she was concerned. She got sick of hearing about Tucker, of course, and talking about him and listening to him and

attempting to understand the reasons behind every creative and personal decision he'd ever made. But she got sick of hearing about him at home, too, and she'd rather get sick of him in Montana or Tennessee than in Goole-ness, the small seaside town in England where she shared a house with Duncan.

The one place that wasn't on the itinerary was Tyrone, Pennsylvania, where Tucker was believed to live, although, as with all orthodoxies, there were heretics: two or three of the Crowe community subscribed to the theory—interesting but preposterous, according to Duncan—that he'd been living in New Zealand since the early nineties. Tyrone hadn't even been mentioned as a possible destination when they'd been planning the trip, and Annie thought she knew why. A couple of years ago, one of the fans went out to Tyrone, hung around, eventually located what he understood to be Tucker Crowe's farm; he came back with a photograph of an alarmingly grizzled-looking man aiming a shotgun at him. Annie had seen the picture, many times, and she found it distressing. The man's face was disfigured by rage and fear, as if everything he'd worked for and believed in was in the process of being destroyed by a Canon Sure Shot. Duncan wasn't too concerned about the rape of Crowe's privacy: the fan, Neil Ritchie, had achieved a kind of Zapruder level of fame and respect among the faithful that Annie suspected

Duncan rather envied. What had perturbed him was that Tucker Crowe had called Neil Ritchie a “fucking asshole.” Duncan couldn’t have borne that.

After the visit to the restroom at the Pits, they took advice from the concierge and ate at a Thai restaurant in the Riverfront District a couple of blocks away. Minneapolis, it turned out, was on the Mississippi—who knew, apart from Americans, and just about anyone else who’d paid attention in geography lessons?—so Annie ended up ticking off something else she’d never expected to see, although here at the less romantic end it looked disappointingly like the Thames. Duncan was animated and chatty, still unable quite to believe that he’d been inside a place that had occupied so much of his imaginative energy over the years.

“Do you think it’s possible to teach a whole course on the toilet?”

“With you just sitting on it, you mean? You wouldn’t get it past Health and Safety.”

“I didn’t mean that.”

Sometimes Annie wished that Duncan had a keener sense of humor—a keener sense that something might be meant humorously, anyway. She knew it was too late to hope for actual jokes.

“I meant, teach a whole course on the toilet in the Pits.”

“No.”

Duncan looked at her.

“Are you teasing me?”

“No. I’m saying that a whole course about Tucker Crowe’s twenty-year-old visit to the toilet wouldn’t be very interesting.”

“I’d include other things.”

“Other toilet visits in history?”

“No. Other career-defining moments.”

“Elvis had a good toilet moment. Pretty career-defining, too.”

“Dying’s different. Too unwilling. John Smithers wrote an essay for the website about that. Creative death versus actual death. It was actually pretty interesting.”

Annie nodded enthusiastically, while at the same time hoping that Duncan wouldn’t print it off and put it in front of her when they got home.

“I promise that after this holiday I won’t be so Tucker-centric,” he said.

“That’s okay. I don’t mind.”

“I’ve wanted to do this for a long time.”

“I know.”

“I’ll have got him out of my system.”

“I hope not.”

“Really?”

“What would there be left of you, if you did?”

She hadn't meant it cruelly. She'd been with Duncan for nearly fifteen years, and Tucker Crowe had always been part of the package, like a disability. To begin with, the condition hadn't prevented him from living a normal life: yes, he'd written a book, as yet unpublished, about Tucker, lectured on him, contributed to a radio documentary for the BBC and organized conventions, but somehow these activities had always seemed to Annie like isolated episodes, sporadic attacks.

And then the Internet came along and changed everything. When, a little later than everyone else, Duncan discovered how it all worked, he set up a website called “Can Anybody Hear Me?”—the title of a track from an obscure EP recorded after the wounding failure of Crowe's first album. Until then, the nearest fellow fan had lived in Manchester, sixty or seventy miles away, and Tucker met up with him once or twice a year; now the nearest fans lived in Duncan's laptop, and there were hundreds of them, from all around the world, and Duncan spoke to them all the time. There seemed to be a surprising amount to talk about. The website had a “Latest News” section, which never failed to amuse Annie, Tucker no longer being a

man who did an awful lot. (“As far as we know,” Duncan always said.) There was always something that passed for news among the faithful, though—a Crowe night on an Internet radio station, a new article, a new album from a former band member, an interview with an engineer. The bulk of the content, though, consisted of essays analyzing lyrics, or discussing influences, or conjecturing, apparently inexhaustibly, about the silence. It wasn’t as if Duncan didn’t have other interests. He had a specialist knowledge of 1970s American independent cinema and the novels of Nathanael West and he was developing a nice new line in HBO television series—he thought he might be ready to teach *The Wire* in the not-too-distant future. But these were all flirtations, by comparison. Tucker Crowe was his life partner. If Crowe were to die—to die in real life, as it were, rather than creatively—Duncan would lead the mourning. (He’d already written the obituary. Every now and again he’d worry out loud about whether he should show it to a reputable newspaper now, or wait until it was needed.)

