

## **Cataracts**

"I can't finish this costume without you," Del says as Jack comes in from the greenhouse.

"You'll just have to measure me while I'm sorting this stuff out."

Del pulls a red-felt tomato ring over Jack's head, then adjusts the halo of lettuce just below his chin.

"I think your outfit is almost ready. What do you think of mine?" she says, bending to pull up her brown leotards.

This time Del is a ranch-style bean and Jack a tap-dancing hamburger for Taco Time in Anaheim. Del makes their costumes with remnant-fabrics she gets from the Sew-Fun shop where she works. She does it for Jack who eventually wants to break into television soaps. They dress as different foods for promotional gigs — supermarkets and fast-food chains. Del really wants to be a fabric designer. She carves designs out of raw potato halves, dips them into fabric paint, and repeats the patterns across yards of bulk cotton.

Jack dumps a garbage bag of marijuana on the table where Del is sewing. She sweeps aside a cloud of white polyester batting.

"Do you have to do that now?"

"First of the month," Jack says, carefully separating the stems from the grass.

Since Jack moved in Del has not paid rent. Instead, on the first of every month, Del delivers to Andy, their landlord, one plastic zip-lock bag of marijuana that Jack has harvested from the green house in their backyard. Andy steeps the leaves and drinks the liquid — like tea, because he once read in the *National Enquirer* that THC gets rid of cataracts.

Tommorrow is the first of September, and Jack has collected marijuana from the garage where he dries it by clothes-pinning the stems to cross-wires.

"Hey!" Jack says, turning up the volume on the television. Right next door to Taco Time, the Disneyland hotel will be entertaining the little Russian girl who wrote to President Reagan about wanting peace between their countries. Jack and Del watch TV-8's special segment as they film the girl seeing the Matterhorn for the first time. Tomorrow they will follow her through Disneyland.

"What a great opportunity." Jack crumbles marijuana between his fingers. He uses a piece of torn newspaper to push it into the plastic bags he's lined-up on the kitchen table.

“But you’ll be doing the promo for Taco Time. Besides, do you think they’re going to let you through the Disney Gates dressed like a hamburger? What if you get stuck in the turnstile?”

“You never think in terms of possibilities, Del. Think of it. TV-8, cameras, exposure. I could be to burgers what Ted Gianoulas is to the San Diego Chicken. Jack Swanson, the Anaheim Burger. Think of it.” He stops crumbling long enough to gaze at the ceiling.

She can’t be certain that Jack is not partially serious, so she continues to stuff the batting between the brown seams of the ranch-style bean. She holds it up to her, the kidney-shaped side on her left, and brushes some of the stems from her costume.

“Actually, I was thinking about Andy,” she begins.

“You can take this over in the morning, if you want.” Jack pushes a half-full baggie into the mess of thread, scissors and cotton in front of her.

“About if he has to leave.”

“Del—”

“You haven’t been over there, Jack. It’s a wreck. Last week there were rats eating bird seed from the floor, and Andy’s so blind he can’t even see them. I kicked at them. They jumped a little, but they didn’t go away.”

“I told you, they can’t force the guy out of his own house. It’s not legal.”

“But how do you *know*, Jack.”

“Just trust me,” he says, pursing his lips to end the conversation.

Del sews, half watching the television, but mostly watching Jack’s careful fingers as he weighs each bag on their postage scale. “Jack knows,” she repeats to herself. But she knows all along that what she really wants is some law, some story, anything he could give her that would make it sound true.

Jack is good at stories. Del met Jack at South Coast Plaza three years ago when Jack worked as a shoe salesman at Thom McAnn’s. She had gone in for a pair of deck shoes, but Jack had talked her into two pairs of pumps, fuchsia and lavender. Del remembers the way he touched her, removing her shoes, stroking the inside of her left foot along the arch while he explained the ways in which the pumps would support her weight; Jack later told Del he made the whole thing up just so he could hold on to her foot. Del still remembers the way he kept hold of her ankle, as though he could take that off too, right at the joint.

Del let Jack move in because he needed a place to hang out until he found another apartment. Jack’s last roommate, a bank teller, wanted someone with a schedule, someone who ate breakfast, someone to live with. Jack had moved in, and Del had never asked him if he was planning to ever move out

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again.

“Come to bed with me?” Del asks a second time.

“Not tired, babe,” Jack says, his eyes still glued to the television. TV-8 is already doing the sports.

