

ghost house

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by Thomas Lord (Berkeley, June 2020)

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<http://basiscraft.com>

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the young people alive today for whom capitalism will never be more than a compelling but illusory hypothesis they held in middle school and high school, but that fell to pieces after that.

We are all outlaws in the eyes of America.

In order to survive

we steal, cheat, lie, forge, fuck, hide, and deal.

*We are obscene, lawless, hideous, dangerous,
dirty, violent,*

and young

– The Jefferson Airplane

WEAR A MASK

AND SAVE YOUR LIFE!



The Emergency That Now Confronts Our City
Is Beyond the Facilities of the Health Department

The RED CROSS



has come to the assistance of the Board of Health. Doctors and nurses can not be obtained to take care of the afflicted. You must wear a mask, not only to protect yourself but your children and your neighbor from influenza, pneumonia and death

"FLU" MASKS CAN EASILY BE MADE AT HOME

The Oakland Chapter of the Red Cross has issued the following instructions for the home construction of influenza masks:

- 1.—Take a piece of gauze a yard square.
- 2.—Cut this into strips 9 inches wide.
- 3.—Fold each strip into halves, then into thirds, making six thicknesses of gauze.
- 4.—Turn in raw edges and stitch all four sides to hold firm. Mask now measures seven inches by six.
- 5.—Put three pleats in seven-inch ends, leaves pleat deeper than other two to allow room for chin.
- 6.—Attach a tape 11 inches long to each of the two lower corners. Attach a tape 12 inches long to each of the two upper corners.
- 7.—Fasten mask outside by a black thread.

A GAUZE MASK IS 99% PROOF AGAINST INFLUENZA

Doctors wear them. Those who do not wear them get sick. The man or woman or child who will not wear a mask now is a dangerous slacker.

DIRECTIONS FOR USING "FLU" MASK

Mask should be worn with the same side out.

If mask is used for preventive purposes only, be sure to boil it every night for ten minutes in clear water.

If mask is used in sick room caring for influenza patient, you should have two at least, changing every two or three hours, and boiling for ten minutes in clear water.

In taking care of the patient, the nurse should wear a coverall apron, and take it off before leaving the room. On entering the room the apron should be put on again.

OAKLAND CHAPTER AMERICAN
RED CROSS

WEAR MASKS

GOING TO WORK
AT WORK
GOING HOME
AT HOME

This statement was authorized at a meeting of the undersigned, who are convinced that it is the only way to stamp out the epidemic. You must do your part

Alameda County Relief Committee

County of Alameda

City of Oakland

Board of Health of Oakland

Oakland Chapter American Red Cross

Oakland Clearing House Association

Oakland Chamber of Commerce

Associated Charities

Retail Dry Goods Association

Figure 1: mask up

Now go to your room and think about what you've done

Berkeley, 2028

Kimmy slid silently down the street, like a river, slow muscular waves flowing down his butt, thighs, and calves. He called it his panther gait. Long coat flowing. Black shades. Steel toed, black boots with rubber soles, silent on the asphalt.

clothes
conspicuous hence invisible;
the key to social invisibility isn't to escape
attention –
but to attract it
in order to deflect it

Kimmy passed home after silent house, curtains drawn, the residents already dead or hunkered down and cowering from the virus. One with an open door, the sound of a radio leaking out, conversation. Kimmy thought it funny.

“Life of the party.”

Behind the dark aviators, he fixed his eyes on empty space. He took in the scene as a seamless whole. No one else was out: the quarantine.

He was hunting. He always knew he'd score, whenever he went out like this.

The skies were silent. No crows, his familiars, hinting the right direction to him. He'd have to rely on his own instincts. He sniffed the breeze and headed off down a narrow side-street, 10 years overdue for repaving, darkened by old trees.

There it was. He sensed it, hairs rising on his arms. A dusty white house. Overgrown yard. Sure enough he finds a big front window uncovered, giving a view into the living room. The old man in the window didn't see Kimmy at first - he was busy gasping for air, clutching at his neck, face turning red as he bobbed up and down in agony. Kimmy closed in, maintaining his cool and steady panther gait pace.

At last the old man saw Kimmy and, from behind the window, reached out a trembling, futile hand in silent pleading. They locked eyes. There was no point and they both

knew it. The virus was lethal, every time, except for immunes like Kimmy. It was over. A crocodile grin flashed over Kimmy's lips. The man's face melted from struggle to terror. He collapsed just as Kimmy reached the walkway and turned towards the front door.

Kimmy didn't pause at the threshold but opened the stranger's door and strode right in like he knew the place. Like he belonged there. He paused to look down at the corpse. Tall and thin with, apart from a terrible grimace, elegant features. White button down, open at the neck. Casual brown suit-coat. Brown slacks cinched by a narrow belt. Vaguely oxford-style orthopedic shoes. Kimmy thought he looked like some kind of fallen aristocrat.

"Dapper to the end."

The old man's neck was ringed with blue and black. In the final stages of the disease the neck muscles spasmed so forcefully that patients died with a ring of bruises and a twisted grimace. A faint smell of semen drifted over the room and Kimmy surmised the old man had ejaculated as he convulsed and died.

Kimmy curled his lips and rubbed his crotch.

"How's it hanging, old man?"

It was time to get busy. Kimmy was here on business, after all. He slid off his black day-pack and unzipped it in a single fluid motion as he began to scan the room. Two bottles gin and half a bottle bourbon, in they go. Three stout candles on the bookshelf, unscented, unburned go in next.

A sheathed knife on the mantle caught his eye. Turkish dagger with inlays on the handle. He picked it up and took it out to feel its heft and balance, throwing it back down in disgust immediately like he'd accidentally picked up a dog turd.

"Tourist shit. I wouldn't even open an envelope with that."

A small pantry next to the kitchen caught his eye. Two cans beans, one can tuna, a can of coffee, and small jar of weed.

"Lived large, I see."

He scooped them into the pack revealing a wood-handled, snub nosed revolver and a box of .44 mag bullets. It looked old but well maintained. Kimmy saw it was loaded and slipped it in a jacket pocket, enjoying its reassuring heft at his side. He put the box of bullets in the pack.

“Handy in a pinch.”

Into the kitchen and, what’s this? Two flimsy chairs. An old kitchen table with a chrome rim and formica top, stained and faded. On the table, a glock. Five magazines, all fully loaded. And a spring knife. Swoop.

“Paranoid freak.”

It was time to leave and Kimmy hoisted his pack on as he went out the way he came in, closing the door behind him casually like he was headed to the corner store. He didn’t head directly home but walked roundabout, taking little detours, to be sure he hadn’t been followed. No one else was on the streets but one could never be too careful.