If Tucker was the husband, then Annie should somehow have become the mistress, but of course that wasn’t right—the word was much too exotic and implied a level of sexual activity that would horrify them both nowadays. It would have daunted them even in the early days of their relationship. Sometimes Annie felt less like a

girlfriend than a school chum who'd come to visit in the holidays and stayed for the next twenty years. They had both moved to the same English seaside town at around the same time, Duncan to finish his thesis and Annie to teach, and they had been introduced by mutual friends who could see that, if nothing else, they could talk about books and music, go to films, travel to London occasionally to see exhibitions and gigs. Gooleness wasn't a sophisticated town. There was no arts cinema, there was no gay community, there wasn't even a Waterstone's (the nearest one was up the road in Hull), and they fell upon each other with relief. They started drinking together in the evenings and sleeping over at weekends, until eventually the sleepovers turned into something indistinguishable from cohabitation. And they had stayed like that forever, stuck in a perpetual postgraduate world where gigs and books and films mattered more to them than they did to other people of their age.

The decision not to have children had never been made, and nor had there been any discussion resulting in a postponement of the decision. It wasn't that kind of a sleepover. Annie could imagine herself as a mother, but Duncan was nobody's idea of a father, and anyway, neither of them would have felt comfortable applying cement to the relationship in that way. That wasn't what they were for. And now, with an irritating predictability, she was

going through what everyone had told her she would go through: she was aching for a child. Her aches were brought on by all the usual mournful-happy life events: Christmas, the pregnancy of a friend, the pregnancy of a complete stranger she saw in the street. And she wanted a child for all the usual reasons, as far as she could tell. She wanted to feel unconditional love, rather than the faint conditional affection she could scrape together for Duncan every now and again; she wanted to be held by someone who would never question the embrace, the why or the who or the how long. There was another reason, too: she needed to know that she could have one, that there was life in her. Duncan had put her to sleep, and in her sleep she'd been desexed.

She'd get over all this, presumably; or at least one day it would become a wistful regret, rather than a sharp hunger. But this holiday hadn't been designed to comfort her. There was an argument that you might as well change nappies as hang out in men's lavatories taking pictures. The amount of time they had for themselves was beginning to feel sort of . . . *decadent*.

At breakfast in their cheap and nasty hotel in downtown San Francisco, Annie read the *Chronicle* and decided she didn't want to see the hedge obscuring the front lawn

of Julie Beatty's house in Berkeley. There were plenty of other things to do in the Bay Area. She wanted to see Haight-Ashbury, she wanted to buy a book at City Lights, she wanted to visit Alcatraz, she wanted to walk across the Golden Gate Bridge. There was an exhibition of postwar West Coast art on at the Museum of Modern Art just down the street. She was happy that Tucker had lured them out to California, but she didn't want to spend a morning watching Julie's neighbors decide whether they constituted a security risk.

"You're joking," said Duncan.

She laughed.

"No," she said. "I really can think of better things to do."

"When we've come all this way? Why have you gone like this all of a sudden? Aren't you interested? I mean, supposing she drives out of her garage while we're outside?"

"Then I'd feel even more stupid," she said. "She'd look at me and think, 'I wouldn't expect any different from him. He's one of the creepy guys. But what's a *woman* doing there?'"

"You're having me on."

"I'm really not, Duncan. We're in San Francisco for twenty-four hours and I don't know when I'll be back. Going to some woman's house . . . If you had a day in London, would you spend it outside somebody's house in, I don't know, Gospel Oak?"

“But if you’ve actually come to see somebody’s house in Gospel Oak . . . And it’s not just some woman’s house, you know that. Things happened there. I’m going to stand where he stood.”

