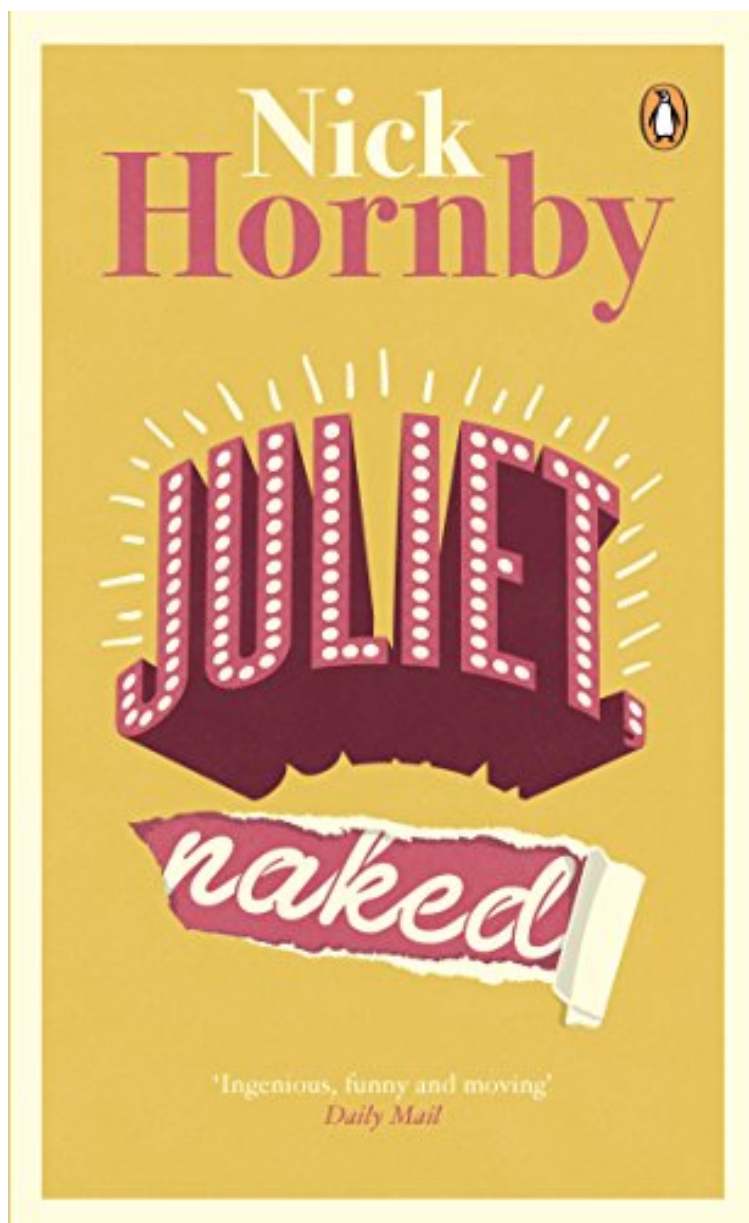


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Juliet, Naked



Par Nick Hornby
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAnnie and Duncan are a mid-thirties couple who have reached a fork in the road, realising their shared interest in the reclusive musician Tucker Crowe (in Duncan's case, an obsession rather than an interest) is not enough to hold them together any more. When Annie hates Tucker's 'new release', a terrible demo of his most famous album, it's the last straw - Duncan cheats on her and she promptly throws him out. Via an internet discussion forum, Annie's harsh opinion reaches Tucker himself, who couldn't agree more. He and Annie start an unlikely correspondence which teaches them both something about moving on

from years of wasted time. Nick Hornby's compelling new novel, four years after *A Long Way Down*, is about the nature of creativity and obsession, and how two lonely people can gradually find each other. Extraitone 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's real life former model and socialite called Julie Beattystill 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 caf, 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 Gooleness, 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 Tuckercentric," 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 year...