Back home Kimmy found Bryan on the couch, hunched over, polishing black boots, weed smoke still hanging in the air.

“The mighty hunter returns. What’d ya bring bring me, sweetie?”

Kim tossed his pack on the low table but said nothing. Bryan flashed a crooked, curious grin, put down the boot, and opened the pack. He pulled out the magazines, one by one, and then the glock giving a quiet, admiring whistle through his teeth.

“Who do you suppose he figured to kill?”

“Himself, I reckon. He just knew he was a bad shot.”

They both chuckled as Kimmy slumped down on the couch next to Bryan. Bryan slowly ran his hand down Kimmy’s chest to his belt then slid off the couch and settled in between Kimmy’s knees.

A small package of value will come to you shortly

San Francisco (North Beach), 1961

Billy sat in the cafe at a small marble-top table - his table - back to the wall, light wool suit coat and slacks, brown, blood red sweater vest, cashmere, pressed white shirt, deep navy tie, silk, neatly polished black oxfords, dark maroon socks, metal-rimmed reading glasses, tussle of thinning black hair that had been mostly but not quite wrestled into submission with a comb and a dab of Brylcreem.

He was leaning back, a folded newspaper section in one hand, a pen in the other, underlining key phrases, studying every word intensely, a thick paperback sitting off to the side. Billy did not so much *sit* in chairs as drape his elegant frame over them in a well studied repose. An untouched cigarette sat in the ashtray smoldering into a long stick of ash, serving more as incense than something to smoke.

From time to time one of the black-aproned waiters came to bring him gin or coffee but never a check. There was an understanding that Billy was a guest of the house alongside the two gray cats who wandered in and out freely, occasional taking a seat to wait for the inevitable sardine. The cats and Billy maintained a cool, satisfied, mutual regard. They each recognized a kindred spirit when they saw one.

The other patrons were mostly male and 10 years younger. Mainly hustlers and thieves working business travelers who thirsted for a discreet San Francisco adventure. Easy marks.

Every now and then a hesitant business traveler would venture in to the cafe, towed by one of the boys, the suit glancing nervously about the room before they found a table. Sometimes when this happened the waiter would bring Billy a fresh cup of coffee, taking away the old one, but not before Billy could slip a discreet foil packet on the saucer. The packet would eventually find its way back to the hotel room with the nervous traveler and his temporary companion. Billy didn't ever take money for this. He considered it a community service. Something to do for the common good.

Next day back in the office, as the visiting salesman is getting ready to head for the airport: "Hey, Johnny, didn't I see you in North Beach last night?" spoken with a knowing grin flickering on the face, hint of a wink.

“Oh ... yeah. Haha. Caught a couple of stripper acts. Hell of a town you got here.”

“Sure is, Johnny. Sure is. Hell of a town. Good cafes, too.”

“Oh, yeah. Good cafes. Ha ha.”

Billy noticed his cigarette had gone out and started to reach in his breast pocket when a dark silhouette glided through the door making a blurry beeline for Billy’s table. It was Judi. She took a seat at the table. It was taboo to sit at Billy’s table

Billy took it all in. Judi Garland was the drag name of Nick Bella, a gay transman who worked the burlesque clubs trying to save money for a trip to Europe. Judi’s hair was a mess. Her eyes darted about, trying to find words. Billy decided Nick was genuinely upset. He drew a deep breath to speak when Judi cut him off.

“Billy, Andy’s dead.”

She pulled a photo out of her purse and slid it across the table. Billy could see her hands were shaking. It was a crime scene. Hotel room. There was Andy, dead on the floor, next to a knocked over chair. Andy was stripped down to his white briefs, one hand thrust inside them and wrapped around his cock. A dark ring of bruises encircled his neck. His face frozen in agony.

Billy briefly studied the photo and turned it over. He’d seen enough. He looked up at Judi, now seeing Nick there, for sure, beneath the wig.

Andy was Orphan Andy, one of the hustler regulars at the cafe and Nick’s long time lover. Andy was a real, legit orphan who ran away into the streets when he was 13 and never looked back. He and Nick lived in a cold water flat over a strip joint. Andy was a painter and a good one, too.

Billy could see the whole crime quite clearly in his head. He already knew how it went down. He wondered who had kept it out of the papers.

“Who was the perv?”

“Some trick from Chicago. We met him last Friday at the bar.”

Andy hustled and Nick worked the drag clubs and they tried to save up for that Europe trip. They thought they might even drop out and never return. Billy had

surmised at once that a pervy john talked Andy into doing a mock hanging scene wherein Andy, standing on a chair with a noose around his neck, jerks off in his underwear and then they both cum and the john takes off the noose. Only, this time, when Andy nuttled, the john must have kicked out the chair and hanged Andy for real.

Billy didn't know what to say.

"Billy you gotta help me."

The words took a few seconds to sink in.

"How? Help you how?"

"You used to be a private dick, help me find this guy."

"No point in that. You can identify him. He'll come for you."

She took his point and slumped, letting her face down. Billy leaned in slightly.

"And listen, I wasn't a private dick. I'm no snitch. I was a private journalist. Journalism for an audience of one. A private dick finds the truth for his clients. My clients already knew the truth - my job was tell them what the truth means. And here's what this photo means: maybe you should take that trip to Europe now. Andy would have wanted it that way."

They sat in silence until Judi stirred:

"Billy, why'd you quit?"

"Quit what?"

"Being a private journalist."

Billy sat back.

"It was a miserable job. If you tell a man what something means for him, you're telling him what he's in for, telling him about his inevitable fate. I was good at it, too. Too good. There's few things a man hates as much as the inevitable. No such thing as a satisfied customer in that line of work."

Billy remembered he had been about to light a new cigarette and reached into his jacket. In the periphery of his vision a dark silhouette glided through the door making a blurry beeline for Billy's table. The figure took a seat.

"Sorry I'm late, I got a little hung up," said Andy, tugging down his collar to show the now fading horror makeup. Looked like Nick's work.

Billy flashed a stinkeye at Nick. He hated being had. Still, he couldn't stop the smirk that crossed his face.

"You bastards."

Andy put his hand on Billy's knee.

"I love you, Billy. We just foolin'."

Andy discretely slid his hand up Billy's leg and gave his cock a teasy squeeze through the trouser's.

Andy, grinned broadly.

"Say, Billy, I wonder if we could get your help with something?"