No, it wasn’t just any house. Everybody, apart from just about everybody, knew that. Julie Beatty had been living there with her first husband, who taught at Berkeley, when she met Tucker at a party thrown by Francis Ford Coppola. She left her husband that night. Very shortly afterward, however, she thought better of it all and went home to patch things up. That was the story, anyway. Annie had never really understood how Duncan and his fellow fans could be quite so certain about tiny private tumults that took place decades ago, but they were. “You and Your Perfect Life,” the seven-minute song that ends the album, is supposed to be about the night Tucker stood outside the family home, “Throwing stones at the window / ’Til he came to the door / So where were you, Mrs. Steven Balfour?” The husband wasn’t called Steven Balfour, needless to say, and the choice of a fictitious name had inevitably provoked endless speculation on the message boards. Duncan’s theory was that he had been named after the British prime minister, the man who was accused by Lloyd George of turning the House of Lords into “Mr. Balfour’s poodle”—Juliet, by extension, has become her husband’s poodle. This interpretation is now accepted as definitive

by the Tucker community, and if you look up “You and Your Perfect Life” on Wikipedia, apparently, you’ll see Duncan’s name in the footnotes, with a link to his essay. Nobody on the website had ever dared wonder aloud whether the surname had been chosen simply because it rhymed with the word “door.”

Annie loved “You and Your Perfect Life.” She loved its relentless anger, and the way Tucker moved from autobiography to social commentary by turning the song into a rant about how smart women got obliterated by their men. She didn’t usually like howling guitar solos, but she liked the way that the howling guitar solo in “Perfect Life” seemed just as articulate and as angry as the lyrics. And she loved the irony of it all—the way that Tucker, the man wagging his finger at Steven Balfour, had obliterated Julie more completely than her husband had ever managed. She would be the woman who broke Tucker’s heart forever. Annie felt sorry for Julie, who’d had to deal with men like Duncan throwing stones at her windows, metaphorically and probably literally, every now and again, ever since the song was released. But she envied her, too. Who wouldn’t want to make a man that passionate, that unhappy, that inspired? If you couldn’t write songs yourself, then surely what Julie had done was the next best thing?

She still didn’t want to see the house, though. After breakfast she took a cab to the other side of the Golden

Gate Bridge and walked back toward the city, the salt wind somehow sharpening her joy in being alone.

Duncan felt slightly odd, going to Juliet's place without Annie. She tended to arrange their transport to wherever they were going, and she was the one who knew the way back to wherever they had come from. He would rather have devoted his mental energy to Julie, the person, and *Juliet*, the album; he was intending to listen to it straight through twice, the first time in its released form, the second time with the songs placed in the order that Tucker Crowe originally wanted them, according to the sound engineer in charge of the sessions. But that wasn't going to work out now, because he was going to need all his concentration for the BART. As far as he could tell, he had to get on at Powell Street and take the red line up to North Berkeley. It looked easy but, of course, it wasn't, because once he was down on the platform he couldn't find any way of telling what was a red-line train and what wasn't, and he couldn't ask anyone. Asking somebody would make it look as though he wasn't a native, and though this wouldn't matter in Rome or Paris or even in London, it mattered here, where so many things that were important to him had happened. And because he couldn't ask, he ended up on a yellow-line train, only he couldn't

tell it was yellow until he got to Rockridge, which meant that he had to go back to the 19th St. Oakland stop and change. What was wrong with her? He knew she wasn't as devoted to Tucker Crowe as he was, but he'd thought that in recent years she'd started to get it, properly. A couple of times he'd come home to find her playing "You and Your Perfect Life," although he'd been unable to interest her in the infamous but superior Bottom Line bootleg version, when Tucker had smashed his guitar to smithereens at the end of the solo. (The sound was a little muddy, admittedly, and an annoying drunk person kept shouting "Rock 'n' roll!" into the bootlegger's microphone during the last verse, but if it was anger and pain she was after, then this was the one.) He'd tried to pretend that her decision not to come was perfectly understandable, but the truth was, he was hurt. Hurt and, temporarily at least, lost.

Getting to North Berkeley station felt like an achievement in itself, and he allowed himself the luxury of asking for directions to Edith Street as a reward. It was fine, not knowing the way to a residential street. Even natives couldn't be expected to know everything. Except of course the moment he opened his mouth, the woman he picked on wanted to tell him that she'd spent a year in Kensington, London, after she'd graduated.

He hadn't expected the streets to be quite so long and hilly, nor the houses quite so far apart, and by the time he

found the right house, he was sweaty and thirsty, while at the same time bursting for a pee. There was no doubt he'd have been clearer-headed if he'd stopped somewhere near the BART station for a drink and a visit to the restroom. But he'd been thirsty and in need of a toilet before, and had always resisted the temptation to break into a stranger's house.