“I’ll wait up for you.”

“Don’t bother.”

“Jack,” Del says, pulling her leotard down to her waist. She dances around the kitchen, occasionally bumping his chair with her hips.

Del has been working to make their life more exciting. She cleans in the nude, showers with Jack in the morning, even wears perfume though it leaves her with little strawberry rashes in the places she puts it. Last week she bought massage cream at the sex shop in Laguna, but Jack refuses to let her use it on him. Jack doesn’t like to be greasy. When they make love he washes himself off in the bathtub. When he comes back to bed he holds her from behind and she can feel his pubic hair wet against her.

“So,” she says like Mae West, hands on her waist, hips forward, “how about it?”

“You go, I’ll be in after this is over.”

Del just stands there, the empty sleeves of her leotard dangling, like an extra pair of arms, all the way to the floor.

“Andy’s back,” Del says, standing on the edge of their tub to see out of the bathroom window.

“Is he alone?” Jack says, toothbrush in his mouth.

“Nope. Guess who.”

“Skip?”

“Polly’s in the car.” Del watches Andy’s son lead him up the stairs, holding Andy’s elbow, opening the screen door. They go into the house, but Del can still see them through Andy’s open windows as they move from the living room into the kitchen. Skip bats at one of Andy’s birds and Andy bats at Skip. Del laughs.

“What?” Jack says, still brushing.

Del lets herself down, sits on the toilet seat and talks to Jack’s back.

“What do you think they’re up to?”

“Have you finished sewing my costume yet?”

“It’s Skip I don’t trust. I bet they’re going to try to move Andy into that rest home again. Especially now that they’ve buried Helen.”

Del misses Helen. Last summer, Helen and Andy repainted the gazebo

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in the backyard. They trimmed the mustard back that had run wild all spring, and then the three of them, Helen, Del and Andy, drank tea from Helen's blue china tea service. Jack never joined them, which Andy said was better because Helen had dropped one of the cups in the tea set and hadn't been able to replace it.

Helen lived with Andy until her heart attack and then went into a home where Skip and Polly said Helen could get full-time care. Del had seen it coming. Del hates Polly the most because Polly never goes inside Andy's house when she visits. She waits in Skip's Ferrari, her long hair hanging out like a white flag as she rests her head against the car window. Secretly, Del relishes the ugly stories Andy tells about Polly. Andy says Polly has bad karma because his birds attack her. Del loves Andy's birds, especially the white-headed cockateel, Madelaine who Del can tease onto her shoulder with pieces of sandwich.

"We have to leave by 10:15 tomorrow," Jack says.

"Uh-huh." Del climbs up on the tub again, but steps down quickly. Someone had turned on all the lights and pulled the blinds in Andy's house. Del can hear Andy's birds screeching, and she imagines Skip in his sunglasses trying to find a place clear of birdshit on Andy's couch so that they can sit down.

"That place is falling down around him anyway. All these places." Jack gestures to the bathroom window with the dental floss. He talks to Del as he flosses, occasionally pulling his lips back from his teeth into two thin lines. It makes Del think of James Cagney saying *you dirty rat*. Del hates James Cagney. She turns to the mirror and pretends to look for something in her eye.

"If they take him, that's it for us you know, she says, and then adds quickly, "We'd have to move."

"You don't think they'll be able to sell these houses. Not Andy's, not ours. I don't know about the Flores' place, but from the outside it looks like hell." Andy has stopped doing the yardwork on his properties since his cataracts got worse last year. Del occasionally waters the geranium bush on front of their place, but the cactuses have turned yellow and soft. The roots of the hibiscus bush have pushed up through the sidewalk. Though once in a while, she can hear crazy old Mrs. Flores run a stick over the chain-link fence, Del can't actually see the Flores house anymore because the bushes have grown over the street-side of the fence, almost to the roof.

"We'll have to pay rent, Jack."

"There are other houses, for God's sake."

"But—"

"Look," he says, abandoning the dental floss, Andy didn't give in to those assholes before. Now don't make trouble. OK?" He squeezes Del's arm.

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In the mirror, she looks at his rough brown hand against her pale skin. The contrast excites her, like yards of white cotton excite her just as stirs it into the dyes — alizarian crimson or peacock blue.

“OK,” she says, but as she reaches to put her hand over his, he pulls away, and she just stands there, in front of the mirror, holding her own arm as though it were going to fall off at the shoulder.