Nick's hand was still shaking. That wasn't part of the act. Billy surmised the real game and sighed. It was taboo to sit down, uninvited at Billy's table but it was FORBIDDEN to sit there and ask for dope. Billy valued discretion above almost everything else. Still, these two knew Billy well enough to make trouble and, anyway, their little gag was clever and Billy was fond of them.

Billy sat back and reached into his jacket for that cigarette. He moved to light it but paused and looked Nick in the eyes.

"Nick, I want you to have a look at something."

Calling Judi Garland "Nick" was FORBIDDEN in the cafe. When Nick was in drag it was Judi and only Judi. Billy had crossed one of her lines. So they were even.

Billy dropped the newspaper on the table and jabbed at it while holding the unlit cigarette between two fingers. He slid it halfway across the table.

"There's something in there you oughta see."

Nick slid the paper the rest of the way over with the presence of mind to palm the foil pack that fell in his lap when it reached the edge of the table. Billy finally lit his cigarette and, exhaling, jabbed at the newspaper again.

“That one. Read it.”

Arts Commissioner Investigated

Berkeley When Art Commission Chairman Quentin Snoot reported a burglary of his home last month, police began a concerted search for a burglar who took two paintings by Pablo Picasso and one that Snoot calls a “minor work by Pieter Bruege, The Elder”. Now, at the prompt of Snoot’s insurer, police are investigating Snoot himself. Last Thursday police served a warrant at his home, removing at least a dozen boxes of financial records as scandalized neighbors looked on.

The account of the burglary Snoot gave this paper last month has raised eyebrows. “I remember a knock at the door, I think it was an encyclopedia salesman,” Snoot said. “Normally I never even answer the door but I was expecting a friend over. That’s all I remember until I woke up on the couch that evening. It was already dark out and the paintings were gone.”

Police tell us they know one thing for sure: no other neighbor on that North Berkeley street was solicited by an encyclopedia salesman that day or anytime recently.

A knowing crocodile smile flickered over Nick’s face and then Judi sat up looking suddenly pleased.

“Sounds like Mickey Finale is in town.”

“It *does*, doesn’t it?”

(Mickey was a high end burgler known among friends for using knock-out powder on easily blackmailed rich people. The arts commissioner likely woke up on the couch with his pants at his ankles, some empty bottles on the table, some underground gay porn by his side, and the piece de résistance: a couple of polaroids of this tableau in his lap. Such an assemblage was not implausible, given the rumors about the commissioner’s personal habits. The clear message: “You don’t remember a thing, got it?”)

“If you run into him, send him my way.”

Billy knew that neither Andy or Nick had ever met Mickey but then few ever had. In spite of that, it was popular sport among the hustlers to pretend to go way back with Mickey and to swap outrageous stories about him.

Billy took the paper back, tucked the “crime scene” photo into his paperback book, picked up his pen, and returned to his project. Judi and Andy clasped hands and skipped noisily out of the cafe to go home and work on Nick’s tremor.

Bang Bang, Shoot Shoot

Once, when he was 13, Kimmy woke up on Baker Beach, shivering, half naked under a dirty flimsy blanket in the San Francisco fog, his jeans rolled up under his head, his eyes stinging of salt, the first pale hints of sunrise warming the sky somewhere beyond the Marin headlands.

He'd ditched the north country after his father tried to kill his dog. As he fled, he'd had the sense to avoid the roads, hiked through patches of woods to the train tracks. Some older boys who'd passed through town, panhandling in beaten up leather jackets and torn jeans, full of flop-down grinning grace, possessed of a quiet animal quickness – they'd told him about the tracks. They'd told him which direction to hike to the siding and how to hop a boxcar to Oakland. He hoped they were telling the truth and they were.

Kimmy had been sitting in a warm bath enjoying the relative isolation from his father's tense lunacy when the dog, no doubt upon careful moral contemplation, deposited a well deserved shit in the old man's brand new golf shoes. Even under the most trying circumstances a good dog remains brave and retains a sense of humor and fairness.

Kimmy had been quietly and gently waving his arms and hands through the warm water, viscerally studying its dynamics, eyes closed, trying to see how its flow could be influenced and shaped, with subtle motions of the fingers, to the mutual satisfaction of water and boy. Into this mediation his father's voice intruded from the basement.

“Jesus fucking christ I paid \$110 for those shoes where's the god damn dog”

Kimmy heard a few blows from his fathers hand fall upon the dog before the dog escaped his father's grasp and bolted up the stairs and down the hall to Kimmy's room to take cover.

And then he heard his father's lumbering footsteps up the stairs and with that Kimmy's body sprung to life and he jumped out the bath just in time to hear his father's footsteps stomp down the hall after the dog.

When Kimmy got to the door of his own room he saw that his father had dragged the dog half-out from under the bed. His father's left hand pinned down the dog's neck. The dog's hindquarters still under the bed, useless for kicking or squirming.

His father's right arm was raised above the dog's head and clutched a 12 inch pipe wrench. Kimmy knew for sure his father meant to kill the dog.

Kimmy spat and screamed across the room, crazy eyed, from the doorway where he stood red faced and red chested, naked, dripping wet.

"I'll kill *you!*"

The screech was so terrible it sent a shiver down his father's spine. He turned and looked at Kimmy and their gaze's locked. Kimmy spoke the words plainly, this time.

"I'll kill you."

It was absurd. He was unarmed, naked, dripping, and small. Kimmy was slender. His father had the build of a middle weight boxer.

It made no difference. Kimmy knew with absolute certainty that if the old man made one wrong move he'd kill the asshole right then and there. His father then knew it too. It hung in the air. It filled every sense. The old man's nostrils flared in involuntary twitches as his overheated breath panted in a suddenly leashed rage.

The old man let go the dog and stood up still carrying the wrench by his side, moved towards Kimmy in the doorway. His breath calmer now, the old man spoke quietly and plainly:

"You best be gone by morning."

His father, now suddenly the old man, walked into his study, and slammed the door.

A preternatural calm flooded Kimmy's body unlike anything he'd experienced before. He went into action dressing in good jeans, two t-shirts, a flannel shirt, and a sweat-shirt. He stuffed an extra pair of socks and spare drawers in the hand-warmer of the sweatshirt. Put on hiking shoes. He knew better than to try to pack more - none of the rest was useful to him anymore - excepting his small (8 inch) hunting knife whose leather sheath he knew how to strap to his calf. He hid a wool cap under his shirts.

The boys in the beaten up leather jackets and torn jeans had impressed upon him the value of traveling light.

“You carry your wits about you and you’ll want for nothing.”

He looked at the dog peering up at him from under the bed. They locked eyes and Kimmy gave a barely audible, conspiratorial two snaps of his fingers, gesturing with his head towards the door.