When he got to 1131 Edith Street, there was a kid sitting on the pavement outside, his back against a fence that looked as though it might have been erected simply to stop him from getting any further. He was in his late teens, with long, greasy hair and a wispy goatee, and when he realized that Duncan had come to look at the house, he stood up and dusted himself off.

"Yo," he said.

Duncan cleared his throat. He couldn't bring himself to return the greeting, but he offered a "Hi" instead of a "Hello," just to show that he had an informal register.

"They're not home," said the kid. "I think they might have gone to the East Coast. The Hamptons or some shit like that."

"Oh. Right. Oh well."

"You know them?"

“No, no. I just . . . You know, I’m a, well, a Crowologist. I was just in the neighborhood, so I thought, you know . . .”

“You from England?”

Duncan nodded.

“You came all the way from England to see where Tucker Crowe threw his stones?” The kid laughed, so Duncan laughed, too.

“No, no. God no. Ha! I had some business in the city, and I thought, you know . . . What are you doing here, anyway?”

“*Juliet* is my favorite album of all time.”

Duncan nodded. The teacher in him wanted to point out the non sequitur; the fan understood completely. How could he not? He didn’t get the sidewalk-sitting, though. Duncan’s plan had been to look, imagine the trajectory of the stones, maybe take a picture and then leave. The boy, however, seemed to regard the house as if it were a place of spiritual significance, capable of promoting a profound inner peace.

“I’ve been here, like, six or seven times?” the boy said. “Always blows me away.”

“I know what you mean,” said Duncan, although he didn’t. Perhaps it was his age, or his Englishness, but he wasn’t being blown away, and he hadn’t expected to be, either. It was, after all, a pleasant detached house they

were standing outside, not the Taj Mahal. In any case, the need to pee was preventing any real appreciation of the moment.

“You wouldn’t happen to know . . . What’s your name?”

“Elliott.”

“I’m Duncan.”

“Hi, Duncan.”

“Elliott, you wouldn’t happen to know if there’s a Starbucks near here? Or something? I need a restroom.”

“Ha!” said the kid.

Duncan stared at him. What kind of answer was that?

“See, I do know one right near here. But I kind of promised myself I wouldn’t use it again.”

“Right,” said Duncan. “But . . . Would it matter if I did?”

“Kind of. Because I’d still be breaking the promise.”

“Oh. Well, as I don’t really understand what kind of promise you can make with regard to a public lavatory, I’m not sure I can help you with your ethical dilemma.”

The boy laughed. “I love the way you English talk. ‘Ethical dilemma.’ That’s great.”

Duncan didn’t disabuse him, although he did wonder how many of his students back home would even have been able to repeat the phrase accurately, let alone use it themselves.

“But you don’t think you can help me.”

“Oh. Well. Maybe. How about if I told you how to find it but I didn’t come with you?”

“I wasn’t really expecting you to come with me, to be honest.”

“No. Right. I should explain. The nearest toilet to here is in there.” Elliott pointed down the driveway toward Juliet’s house.

“Yes, well, I suppose it would be,” said Duncan. “But that doesn’t really help me.”

“Except I know where they keep their spare key.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“No. I’ve been inside like three times? Once to use the shower. A couple times just to see what I could see. I never steal anything big. Just, you know, paperweights and shit. Souvenirs.”

Duncan examined the boy’s face for evidence of an elaborate joke, a satirical dig at Crowologists, and decided that Elliott hadn’t made a joke since he’d turned seventeen.

“You let yourself into their house when they’re out?”

The boy shrugged. “Yeah. I feel bad about it, which is why I wasn’t sure about telling you.”

Duncan suddenly noticed that on the ground there was a chalk drawing of a pair of feet, and an arrowed line pointing toward the house. Tucker’s feet, presumably, and

Tucker's stones. He wished he hadn't seen the drawing. It gave him less to do.

"Well, I can't do that."

"No. Sure. I understand."

"So there's nothing else?"

Edith Street was long and leafy, and the next cross street was long and leafy, too. It was the sort of American suburb where residents had to get into their cars to buy a pint of milk.

"Not for a mile or two."