Del stops by Andy’s, handing him one of Jack’s plastic bags.

“Don’t you look smart,” Andy says, stroking a red bird on his shoulder. Del has given up trying to remember their names. She tried to count them all once, but after twenty she began to think she was counting some of them twice. There’s bird seed in Andy’s hair, little yellow and brown kernels. He sips from an old-fashioned blue tea-cup.

He still uses a saucer, Del thinks as she models her ranch-style bean for him. “I made this one too. But you should see Jack.”

“Broccoli again?”

“Nope. An Ortega-Burger.”

“No kiddin’? What kind of deal is that?” Everything is a deal to Andy. Once in a while, when Jack doesn’t come home, Del sits up with Andy and watches *On the Waterfront* or *Connecticut Yankee* on his old black and white RCA. When Cal Worthington, the car salesman, comes on with his monkey, Andy always says, “That’s one heck-ov-a-deal.” He explains to Del that this is the way people from Minnesota talk.

Andy has not lived in Minnesota since 1941. He moved to California when he was 24 and bought an entire block of Newport for 2,500 dollars an acre. Del has heard the story many times, how he lost the property except for these last three houses, one of which he rents to Del and one to the Flores. Once their street was named Westerhaute, for Andy. Now all the streets in their area named after queens — Victoria, Mary, and Elizabeth.

“Jack and I — we’re sorry — about Helen.”

“Remember summer?”

“Yes,” she says.

“She really loved my birds.”

“Yes.” She waits awkwardly, allowing Andy a few moments to stare out the window toward the gazebo in his backyard. Each year he and Helen painted it a different color. Last summer was seafoam green which is now peeling

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away at the top to reveal the dull mauve of the year before. Del hopes Andy can't really see the paint peeling. Secretly, Del likes the way Andy's eyes look with the cataracts. She likes the way his blue eyes cloud over, misty, nostalgic. She's glad he can't see the rats eating the bird seed, the birdshit on top of the television, the mildew on his walls, the whole house, coming apart around him.

"Better for her, you know. She doesn't have to deal with those damn kids."

"I saw Skip yesterday."

"They think I can't take care of myself. My own kids don't make a move without asking me for money. What kind of a deal is that, I can't take care of myself?" Andy throws his arm up, and the bird squawks and fans its wings dropping red feathers onto the carpet.

"What do you think, Delta?"

"What? I don't know. Skip and Polly are so different from you and — Helen." Andy pats her arm.

"It's OK. You know, at first I wasn't even upset at the funeral. Helen was so different after the second heart attack that I thought she'd be better off . . . well, you know. But then, Skip and some of the nephews lifted her coffin, carried it to the grave, and I thought, *that's not Helen, why that coffin's no bigger than a child*. It frightened me to think that death makes you smaller."

Del crosses her arms and holds herself. She went to her first funeral last Christmas when her father died of pneumonia. The postman had found him in his Kansas farmhouse about three days after he'd died. Del hadn't spoken to her father since she'd moved in with Jack. She has nightmares about her father — short, vivid dreams in which her phone call arrives moments after he's died. In the nightmare she is always both in Newport, on the phone, and in Kansas listening to the rings shrill through the freezing house. She stares at her father's shriveled body with the feeling that, if the Newport Del doesn't stop calling, the body may rise up out of the bed and answer her. But neither Del can tell the other one what's happening, because she can never speak in those dreams. Sometimes she wakes up at the same time a yell bubbles up from her throat. Or sometimes, the dream varies, and she calls right before he's about to die, and she saves him and wakes up happy until she remembers.

"Do you remember when we painted the gazebo purple? That first year when you were here?" Andy pats her on the shoulder.

He seems to have gotten older in two days, Del thinks. "And Helen dropped the paint can from the ladder. We had purple grass too."

"I'd really miss this place, honey."

"They can't make you go Andy. Jack says it's not legal. We could help

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you out.”

“Who? That young man of yours?”

“Jack.” Andy never liked Jack because Jack was allergic to birds.

“Still around, heh?”

“What do you mean, still around?”

“Touchy today, aren’t you?”

“Tired,” Del says, glad that Andy can’t see her face. At another time, she might have teased him back. But too much is happening at once. Everything upsets her now, not just the possibility of Andy leaving, not just Jack not coming to bed. Del is a one-thing-at-a-time person. That is why she loves to sew; she can do everything in order — lay out the fabric, cut out the pattern, sew the shoulders, back, and legs.