As the dog started to move Kimmy put on his best bullshit little boy routine.

“C’mon, dog, let’s get you fed.”

They headed to the kitchen where Kimmy noisily fished out the can opener and noisily rummaged the pantry. He paused and listened.

Satisfied his father wouldn’t soon come out from the study, Kimmy set down the can opener and opened the back door. He gestured silently to the dog and they went together out into the rural night.

A half mile down the road Kimmy stopped and knelt down to talk to the dog.

“Listen. I’m going that way.”

Kimmy gestured towards the woods to the west.

“Go find your friends. Don’t go back to that asshole.”

The dog looked startled. Are you sure?

Kimmy stood up and tapped the dog’s backside.

“Go!”

Kimmy knew the dog had several human friends nearby and would run to one who would take him in.

The old man would surely figure out where the dog went but he also knew that the old man wouldn’t make a fuss or try to get the dog back because then he’d have to answer awkward questions about why nobody’d seen his 13 year old boy for a while.

Dog bolted east. Kimmy strode purposefully west, into the woods, headed for the tracks. Music swells. Roll credits.

Kimmy slipped out of the boxcar into Oakland, into the predawn shadows, and walked south along the tracks and the barbed-wire until it opened onto a road.

A BART train passed on elevated tracks a few blocks east and Kimmy set off to follow them to a station. The early crush of daily commuters gave him ample cover to slip through the fare gate and he was soon in San Francisco. He wandered the City making a mental map, shoplifted some water, and ate leftover pizza set out for homeless people.

As the sun set, Kimmy found himself nearing the ocean shore.

Kimmy woke up on Baker Beach, shivering, half naked, dripping wet. The bed, useless for kicking or squirming. His father's right arm was raised above his head and clutched a 12 inch pipe wrench.

"I'll kill *you!*"

Kimmy spat and screamed across the room, crazy eyed, from the sky somewhere beyond the Marin headlands. It made no difference. Kimmy knew with absolute certainty that if the study... He gestured silently to the dog and they went together out into this mediation ... Kimmy knew for sure his father meant to kill the warm water, viscerally studying its dynamics, eyes closed, trying to see how its flow could be influenced and shaped to the mutual satisfaction of salt, the first pale hints of sunrise warming ... the sky somewhere beyond the Marin headlands.

"Go find your friends. Don't go back to that asshole."

You have many contacts, among the lumberjacks

Berkeley, 2028

Kimmy dreamed that he rounded a corner and – shock – found Bryan shirtless, handcuffed, and hostage to a maverick raider, a short fat thug in a cheap leather jacket and greasy hair who must have somehow surprised Bryan in his sleep to get this far.

Dream Kimmy thought fast and strode confidently towards leather jacket, putting a big friendly arm around his shoulder and grinning like a maniac.

“What’d you catch? He’s purdy. Is it for sale?”

Kimmy winked so’s only Bryan could see it, ran his hand down Bryan’s chest to his bare belly. He knew touching the thug’s prize would infuriate his leather jacket even more than the surprise arm around the shoulder. Jacket guy wouldn’t have a chance to notice the derringer Kimmy’s embrace placed next to his head.

Sure enough, the jacket was pissed.

“He’s mine. Fuck off”

“Oh, sorry mate, it’s a good catch you got there.”

Kimmy lightly licked a lip staring deep into cheap leather’s eyes like he was about to suck him off.

BANG and the jacket boy fell to the ground like a stone. Dream Bryan popped off the flimsy sex-toy cuffs the idiot had used and felt around on the back of his head, finding a big wet spot where jacket’s blood and brains got onto his hair.

“Dammit, you mest my hair!”

Kimmy woke with a start and was flummoxed at once. He looked over at Bryan who was starting to wake up, staring at Kimmy blurrily.

“It don’t make no sense. A gun goes off that close to yr head and you’d be deaf for a week. What a shitty dream!”

Real Bryan blinked, awake now, and studied Kimmy’s face. He half crocodile smiled.

He cocked an eyebrow before Kimmy went on.

“Let’s ditch the glock, anyway. Maybe the girls will take it.”

“The girls” was Kimmy’s name for the Coop, an affiliation of lesbians that had taken over many of the houses in the areas hardest hit by the virus. Calling them “the girls” was FORBIDDEN in their presence and taboo among anyone who knew and liked them but just between Kimmy and Bryan it was cool.

Bryan started to get hard at the idea. It was on.

The boys knew the drill: One didn’t enter Max and Bernie’s place directly. It was a civilized place. They walked down the driveway to the back yard, to the solar showers, stripped down and started washing down. They washed each other’s hair and backs, grinding and grabbing, laughing. Warm water was a rare thing these days.

After a time Max appeared on the porch and tossed down neatly folded bright white karategi and some towels.

“If y’all are done fucking around you might come in.”

Permission was granted, in other words. Kimmy and Bryan dried and dressed, tied the white belts, and entered barefoot, Kimmy grabbing his backpack on the way.

The Coop was part of a larger network, mutual aid groups in cities up and down the coast. Kimmy figured they’d know someone who could use the glock.

As they entered Bernie set down a big kitchen knife to give Kimmy a mama bear hug and a sloppy kiss on the cheek. He melted into her a little. Not many people could do that to him.

“Good to see you, Kimmy. How’s it hangin’?”

He smirked at her, self conscious that her hug relaxed him enough that his weariness showed. He dropped his pack by the door and draped himself over a chair at the kitchen table.

“Oh, it hangs. It hangs.”

Max was sitting at the table, sleeves rolled up, staring through a tabletop magnifying glass, soldering something. Bryan figured it was some kind of remote trigger for an explosive. Max was good at that kind of thing.

Bryan carefully took a seat near Max who bristled a bit and shot him some side eye.

Bernie set down coffee for the boys and herself, and topped off Max's. She joined the others at the table.

“So Kimmy, a little bird tells me you must have gone shopping recently. Don't suppose you picked me up any coffee?”

Kimmy snickered, figuring she'd guessed by the heavy pack he brought in.

“As a matter of fact.”

Kimmy reached back and slid the pack over and pulled out the can of coffee from the old man's house.

“For you, darlin'”

Three of them chatted idly, catching the boys up on their Coop acquaintances, swapping rumors about how much longer the electric grid and water systems might remain functional, pretending to make wagers on how many non-immune still remained. Kimmy figured there were probably about 3,000 left in Berkeley but Bernie assured him it was much more, maybe three times that. If anyone knew, it'd be the Coop.