Duncan puffed out his cheeks, a gesture, he realized even as he was making it, intended to prepare the way for the decision he'd already made. He could have gone behind a hedge; he could have left that second, walked back to the BART station and found a café, walked back again if he needed to. Which he didn't, really, because he'd seen all there was to see. That was the root of the problem. If more had been . . . *laid on* for people like him, he wouldn't have had to create his own excitement. It wouldn't have killed her to mark the significance of the place in some way, would it? With a discreet plaque or something? He hadn't been prepared for the mundanity of Juliet's house, just as he hadn't really been prepared for the malodorous functionality of the men's room in Minneapolis.

"A mile or two? I'm not sure I can wait that long."

“Up to you.”

“Where’s the key?”

“There’s a loose brick in the porch there. Low down.”

“And you’re sure the key’s still there? When did you last look?”

“Honestly? I went in just before you came. I didn’t take a single thing. But I can never believe that I’m standing in Juliet’s house, you know? Fucking *Juliet*, man!”

Duncan knew that he and Elliott weren’t the same. Elliott had surely never written about Crowe—or, if he had, the work would almost certainly have been unpublishable. Duncan also doubted whether Elliott had the emotional maturity to appreciate the breathtaking accomplishment of *Juliet* (which, as far as Duncan was concerned, was a darker, deeper, more fully realized collection of songs than the over-rated *Blood on the Tracks*), and nor would he have been able to cite its influences: Dylan and Leonard Cohen, of course, but also Dylan Thomas, Johnny Cash, Gram Parsons, Shelley, the Book of Job, Camus, Pinter, Beckett and early Dolly Parton. But people who didn’t understand all this might look at them and decide, erroneously, that they were similar in some way. Both of them had the same need to stand in fucking Juliet’s house, for example. Duncan followed Elliott down the short driveway to the house and watched as the boy groped for the key and opened the door.

. . .

The house was dark—all the blinds were down—and smelled of incense, or maybe some kind of exotic pot-pourri. Duncan couldn't have lived with it, but presumably Julie Beatty and her family weren't sick with nerves all the time when they were in residence, the way Duncan was feeling now. The smell sharpened his fear and made him wonder whether he might throw up.

He'd made an enormous mistake, but there was no undoing it. He was inside, so even if he didn't use the toilet, he'd still committed the crime. Idiot. And idiot boy, too, for persuading him that this was a good idea.

"So there's a small toilet down here, and it's got some cool stuff on the walls. Cartoons and shit. But the bathroom upstairs, you see her makeup and towels and everything. It's spooky. I mean, not spooky to her, probably. But spooky if you only kind of half believe she even existed."

Duncan understood the appeal of seeing Julie Beatty's makeup absolutely, and his understanding added to his sense of self-loathing.

"Yes, well, I haven't got time to mess around," said Duncan, hoping that Elliott wouldn't point out the obvious holes in the assertion. "Just point me toward the downstairs one."

They were in a large hallway with several doors leading

off it. Elliott nodded at one of them, and Duncan marched toward it briskly, an Englishman with pressing West Coast business appointments who'd troweled some time out of his hectic schedule to stand on a sidewalk, and then break into someone's house for the hell of it.

He made the pee as splashy as possible, just to prove to Elliott that the need was genuine. He was disappointed by the promised artwork, however. There were a couple of cartoons, one of Julie and one of a middle-aged man who still looked something like the old photos Duncan had seen of her husband, but they looked like they'd been done by one of those artists who hang out at tourist traps, and in any case they were both post-Tucker, which meant that they could have been pictures of any American middle-class couple. He was washing his hands in the tiny sink when Elliott shouted through the door, "Oh, and there's the drawing. That's still up in their dining room."

"What drawing?"

"The drawing that Tucker did of her, back in the day."

Duncan opened the door and stared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"You know Tucker's an artist, right?"

"No." And then, because this made him sound like an amateur, "Well, yes. Of course. But I didn't know . . ." He didn't know what he didn't know, but Elliott didn't notice.

"Yeah," said Elliott. "In here."

The dining room was at the back of the house, with French windows leading out onto a terrace, presumably, or a lawn—there were curtains drawn over them. The drawing was hung over the fireplace, and it was big, maybe four feet by three, a head-and-shoulders portrait of Julie in profile, half squinting through her cigarette smoke at something in the middle distance. She looked, in fact, as if she were studying another work of art. It was a beautiful portrait, reverential and romantic, but not idealized—it was too sad, for a start. It somehow seemed to suggest the impending end of his relationship with the sitter, although of course Duncan might have been imagining that. He might have been imagining the meaning, he might have been imagining the power and charm. Indeed, he could have been imagining the drawing itself.

