

GEOFFREY BEWLEY

ALL IN TOGETHER

Susan and I went up to the Greeks' for a meal and it was dark when we got back. We saw people standing in the street outside the houses. I could see Anne's long blonde hair. She and Max and Chris were looking up at the windows in the corner terrace.

Max said to us, "Hicks is back. He's up in 97."

Anne said, "Samantha let him in."

I said, "Who let Samantha back in?"

Chris said, "Steve let her in."

Anne said, "Steve's too weak. He'd let anybody in."

We all knew Steve would be at work now. We looked up at the light in one of the top-floor windows.

Max said, "Hicks has just been hitting up."

I said, "How long ago?"

He said, "About twenty minutes ago."

I wasn't really eager to get involved. Susan and I were in another terrace two along from the corner. I forget where Samantha had been. She wasn't there that long. Apparently Hicks had got back into the room he had before. Anne was the only one of us there who lived in that place.

I said, "Why did they come back? They know there'll only be trouble."

Chris said, "Oh, who knows, man?"

Max said, "I hoped they'd have enough sense to stay away. I thought they'd realise we couldn't afford to have them here."

I wanted to go on up, but I couldn't just leave it go like that. So I said, "What do you reckon on doing about it?"

Max said, "I guess we've just got to try to reason with them. We'll just have to sit down quietly and try and convince them that it's no good having them here. Them being here. It's no good for us and it's really no good for them either."

Susan said, "Maybe they really need somewhere, though."

Anne said, "They need somewhere, but not here. We really can't afford to have them here."

Chris said, "We can't afford to have the cops round here again. We don't want to get busted. That's what it amounts to."

Anne said, "Samantha doesn't just use the stuff now, she deals."

That was the thing, because there was probably enough grass and lollies in the places to get us all busted. Most people were pretty cool about it but Samantha and Hicks were right out of their heads.

A few other people came along. The new guy and chick in 95 came along, and we told them about it.

Max said, "It might be an idea if you waited around a while."

The new guy said, "Not right now, man. We're just eating and then we're going back into town."

They went on in and left us there. But a few minutes later Scott and Warwick came down, and they stopped there with us. Chris and Anne started on about Hicks again.

Warwick said, "I wish there was something we could do about him."

Chris said, "He's a hopeless case. He'll be dead in another couple of years."

Anne said, "He's been on smack for years already."

Susan said, "How old is he?"

Chris said, "I heard somebody say he was about thirty."

It was hard to tell how old Hicks was from the look of him. He was too wrecked from the stuff he'd been taking.

Anne said, "It's a wonder he's lasted as long as he has."

Scott was looking up at the window. He said, "They won't want to go, you know."

Anne said, "Max says they'll have to."

Max had been leaning on the iron fence, hanging on to a couple of the spikes. He was looking down all the time, as if he was thinking it out.

He said, "Look, I didn't want any of this, you know? It's just not my scene. This is supposed to be a place where people co-operate, where they get on with each other. It's supposed to be a thing where we all work together, like a community sort of thing."

Warwick said, "Love your neighbour. Love Samantha."

Scott said, "She can be your neighbour."

Max was pulling at his big beard. I could see he felt pretty serious about it.

Susan said, "I keep thinking we ought to try and do something for them."

I said, "We can't keep them here."

Max turned round again. He said, "Look, I know they can't stop here. I just don't like having it this way. It was all supposed to be different."

Nobody said anything. We all knew Max was the guy who really ran the whole thing. He did all the organising. I think for him it was like a big experiment in people living in harmony together.

Then Max said, "I'll go up and see them now. I'll see what condition they're in."

He and Chris went up into 97. Then Chris came back and said Max had got the door open, and he was in there with them. He wanted to talk to them on his own.

We all just stood round waiting. The light was on up there but the window was shut and we couldn't tell what was happening.

Scott said, "Because the thing is, he's right. It really ought to be the way he says. This ought to be all like a big family. All working in with each other, right? That's what we're all here for."

Anne said, "Samantha doesn't care about any of that. Max tells her all that stuff and then she knows she can get away with it."

Susan said, "That's true."

Scott said, "Yeah, but haven't you got to be a bit easy on the others now and then? You've got to give people a bit of a chance."

I said, "Even if they don't give a stuff about you?"

Scott said, "Well, maybe that's their business. But if you're going to have a community you've got to let people be in it."

Susan said, "Even if they don't care about it?"

Anne said, "Do you want to give Samantha and Hicks another bit of a chance?"

Scott looked round in the dark. He said, "No, I guess not."
Then we heard somebody call out upstairs. It was a guy's voice but we couldn't tell what he was saying.

Chris said, "That was Max." He went back inside.

We all listened but we couldn't hear anything else. The guy and the chick in 95 came out and asked us how it was going, and then they went up the road.

Anne said, "They ought to be in this too. We all ought to be in it together."

Then we heard something else upstairs. One of 97's balcony windows opened and Chris put his head out.