Max half listened, occasionally nodding or laughing but staying focused on her project. Bryan couldn't help but to study her working. He tried, with some considerable success, not to stare.

The whole time, Kimmy felt Bernie keep scrutinizing him - waiting for something. Like she was trying to see if he noticed...

“His table! Hey, how'd you do that?”

An old kitchen table with a chrome rim and formica, stained and faded, on top. Two flimsy chairs, presently occupied by Max and Bryan.

Bernie smirked like a wise-ass.

“Why don’t you tell us about that .44?”

Startled Kimmy looked wide-eyed at Bernie. He hadn’t said “boo” about the derringer. Her words took a few seconds to sink in.

Kimmy reached back into his backpack and pulled it out for show and tell.

“It’s a beaut, ain’t it?”

Kimmy stood up with a stable stance and played like he was cross-draw pulling from a holster tucked in his pants. He crouched slightly with both hands on the piece, aiming at a cupboard.

“BANG!”

Kimmy pretended to blow smoke from the barrel.

Then he sat back down and set it on the table, grinning.

Bernie didn’t react but cleared her throat.

“Looks well maintained.”

“Fine but how’d you know about it?”

“Cousin Mary was gleaning the house across the street and saw you go in. She knows how much good stuff you usually leave behind so she wanted first dibs. She found some clues about the gun, let’s say.”

This was typical of the Coop. They were active all over town but effectively invisible unless they *wanted* you to see them.

“She get anything besides the table?”

“Some interesting items.”

Kimmy sat back. He knew when to stop asking questions.

Max looked up from her work taking a close look at Kimmy's face, evaluating him for a second. Apparently satisfied she stood and opened a large drawer on some built-in cabinets. She pulled out a black leather holster and small metal toolbox, might have been an old-timey tackle box, then set them down in front of Kimmy.

"You should probably take these as long as you've got the gun."

He looked inside. Cleaning brushes, tools to disassemble the guns, chamois cloths, gun oil. And two more boxes of .44 cartridges. Kimmy nodded, taking it all in.

They sat in silence for a while, Kimmy wondering if the girls were waiting for more. Well, he did come for a reason.

"And then there's this."

Kimmy produced the glock and five magazines.

"Me and Bryan were hoping you might know somebody in need."

"Well, thanks again for the coffee but you should hold on to that. You're probably going to need it. Keep it."

The "need it" surprised Kimmy but he could see Bernie was serious. He started to reach for the gun to put it away but Max flashed a hint of a displeased look at Bernie and took one of the magazines, sticking it in her t-shirt pocket before going back to the soldering.

Kimmy paused a beat to see if she wanted more, then put the gun and the rest away.

"Well, don't leave us hanging. How do you figure we need it?"

"Mavericks are moving in, pretty fast this time, and from multiple directions. In fact, you'll stay here for a few days to lie low, if you please. They're almost at your place right now."

They're only paying him two grams now for a one-man abstraction

Berkeley, 1965

Billy – now Bill, these days – woke up and threw up, hands shaking, heart racing, stumbling to his dresser, looking for his junk but it was gone and so was the Kiki. Little prick. Well... in a manner of speaking.

He stumbled half-blind to the front room and grabbed a cheap Turkish dagger off the mantle and used it to pry open a board that lined the back of a small pantry. He was sweating wondering just how clever the Kiki was but, a flood of relief, his main supply was there, undisturbed. Kiki just got the one. Billy grabbed a packet and returned to the bedroom to steady his nerves.

As the warmth returned to his body he recalled the night before and crocodile smiled. What would life be without Kiki?

“You were worth it, kid.”

Bill made coffee, and toast, then an egg and toast with more coffee, lit a cigarette, smoked a joint, and had some coffee as he read the paper, feeling smug. He found a society page mention of young Gavin Fopps' return-from-Europe dinner party wherein Gavin had impishly seated the mayor next to his long time rival. There was a photo with the item and Bill could see some fine looking paintings hanging behind the mugging society mavens. He recognized one of them as a Paul Klee¹.

Bill amused himself, imagining resurrecting his old Mickey Finale routine to bag the painting. He imagined the hustle taking off late one night when he would stumble upon Gavin Fopp slumming it, in dark shades, in a dive bar down next to the port, talking stiffly to some merchant seamen.

Bill finished his coffee, retrieved yesterday's mail from the letterbox, put out food for the stray cat that visited his porch. Bill sat down on his couch wondering idly what to do with himself.

¹*Dream City*, Paul Klee, 1921

In the periphery of his vision a dark silhouette flew up the stairs of the porch glided through the door before he quite knew what was going on.

In a haze of somnambulistic calm brought on by nicotine and heroin Bill just reached casually across his body to his hip, drew his derringer, aimed vaguely, and fired.

It was Orphan Andy waltzing in like he owned the place. Andy heard the round shriek just over his head and into a wall with a horrible splintering sound. Must have hit a support beam.

“Fuck man, what’s your problem?”

Bill froze after he shot but soon recognized Andy. He’d shot at Andy. Bill’s grey lizard face dissolved briefly into terror. He stared wide eyed at Andy for a few seconds, triple-checking that he hadn’t killed him.

“Seriously, what the fuck are you even doing?”

Bill’s face returned a bit.

“Bad shot, I suppose.”

He was was rubbing his wrist now, pretty frantically. He had only just noticed how badly the .44 stung when fired. He cleared his throat a bit and took a sip of whiskey from a highball glass on the coffee table left from the night before.

“Weelllll... this day is off to a hell of a start. How’s it going, Andy? You and the *misses* getting along?”

“If *he* asks, you can tell Nick I slugged you for that.”

“Will do. Will do. Now, come in! Come in!”

Good Day Sunshine

Bernie and Max, and Bryan, Kimmy went back a ways.

Max spent the morning soldering detonators and teaching Bryan how they worked and how to build them. They settled into a routine, Max assembling them, Bryan testing and debugging a few.

Bernie and Kimmy spent the morning on lawn chairs on the broken concrete back yard next to three eight foot contraband tobacco plants alongside a wide variety of other greater and lesser botanical medicines. They told each other funny stories and spent long stretches in silence. Occasional hits on a bong.

The quartet gathered in the kitchen for a lunch of sardines, rice, and greens. Bernie poured out four whiskeys and, at length, brought out a map marked with maverick sightings.

The mavericks were loutish, dull-witted, violent packs of survivors, most of them young men. Not a very organized formation, as they say. Moreso, “maverick” had become a kind of popular brand, a personal identification with obnoxious and pointless violence. The Coop, more than anyone else, kept the mavericks at bay.