Duncan moved in closer. There was a signature in the bottom left-hand corner, and that was thrilling enough to require separate examination and contemplation. In a quarter of a century of fandom, he'd never seen Tucker's handwriting. And while he was staring at the signature, he realized something else: that for the first time since 1986 he hadn't been able to respond to a piece of work by Crowe. So he stopped looking at the signature and stepped back to look at the picture again.

"You should really see it in the daylight," said Elliott. He drew back the curtains on the French windows, and

almost immediately they found themselves staring at a gardener mowing the lawn. He saw them and started shouting and gesticulating, and before Duncan knew it, he was out the front door and halfway up the road, running and sweating, his legs shaking with nerves, his heart pounding so hard he thought he might not make it to the end of the street and possible safety.

It wasn't until the doors on the BART closed behind him that he felt safe. He'd lost Elliott almost immediately—he'd run out of that house as fast as he could, but the boy was faster, and almost immediately out of sight. And he never wanted to see him again anyway. It had been pretty much all his fault, there was no doubt about that; he'd provided both the temptation and the means to break in. Duncan had been stupid, yes, but his powers of reasoning had been scrambled by his bladder, and . . . Elliott had corrupted him, was the truth of it. Scholars like him were always going to be vulnerable to the excesses of obsessives, because, yes, they shared a tiny strand of the same DNA. His heart rate began to slow. He was calming himself down with the familiar stories he always told himself when doubt crept in.

When the train stopped at the next station, however, a Latino who looked a little like the gardener in the back

garden got into Duncan's car, and his stomach shot toward his knees while his heart leaped halfway up his windpipe, and no amount of self-justification could help him put his internal organs back where they belonged.

What really frightened him was how spectacularly his transgression had paid off. All these years he'd done nothing more than read and listen and think, and though he'd been stimulated by these activities, what had he uncovered, really? And yet by behaving like a teenage hooligan with a screw loose, he had made a major breakthrough. He was the only Crowologist in the world (Elliott was nobody's idea of a Crowologist) who knew about that picture, and he could never tell anyone about it, unless he wished to own up to being mentally unbalanced. Every other year spent on his chosen subject had been barren compared to the last couple of hours. But that couldn't be the way forward, surely? He didn't want to be the kind of man who plunged his arms into trash cans in the hope of finding a letter, or a piece of bacon rind that Crowe might have chewed. By the time he got back to the hotel, he had convinced himself he was finished with Tucker Crowe.

JULIET

FROM WIKIPEDIA, THE FREE ENCYCLOPEDIA

Juliet, released in April 1986, is singer-songwriter Tucker Crowe's sixth and (at the time of writing) last studio album. Crowe went into retirement later that year and has made no music of any kind since. At the time it received ecstatic reviews, although like the rest of Crowe's work it sold only moderately, reaching number 29 on the Billboard charts. Since then, however, it has been widely recognized by critics as a classic breakup album to rank with Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks* and Springsteen's *Tunnel of Love*. *Juliet* tells the story of Crowe's relationship with Julie Beatty, a noted beauty and L.A. scenester of the early eighties, from its beginnings ("And You Are?") to its bitter conclusion ("You and Your Perfect Life"), when Beatty returned to her husband, Michael Posey. The second side of the album is regarded as one of the most tortured sequences of songs in popular music.

NOTES

Various musicians who played on the album have talked about Crowe's fragile state of mind during the recording of the

album. Scotty Phillips has described how Crowe came at him with an oxyacetylene torch before the guitarist's incendiary solo on "You and Your Perfect Life."

In one of his last interviews, Crowe expressed surprise at the enthusiasm for the record. "Yeah, people keep telling me they love it. But I don't really understand them. To me, it's the sound of someone having his fingernails pulled out. Who wants to listen to that?"

Julie Beatty claimed in a 1992 interview that she no longer owned a copy of *Juliet*. "I don't need that in my life. If I want someone yelling at me for forty-five minutes, I'll call my mother."

Various musicians, including the late Jeff Buckley, Michael Stipe and Peter Buck of REM, and Chris Martin of Coldplay, have talked about the influence of *Juliet* on their careers. Buck's side project The Minus Five and Coldplay both recorded songs for the tribute album released in 2002, *Wherefore Art Thou?*

TRACK LISTING

SIDE 1:

- 1) And You Are?
- 2) Adultery
- 3) We're in Trouble
- 4) In Too Deep
- 5) Who Do You Love?

SIDE 2:

- 1) Dirty Dishes
- 2) The Better Man
- 3) The Twentieth Call of the Day
- 4) Blood Ties
- 5) You and Your Perfect Life