Del and Andy both jump at the sudden clacking next door at the Flores’. They smile.

“Now *that* woman needs help.”

The Flores had to put up a fence to keep their mother from running into the street and pulling up her skirt. Last year she caused two car accidents because she wasn’t wearing any underwear. The police threatened to arrest her unless the Flores kept her confined. Andy had to explain everything to the Flores in restaurant-Spanish.

“She used to cook for us when they first moved in.” Andy shakes his head.

Del turns toward the door. She can’t stand to hear another story right now. “Jack’s waiting for me,” she says.

“What’s going to happen to all my birds?” Andy says, facing the Flores house. “What’s going to happen to us?”

Shamefully Del finds herself wishing she had not come. She has never seen Andy this way, not even when Helen left. She would like to not be here, she would like to be in bed with Jack who would scold her for worrying, she would like this day to be two weeks ago or next year.

“How about a movie tonight, Andy? Reruns — *Topper Returns*.”

He brightens a little, picks up his head, attempts a smile. I am glad he has cataracts, Del thinks again, because he doesn’t have to explain his misty eyes.

They climb into Jack’s red volkswagen. Del drives because Jack can’t fit behind the wheel. Jack has to take the bottom half of his bun off before he can even fit in the front seat. Usually, they do not have this problem. Usually, they are vegetables, asparagus or broccoli, and they just have to take off their heads.

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“Do you think TV-8 will be there already?” Jack says, straightening his lettuce.

“You know, Jack, I’m not that anxious for all of America to welcome me into their living rooms as a bean.” But Del is not worried about TV-8. She has been with Jack on these promos before. She is more afraid of the things Jack does to make the day more exciting. Once he pretended he was blind and held out the top of his pumpkin for change. Del, who was the Halloween witch, had to hide what he was doing with her cape.

“Your legs look great.”

“Flattery, etcetera,” Del laughs. She is glad to hear her legs look better than Jack’s. The Taco Time people liked her legs for the bean and Jack’s belly for the burger. Jack wears bright orange high-tops for revenge. Her costume is very short, almost to her crotch, but she would rather be cool in the bean outfit than bulky in the layers of tomato, lettuce, beef and bun of Jack’s costume.

Jack spots the TV cameras before they even park the car. They have to park three blocks away because of the traffic, and Jack is so excited that he forgets to put on the bottom half of his bun. He is halfway up the block before Del can catch up to him, dragging the bun behind her.

“Jack,” she pants, “wait.”

He turns and grabs the bun. In his brown leotard, he looks large, exposed. Del turns away as he steps into the bun right there on the sidewalk.

Jack lasts about three hours in front of Taco Time before he decides to take off for Disneyland. “They’re paying you for eight hours. You can’t just leave.”

“Opportunity, Del.”

“But they expected—”

“Who’s watching? The kids? A few cars slow down, but we’re not exactly making a hit here.”

“It’s not right,” she whispers.

Jack whirls on her. “Where the hell do you get off telling me what’s right? If I were like you, I’d still be stuck selling shoes.” Several small children that have gathered and periodically pulled on Jack’s costume, now scatter back into the restaurant. A few adults turn aside, but Del can tell by the tilt of their chins they’re listening.

“Don’t Jack.” Her voice sharp, raspy, like an old woman’s, surprises her.

“Why not? I am a public person. I don’t care what these people think. Who’s going to care ten years from now whether I worked at this fucking joint



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eight hours or ten minutes? Only you Del. You keep this score card in your head. You have this whole plan up there,” he pokes the side of her head with his index finger. “You’re impossible to live with.”

He turns, but Del grabs him by the shoulder.

“I just wish you were different,” he says, shrugging her hand away.

Del pulls her arm close to her, embarrassed by her empty hand. She smiles at the crowd. This is just an argument, Del reminds herself. We have said things like this at home many times. But somehow, Jack’s saying it in this public place makes it official, with witnesses, something neither of them can take back. Del feels as though her whole life has been exposed — the nude dancing, the massage cream, her attempts to seduce Jack into staying with her. She feels shrunken, a spectacle, imagines her pathetic self in front of these people, in front of Jack who can’t even look at her.

“You’re no gem,” she mumbles.

“I heard that.”