Max and Bryan went back to detonators, sitting very close now, occasionally looking up at the map and kibitzing, otherwise soldering and testing connections, sharing the tabletop magnifying glass.

Kimmy, on the other hand, poured over the map intensely, prompted by the whiskey and the provocative questions Bernie casually posed as if making small talk. Kimmy walked some of those streets often and had more recent information than Coop scouts about current conditions. Bernie’s questions pointed generally in the direction of looking for choke-points where Mavericks could be fucked with and discouraged from advancing farther. She’d point at some point on the map.

“Do you think they might run into bad luck *here*?”

“I saw a lot of bloodied turkey feathers there. I think there’s a wildcat in the area.”

“If they send scouts, they might get mauled.”

“Probably so, I’d imagine.”

The Coop had a system of *discouraging* unwanted strangers from getting too close. As a band of maverick dunces wandered near, their luck would dry up and grow worse and worse. An infestation of rats into their food supplies and a wave of dysentery. A pestilence of mosquitos, wherever they camp. These were the kinds of interventions the Coop’s *Effects Crew* could pull off without the enemy knowing they even existed. Often the mavericks would turn around and wander away just out of a vague sense that the place itself was somehow magically inhospitable.

If the intruders pressed on, their scouts would start turning up on pikes, or in bits and pieces around the maverick camp. When things got to this point the mavericks would know they had a human enemy – but an invisible one. The awareness of a deadly yet invisible human enemy is one of the greatest terrors of which humans are capable. Walking away from such a fight made sense even to mavericks, usually.

So far The Effects Crew hadn’t had to move on to stage three, wiping out entire bands of mavericks, but there had been no shortage of discussion and preparation for doing so, quickly and cleanly. There was more or less unanimous feeling among the entire Coop that such as confrontation was ultimately unavoidable. The trick was simply to show up to that fight the most prepared.

In the late afternoon Kimmy helped Bernie lay out a large futon in the front room for the boys. He again had the sense that she was sizing him up for something but said nothing, waiting for her make her decision. The four of them ate casually from a stew of beans, cured goat, collard, potatoes, and tomatoes.

At length, Kimmy saw Bernie make up her mind:

“Would you like some tea, Kimmy? We have some from the garden that’s very interesting. It can help sharpen certain psychic abilities, particularly remote perception across time and space. Since you’re already somewhat sensitive, in my opinion, I am curious what its effect on you might be.”

Kimmy played along, always curious to sample from their garden.

“And I gather there is some question you’d like me to investigate?”

“Indeed. From that house you harvested. Something else you left behind.”

Bernie retrieved an old paperback and laid it in front of Kimmy. “Tropic of Cancer” with yellowed pages.

“What’s this?”

“Not the book. Look at the photos. We believe they were taken using an old camera we also found in that house. Have a look.”

Kimmy flipped through and found a black and white photo, tucked in between the pages. It looked as old as the book. It showed a man, passed out on a couch, with his pants at his ankles, some empty bottles on a table, some gay porn by his side.

“Looks like a good time.”

“Keep going.”

Kimmy found a photo of a dapper man, not much older than Kimmy, sitting at a cafe, with a long, elegant face and a crocodile smile. Kimmy recognized him as the old man in the white house. He stared, losing himself in the portrait.

“Mmm. Now have a look at the last one.”

Kimmy flipped through the pages and found the third photo. It took him a second for him to see what he was looking at. Kimmy recognized the scene as a hotel room. There was a young man, dead on the floor, next to a knocked over chair. He was stripped down to white briefs, one hand thrust inside them and wrapped around his cock. A dark ring of bruises encircled his neck. His face frozen in agony.

“Hah. It’s gotta be fake.”

“We don’t think so.”

“The virus didn’t even exist back then!”

“Well now that’s no longer so clear, is it.”

Kimmy slumped back and stared at the photo. It dawned at him that, without the grimace, the young man's face would have been quite pretty.

A kettle on the stove whistled from the kitchen and Bernie rose quietly to get it. Kimmy just stared at the photo, feeling a deep sadness grow in him. He longed for the figure in the photo to come to life and be there, flirting, running his hand up Kimmy's leg. He felt nauseous looking at the bruises in the photo.

Bernie returned with a small bowl, a clear, red liquid, steaming, with flashes of a dark blue sheen from a few dabs of some oily substance floating on top.

"What do you expect me to do?"

"You were the last person to see the photographer alive. You were there at the moment of his death. You even adopted his beloved gun. We feel this may have given you some ... *connection* to him. We want you to do some astral travel and find out more about him. How the hell did he get a photo of a virus death back then? What's going on there?"

"Suppose I agree. What then?"

"We'll do a ritual. We'll each take four sips of this, one for each cardinal point. That should be plenty. While it sets in we'll make a small altar and put the photos there. You'll feel it coming on. Just go there and tell us what you see. I'll try to tag along. Don't worry how it sounds. Just talk. You can tell us what it means later. You'll be acting as a kind of remote camera."

Bernie gestured at Max and Bryan who were watching with cool intensity.

"Those two will stay here and witness. Their job is to remember everything we say while we're out there, and help us put it all together later."

Kimmy thought, then nodded. He took his first sip of the tea and set the bowl back down. Bernie did likewise. Kimmy reached into his backpack and retrieved two candles from the old man's house, and began to set up the alter. Bernie added an old highball glass, old ashtray, and an antique camera. She produced a cigarette, lit it with one of the candles, and left the cigarette smoldering in the ashtray, next to the book, sneaking a drag first. She poured some whiskey into the glass.

They drank more tea and finished by laying out the photos in silence. Bernie stripped off her clothes and sat down, closing her eyes in meditation. Kimmy felt an intense warmth building in his body and followed her example.

Kimmy felt his body approach the center of the universe. He felt himself orbiting around it eccentrically but in ever tightening orbit, dizzying at first, then clear, at close to the speed of light

Max's notes from Kimmy's report:

Kimmy is burbling. rocking.

"It's time rival, breaking in. There's a photo with the item behind the dark shades in a dive bar down next to the rural night."

"Don't go back to that asshole."

"Right then and there. His lips and rubbed his crotch."

Kimmy seems to be feeling less dizzy. He says he's in the kitchen of the white house.

"Fuck man, what's this? Two flimsy chairs. An old kitchen table with a crocodile grin. The man is there. The man's face is melting."

"It's starting to come clear."

Kimmy is breathing more calmly now.

*Kimmy is at a cafe now. He is watching the dapper man, across the room, sip coffee. Kimmy says he can begin to give his report. What does he think he's **been** doing?*

"I know this place. We're in North Beach."

