

took the phone from him. “What about the old man?”

The assistant DA was silent for a moment, then said, “That’s more complicated. You hang on to him until I get back to you.”

“Get back when?”

“As soon as I can, Mrs. Valentine.”

“About *how* soon.”

“A few weeks, maybe a month or two. I’m not sure. Who can tell in a case like this?”

“But we don’t need him for that long,” she said. “In fact we don’t need him at all!”

“By law you’re entitled to keep anything delivered to your house under false pretense, you know.”

“Is that all you can tell me?”

“Some people would sell their souls to hear the same thing, Mrs. Valentine.”

She frowned at Doug, who shrugged in response.

“You’ll call us?” she said, sounding doubtful.

“Sure,” he said.

When they returned to the kitchen they found Rusty going through the refrigerator. “You’re out of yogurt,” he said, “I’ll need some tonight.” He closed the fridge door and blinked at them. “I was wondering if you two could fly me to Miami, Florida, this week and buy me a new suit — I hear they’ve got very good seersucker there. How about it?” He looked from one to the other, his dishevelled hair peaked like a bird’s crown. Doug and Nancy only stared back, their faces slack and pale, their eyes wide with disbelief. “Hey,” said Rusty, smiling suddenly, “that was a joke.”

ANNE MACGREGOR

THE CROWN AND ANGEL

She’s so very beautiful. Half a dozen times now I’ve walked into this pub, and, standing at the bar, noticed her and thought this. It’s a circular bar and when she goes to serve customers on the other side I see her from the back as

well, so I've had time to consider her, to look while she can't see me looking. She's perfect — neither thin nor fat, every curve soft yet somehow spare. She is wearing very clean faded well-fitting jeans and a white T-shirt. Her hair is fair, shiny, shoulderlength. Covertly I look and look, storing every detail in my eyes, making the most of these few minutes before she turns around and comes over this side to serve me; when I must alter my eyes and my face to meet hers.

If I were a man, I would not have to do this.

And when she turns round, her face is sweet and beautiful too. But it's the all-overness of her that's striking: the way she is so unglamorous, so naturally graceful: every inch of her is clean lines, rounded, wonderful, even the tips of her elbows. I drink her in, I worship silently.

And now she approaches me all attention to find out what I would like to drink. And she takes a glass and fills it with beer. The flesh of her arm is soft and delicate, not quite pale, with short blonde hairs. She gives me my beer and takes the money and goes to the till while I watch adoring. And then she comes back with my change and puts it in my hand — for a fraction of a second her hand touches mine — and she looks at me and smiles right into my eyes so that I melt and I smile back. But I am very careful not to smile too wide or too long though my heart is beating: I love you.

And then I take my beer and walk away from the bar and suddenly I feel very clumsy and ungainly and very wistful, and also I feel like a pitiful sordid freak, for she would no doubt be shocked if she knew that her body had been so intimately, hopelessly caressed by the imagination of a dyke.

If I were a man, I would not have to do this.