She looks into the crowd. Now they stare openly at her as they did the little Russian girl on television last night. “He’s no gem,” she yells at them. And then she runs all the way to the car.

Jack gets into the car an hour later. He takes off his costume down to a pair of peacock print shorts Del made for him. Del can’t tell if he’s even been to Disneyland. She wonders if he has, wonders what he’s thinking, wonders most of all what he’s thinking. But she doesn’t ask because she knows he will tell her. Del still doesn’t know which is worse, knowing what is going on or worrying about it. Neither of them speak on the way home.

They pull into the driveway in time to see Skip helping Andy down the stairs. Polly sits stiffly next to Andy’s black-and-white RCA in the back seat of Skip’s Ferrari. Del can see her turn her head away from Andy and Skip as they approach the car.

“Wait!” Del screams, running toward Andy. Skip steps in front of him and Del barely stops herself from banging right into him.

“Let her alone,” Andy says to Skip. He holds Del by the arm and pulls her to him. She has forgotten that she’s still wearing the bean costume.

“They’re taking you away.” Andy looks right into her eyes. “Don’t go,” she pants, not from running but to keep from crying in front of Jack who has followed her.

“They brought someone, a social worker, to look at the house. I didn’t even know. There’s rats, I always heard them, but all houses have rats, right? But they saw them, in broad daylight, those buggers waltzing across the floor.”

Del can't talk.

"And the walls, everything."

She nods. She can't look at Andy's face. She holds him tighter, burying her nose in his jacket so that Skip and Jack and cool Polly can't see her face.

"Where're you headed?" Jack asks when no one says anything.

She feels like the two nightmare Dels — one buried in Andy's arms, and the other Del disconnected, watching and listening to Andy and Jack discuss rest homes over her head.

"Don't go."

Andy strokes her head. She feels like one of his birds — tiny, skittish. She imagines them without him, flying around in the house, banging into windows, looking for food.

"Dad," Skip says.

"I made them tea." Andy whispers in her ear. He pushes her back from him, at arm's length, so that she can see him grinning.

Del wipes her nose with the back of her hand. "You didn't."

"Every last one of them. They caught on after a sip or two. At least I went out kicking."

Skip looks lost among the weeds. For a moment, it's as though this private joke puts the whole business off — the rest home, Skip, Jack, all the changes that this one move will force upon her.

"Delta," Andy hugs her again. "Take care of my birds. Extra key's taped to inside the mail slot. That's the deal, OK?"

She nods her head without even thinking about it. From next door, Mrs. Flores starts again, clacking her spoon against the fence.

"Come on, Dad." Skip pulls Andy away, but Del hangs on to the sleeve of his jacket, possessively. Jack looks away. Andy rests his hand over Del's a moment, and then gently loosens her fingers.

"Goodbye," she says after the Ferrari as it takes off on Victoria, turns on Elizabeth, disappears.

Here we are, she thinks. Me, a few old queens, and a house full of birds.

"You coming?" Jack says.

And Jack, but she refuses to think about it too long.

"What are you doing in the dark?" Jack turns on the bathroom light and Del, suddenly blinded, squints down at him from where she stands on the tub.

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“Nothing.”

“Aren’t you going to take that thing off?”

Del smooths the felt of her bean costume with her fingers as though it were satin or velvet. Jack has stripped down to his shorts. His dark skin seems to startle everything in her house — the pastel towels, the yellow tile, the porcelain.

“I was trying to see what the birds were doing.”

“You can’t see over there in the dark.”

She turns back to the window. “I don’t know what I’m going to do with them.”

“Let them out.”

Del spins around and catches herself on the window sill as one foot slips off the tub.

“I just can’t let them go. How will they take care of themselves? Who will feed them?”

“They’re just birds for God’s sake, Del.”

“They’ll die,” she says, still standing inside the bathtub. Her voice, emotionless, monotoned, frightens her. She doesn’t completely understand what’s happening here. It occurs to her that the difference between them is all about Andy’s birds.

Jack leans forward. He looks into the mirror at the mirror-Del’s face, which is really behind him. “If you want to know, I don’t think it’s your responsibility. Let Skip and Polly take care of it.”

Del brushes past him. Jack follows her from the bathroom to the bedroom.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going over there.” She pulls her Mexican wool sweater over her costume.

“Jesus.” Jack sits on the bed, arms folded. “I bet there’s no electricity.”

It’s a dare, she thinks. He’s trying to scare me.