There was no sound. Kimmy can see people talking in the cafe but there's no sound. No voices. No clinking of cups on saucers.

It's frustrating him. He's trying to eavesdrop.

The man in the photo flashed a look directly at Kimmy. The eye contact drove a shiver down Kimmy's spine. Kimmy grabbed his crotch at this point.

"He's leaving. It's night now. He walks too close to me on the way out. He wants me to follow."

Bernie looks scared now. Quick deep breaths. She doesn't like where this is going?

Kimmy thinks the old man is going to a nearby hotel and that the virus boy in the photo will be waiting for him there. He's trailing the old man. Kimmy sees a fancy doorman – a block away – chatting with a bell boy, staring blankly into the street.

Kimmy is somehow at the entrance to a dead end alley now, near the hotel. The dapper man and virus boy are there, in the shadows, standing close. Virus boy is taking something from the dapper guy. Putting it in a breast pocket. Locking eyes. Running his hand down dapper's chest to his belt and sinking to his knees.

Kimmy starts to enter the alleyway. The dapper man flashes a look directly at Kimmy. The fleeting eye contact drives another shiver down Kimmy's spine.

The dapper man reaches out one hand towards Kimmy, trembling, desperation. He has an anguished, panic look but Kimmy senses it's a put on.

Kimmy says the dapper man is trying to distract him while his other hand reaches across to pull a gun from his waist. I asked him to describe it. It's the derringer.

Kimmy looks scared, now.

"Fuck man, what's your problem?"

The tea is wearing off but barely.

“No point in that. You know what yr doing”

*The dapper man takes square aim at Kimmy – taking his time
– stable stance – bracing for the shot.*

Tripping Kimmy felt the back alley ghost bullet hit his gut and splat in incomprehensible sensation. His eyes opened wide as he clutched Bernie suddenly. They were then two who, crying quietly, flopped onto the futon, embraced, stroking each other's hair, consoling, and remembering that Kimmy was still alive.

Max and Bryan took it all in. Got some blankets. Stripped down and cuddled with them. Max and Bryan reassured Kimmy he was still alive. All four fell into a very deep sleep.

She's so sweet, so cold, so fair

The prank by Andy and Nick nagged at Billy. Something didn't add up but he couldn't put a finger on it. They seem to have gone to a surprising amount of trouble using the hotel room that way - and how'd they pay for it?

The next day Billy headed to the hotel to see what he could sniff out. He headed first for the mid-afternoon lobby bar, as one does under these circumstances.

A sleepy place, the bartender at one end cutting up limes, trading occasional wise cracks with a couple of regulars. At the other end a mid-range grey suit in brown dress shoes, shuffling some papers.

Billy had an adrenaline shock and almost lost face when he recognized the suit: Peter Klauss, a detective from Chicago P.D. but obviously some sort of Fed. Klauss and Billy had traded information now and again, over the years. They went way back.

In a circumstance like this Billy knew better than just to go slap his friend on the back like old times. Klauss might be here just as himself or might be working under an assumed name, preferring not to recognize Billy at just this time and place. So Billy took a bar stool 2 seats away from Klauss, raising a pointed finger, announcing I'll have a whiskey, please, when you have a chance. Whiskey soda, rocks.

Klauss jolted a bit and scrambled to tuck the photos he was shuffling through into a book. Not before Billy got a clear glimpse of a photo of mostly naked Andy, on a hotel room floor, next to an overturned chair, looking hanged.

"Oh, hey Billy, how's it hanging?"

Billy pursed his lips to suppress any signal that he recognized the Andy photo. He now figured Klauss must have been behind the gag but he decided to play dumb and try to suss out Klauss' intent.

"It hangs, it hangs. What brings you to San Francisco, business or..."

"A case. Interesting meeting you here. I was thinking of seeking you out."

Klauss stood and moved towards the bar stool next to Billy.

“You mind?”

Billy nodded consent. The bartender set down the whiskey soda and Billy nodded thanks.

Two drinks in, Billy broke the ice.

“So I gather you’re a photographer, now.”

Klauss grimaced at being busted.

“How ya figure?”

Billy nodded towards Klauss’ book.

“Ah, yes. You saw.”

Klauss took out the hanged Andy photo.

“Yeah. A hanging. Right here in this place. There was a similar situation in Chicago.”

Billy continued to play dumb.

“I didn’t see anything in the papers.”

“The owners have the sway to keep it quiet. Some drifter kid killed, probably turning a trick.”

“What a waste. He’s awfully pretty.”

Klauss fell silent, downed his shot, and waved for another.

Billy waited and then gave up.

“Klauss, you know I’m not buying this, right?”

Klauss just furrowed his brow.

“Andy is a friend of mine. I saw him yesterday. He showed me a copy of the photo. Game’s up, pal.”

It took a second to sink in for Klauss but then it dawned on him what Billy was saying.

“No. I know who you mean. You must know the orphan guy. Orphan Andy. No. It turns out your friend has a doppelganger. Well, had a doppelganger. Oh, god. Brace yourself.”

Klauss pulled another photo from the book. It was Andy – or his doppelganger – on a steel autopsy table. A closeup of his face and mangled neck, clearly scarred – not made up – cut open by the coroner.

Billy looked down and concentrated on his breathing to avoid vomiting as the blood drained from his head in shock and panic.

When it was time to leave, his head still a bit dizzy, Billy exited through the back door of the bar. A door that opened into an alleyway.

As the door drifted towards closing behind him Bill paused to breath and settle himself. When he looked left, towards the dead end, he saw a guy in a suit, leaning against the wall, eyes shut, behind some trash cans, evidently getting a blowjob.

When the door clicked the man’s eyes shot open in alarm and his head jerked and he briefly locked eyes with Billy. Then he fumbled around his crotch and fly, shaking nervously, walking briskly out of the alley, but not before shooting Billy a vicious, annoyed look.

Billy started to reach into his breast pocket for a cigarette but froze when the pretty hustler - it was Orphan Andy, of course - stood up from behind the trash cans.

“Damnit it, Billy! You cost me 10 bucks!”

Billy strolled towards Andy, getting out that cigarette.

“Sorry, kid. Let me cover his tab.”

Billy pulled out *two* tens and handed them to Andy, pressing a discrete foil packet in his palm at the same time.

Andy grinned and suppressed a laugh at the foil and then noticed the extra ten. He smirked.

Billy leaned back against the brick wall and let his eyelids rest, half open, with a crocodile smile. Andy leaned in, hand lightly on Billy's breast, and gave him a sweet kiss on the cheek, then went down, squatting, and gently unzipping Billy's fly.