I said, "What's going on?"

Chris said, "Max is still talking to them."

Warwick said, "Is he having any luck?"

Chris made a face and shook his head.

Scott said, "What does he want us to do?"

Chris looked back in the room. Then he said, "You might as well come up."

We all went in together, up the stairs at the back. Hicks' room was right at the top and the door was open. Inside there was some really shitty old furniture, and a bed on the floor. Hicks was lying there on his back with his knees up, and Samantha was over in the corner. Max was squatting on the floor next to Hicks.

Samantha was wearing the same dirty-looking things she always was. She was smoking and she never looked at us. We all stood round Hicks on the bed. His eyes were shiny and he was blinking all the time. Max was talking to him.

Hicks started saying, "Listen, listen a minute."

He sounded like he was trying to stay awake, but his eyes were staring at us. We all leaned closer.

Hicks said, "Listen, I'm here because I, I came back. Because I'm back here."

His head was rolling sideways all the time and his face was shiny and soft-looking. His mouth was really struggling to make the words. Max sat back and shook his head.

Chris said, "Come on, Hicks, time to go."

Hicks' eyes bugged and he looked round to see who said it.

He said, "You're going to throw, throw me out, are you?"

Max said, "Come on, mate, you know you can't stay here."

Samantha said, "You can't put him out like that, man."

Warwick said, "Yes we can, you watch us."

Hicks was trying to talk again. He said, "All right, now if you want to get rid of me you've got to fight me, right? You've got to fight me. Now there is, there is this big number of you and there's only me, one, one of me. So you can fight me all together or you can fight me, fight me, till you beat me to a pulp. To a pulp."

We all leaned closer and listened to Hicks saying this shit he'd got out of old movies or somewhere.

Max said, "Look, man, I've already told you, we don't want to fight you. We just want you out of here."

Warwick said, "Come on, it's a waste of time talking."

Warwick and Chris and I got hold of Hicks by the arm, and we tried to lift him. He started kicking and we had to let go, and he rolled across the floor. We got hold of him again but he hooked his arms under a big chair and held on. Chris held him down and we tried to get him away from it.

Hicks was excited now and he was thrashing round and kicking. He screamed out, "Let me alone, you bastards, come on, one of you, one at a time, why don't you?"

Chris let go and backed off, and then I got one of Hicks' arms free. Max pulled the chair away and Hicks let go and twisted round wrestling us. We were all on top of him. And I saw Samantha in the corner still smoking, and she wasn't even watching us.

Chris said, "Come on, let's get him outside."

We pulled him through the door in a rush. Then we had to half carry him down the stairs. He was still wrestling and we had to stop him getting a hold on the banisters. Then at the bottom he went crazy. Chris let go to open the front door and he started swinging again, yelling and crying.

I think he got away from one of the other guys, and then he got his boot on my shin. Then I went mad. I got hold of his shirt and punched him hard twice in the face. I really did my block. He was trying to get hold of me and I hit him under the

chest and then in the face again, and he let go and fell over against the wall.

Max said, "I think you've hurt him."

Warwick said, "He was asking for it."

Hicks was on the floor and we were all round him. He was holding his stomach tight and he was still crying. Then he vomited on the floor.

Anne said, "Get him outside."

We got him down the steps. He was moving like a zombie and still crying, and when we let him go he sat down next to the railings. He tried to wipe his face and then he fell over on his side. He was coughing and his nose was running.

Warwick said, "We'd better get him away from here."

Scott said, "He looks pretty sick."

Anne said, "As long as he's on smack he'll always be sick."

Max was bending over Hicks talking to him. Susan said, "Where will he go?"

Warwick said, "That's his problem."

I didn't say anything because I felt bad about hitting him like that. But it was too late now.

Anne said, "Walk him away."

Scott and Chris lifted him up. He was raving at them in his sick voice. He said, "You pigs, you think you're okay because there's a lot of you, but I've seen you all, I've seen him and I've seen the rest of you, and you're all a pack like a pack of cowards."

Max said, "Come on, mate, that's all over now."

Hicks was on his feet and he could move all right. He was raving but he let them lead him. He must have known even the way he was he wouldn't get back in 97.

Anne said, "What about Samantha?"

Samantha had followed us down. We all looked at her. She said, "I'll go with Hicks."

We all started to lead Hicks down the street. I said, "Some of his things are still upstairs."

Anne said, "He's better off without that."

He couldn't walk straight but Max helped him. Samantha followed on behind. The rest of us stopped at the corner

and went back to the terraces.

Susan said, "That was awful."

Scott said, "He really needs help."

Anne said, "It's his fault and it's none of our business."

Mostly at night people would hang round in the big ground-floor front rooms, but this night Susan and I went upstairs. Susan lay on the bed. I tried to read a book but I couldn't.

After a while Susan said, "We'll be getting our own place soon, won't we?"

I said, "Yeah, I think as soon as we can."