“Disneyland offered me a job,” he says.

Del buttons her sweater, slowly, deliberately.

“I was on TV.”

She walks to the front door.

“Well?” he raises his voice as he follows her. Del puts her hand on the doorknob. Jack leans on the door, one arm braced just above Del’s head.

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She looks up at him. He's going bald at the sides, she thinks.

"I don't believe you," she says.

He lets his hand slide down the door.

"Suit yourself," he says, walking away.

"I will." Still, she hesitates. *I have* to do it now, she thinks. She imagines feeling for the key, taped to the mail slot. She sees herself opening the door, startling the birds, covering her face as they fly at her like bats in the dark.

"Is there anything else?" She turns back, leans against the door. Facing him seems so much easier than facing Andy's dark house.

"We'll have to get rid of some of this — stuff." He motions to the kitchen, her sewing machine, his wind chimes, her dishes, his rug. "We could have a garage sale, split the money.

He doesn't even have to tell her. Del has always known. Jack moved in with just two pairs of pants and some T-shirts. Del bought him things — a bathrobe, deck-shoes, a toothbrush, an Indian blanket. For every gift she gave him, he gave her one back. Living with Jack was like a barter system. She has kept Jack like a secret in her soul, as though she could hide Jack from himself.

"Where will you go?" he asks.

He sounds kinder, she thinks.

"There's this friend at work," she begins. Jack nods, smiling, and after the initial relief in his face, Del is sure he won't consider too much what she tells him.

She almost freezes in the bean costume, as she slips outside. Her legs prickle as the ocean wind comes in. Andy's house, dark and silent, looks like a dull face — the windows, two empty eyes, and the door, a long, weathered nose. Del feels for the key, tears it from the mail-slot. She can hear rustling inside, but she's not sure if it's the rats or the birds. Before she can think about it, she turns the key in the lock and opens the door.

Nothing happens. She reaches around and flips the light switch, and the whole house blazes alive. The birds screech, the rats, who have now chewed through the bag of bird seed in the hall, retreat into the bedroom.

Del closes the door behind her. She moves gingerly through the house, avoiding circles of birdshit. The house has an odor of popcorn, sweating animals and urine.

The smell is overwhelming. Del has to shoo the birds aside to open the window, and she opens it before she realizes that Skip has removed all the screens.

A yellow bird escapes. Two red ones. Two more, and she is afraid to

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close the window now for fear of crushing them. The birds begin to chatter, the screech again. Before Del can stop them, they all rush for the fresh air. Del barely steps aside before Andy's birds sweep out of the house and up into the sky. She watches them scatter in different directions. Not one of them even turns back.

She looks up after them. She would like to imagine that they were just waiting to get out, that she has freed them, but she feels too ashamed to be relieved. The whole thing has just been another accident in her life.

There's a light from the bathroom window of her own house, and Jack's silhouette appears on the blind. She watches the silhouette-Jack rub his arms and chest as he showers. She likes him like this, without stories, without costumes, without marijuana. She likes Jack in her bathroom. There's something comforting about the way steam from the shower softens his angular body, the contrast of Jack's skin against hers, the mirror's edges. There's something about clean hair and teeth that makes people compatible.

"If you could just live in the bathroom," she says to the silhouette-Jack, "we would be OK." But they don't even have a bathroom door. Two weeks ago she got so mad at Jack that she held the door shut so he couldn't get out, and Jack kicked it right off the hinges. They were both surprised how easily it had happened.

Jack's silhouette disappears as the light goes out. Del jumps away from the window, falls back on the couch. Without the birds and Andy's black-and-white RCA, the house already looks condemned. One of the piano legs has splintered. The vinyl Lazy-Boy chair has only three of six buttons left on the back. Helen's tea set still sits on the table. Two of the three tea-cups are half full of green water.

Del gets up, clears the table, washes the tea set. She dries the cups with a paper towel and puts the whole set into a brown bag she's found stuffed between the wall and the refrigerator.

She holds the brown bag under her arm as she locks the door and slips Andy's key through the mailslot. If someone should ask her about the tea set, she reasons, she will tell them she has rescued it for Andy. Suddenly, as though she had read Del's mind, Mrs. Flores runs her metal spoon along the fence like an alarm. The noise reminds Del of helicopter blades or jack hammers — clackety, clackety, loud, insistent — it follows her as she walks home. She just keeps walking. She doesn't look back.