The alley went all but silent, for Billy, just the rustle of their play, and the eddy of dry leaves on the sidewalk, at the end of the alley through which the brightly lit world could be glimpsed, from afar.

The record skips

One evening the quartet was adjourning for the evening. Max got up to put a bottle of whiskey away on a shelf. Bryan rose from the futon to stretch like a cat.

As Max crossed the room, out of nowhere, she swiftly swept one leg behind Bryan's, closed in, and shoved his chest sending him flailing over backwards, helpless. She caught him, one arm behind his shoulders, one holding the collar of his karategi like a harness. She caught his fall and set him down gently on the futon, like a baby, flat on his back.

For her encore, Max stood up straight, stepping astride Bryan, looking down at him with a smug grin. She took a beat then dropped athletically to her knees, sitting lightly on his gut. She ran her hands up both his arms and pinned his hands against the futon, behind his head.

Bryan stared up, helpless, stunned. Then he said the first thing that popped into his head.

“Who’s your daddy now, Max?”

Max laughed and rolled off him onto her back. Looking up at the ceiling she shifted up against his side like they were staring at the stars.

Kimmy woke up in a big bed in the back room snuggled up next to Bernie and an acrid whiff of far off wildfire lit his brain to consciousness. He slipped out the bed, naked, stretchy, and silent. He padded through the living room where Bryan was still sleeping. Bryan was naked, cold out, sprawled and peaceful, wearing a lavender leather harness and collar that made Kimmy snicker. He surmised that Max must be in the kitchen. He could smell coffee and was drawn to it.

“Mornin’”

Max was finishing up detonators and didn't look up.

“Yup, sure is.”

Kimmy poured himself a cup and, turning to Max, sniffed that wildfire smell again. Max didn't look up from her work but gestured with her head towards the back porch. Kimmy stepped out, naked to the world, in the warm morning sun, and scanned the hills. Sure enough, a fire near the ridge, a dark plume in the sky.

Kimmy came back in and turned to Max.

"Looks like it's on the other side of the canyon - might not spread far."

"Maybe."

Kimmy grabbed a jar from the shelf, some rolling papers, and sat across the table. He sipped his coffee and started to roll a joint.

After a time, Max finished the last detonator, setting it in a row with the others for Bryan to test. She stood and stretched.

"Get out that glock. Let me show you how to work it."

For all his bravado, Kimmy had only ever shot a gun once, at a back yard party, at some drunken bottles, prelude to the big orgy. Max went over the basics of loading and unloading, the safety, and the basic principles of shooting, and then guided Kimmy taking it apart, cleaning it, and reassembling.

They shared the joint in silence, staring out the back door, sipping coffee. Kimmy started to turn back to the table, where the gun rested.

In the periphery of his vision a dark silhouette flew up the stairs of the porch glided through the door before he quite knew what was going on. The figure strode right in like he owned the place but froze in his tracks seeing Kimmy and Max at the table.

Kimmy and the maverick locked eyes. Greasy and cheap leather jacket with a ten inch knife in a hand by his side. The maverick grinned in a snarl, baring his stupid incisors like he just won the fucking lottery.

A preternatural calm flooded Kimmy's body and with an efficient, languid fluidity he twisted to pick up the glock and a magazine, snapped the magazine in place, turned to face the maverick. And shot. Wildly.

A dirty miss the shattering wood sound as the bullet hit the door frame but the maverick screeched and clutched his ear, bleeding profusely now, grazed by the bullet.

A hideous look of incomprehension at betrayal took the maverick's face and he briefly locked eyes with Kimmy as if to say "How could you? What is *this*?"

The maverick turned and bolted out the door, making for the back fence to leap over it and run away.

"FUCK! God Damn it Kimmy!"

Max grabbed a kitchen knife and started for the door after the maverick but stopped short. Kimmy was standing now, a slight squat, both hands on the gun, taking his time.

The second shot shattered the maverick's spine just behind the heart and shattered the heart and lungs as well. It being a spine shot, the maverick dropped, mid-stride, like a marionette with strings cut.

Kimmy strode purposefully to the porch, still naked, gun in both hands, looking around hard for any other takers.

Kimmy lowered the gun and stared for a time at the body. Max stared at Kimmy. At length a bird spoke. Then two. The reverence and awe began to fade.

Kimmy, with an absent look, returned to the kitchen and unloaded the gun, like Max taught him, setting it on the table. He stared at it for a beat then clutched his stomach and let out a wail, sobbing.

Max slowly and softly approached him from behind and wrapped her arms around his chest, her head on his shoulder.

"You did the right thing, Kimmy. It's OK. You're OK. You did the right thing."

The river bends

That evening, after the Effects Crew collected the body for re-use, the quartet sat quietly in the living room, candle-lit, an old turntable playing, whiskey and passing a couple of joints around, fingers touching meaningfully with each hand-off, mourning serenity.

A far off explosion, then another, then another, and then one more, and turntable stopped, and nightlight in the kitchen went dark. They looked at one another in the candlelight and stood in unison, to the back porch, to see.

Every thing was dark. The street lights were dark. The houses were dark. The hills were dark. Every thing was dark.

That power was out. Right out. Ended.

kimmy and max in the morning

the coffee

gesture towards the back door

smoke hills

explosion

hmm

hmm indeed

never used one of these have you'

she goes over the principles of operation

the safety on (always, til you know what yr doing

finger (til you know what yr doing

the maverick enters

and kimmy shoots

and kills

the final hoax

Mickey Finale

death in 1978, no arrests or even suspected
except the one
for public drunkenness but

discuss the origins (historic, botanical, geographic) of
the drugs involved

troubleshooting: what goes wrong, what to do
about it

variations on a theme - burglary is but one old man
shooting / getting shot / ghost vision
of kimmy

kimmy felt a slight pang in his stomach
and burped then sucked
in a deep breath
his mind returning from sleep
filled in the world one piece at a time
realized the sound of an explosion
off in the distance reverbing off the hills.

the streetlights went out

hills on fire

billy bought the art commissioner's house
mary ran across the street
meaning to send this to you,
you really should have it
gun cleaning kit from the white house,
what brings you here
you really should have it,
reportback on the assault and rescue
crash here (mind sharing?)
they'll be gone by morning
the effects crew is on it

about that house
something awfully interesting, as it turns out
kimmy pulled off to the other room, kisses
bryan locked eyes, "who's your daddy"
he woke to the smell of woodsmoke and fine cotton
linens
the beatific smile of a shared joke
softly warm safe
room
the escape



Figure 2: Billy