ONE

I'm in love with a murderer. In his own quiet way he's extraordinary—honey in his hair, his mouth, his voice—a stillness in his eyes—and he moves with a panther's luxury. He's kind to me. I think his heart is breaking. He comes here every night but he hasn't said he loves me yet.

He can do things with my body that other men sense and hate, he pulls me down in the dark with a lost boy's smile, and his eyes are the phosphorescent blue of grottos or wolves. Then he sleeps, and in sleep he shudders, the way a child shudders and twitches while dreaming. When he wakes he's seldom rested.

I've known him for seven weeks, and only yesterday he admitted he killed a man. When he told me last night he finally came into focus, and I could see the dark stain at the center of him and the beauty fanning out from that center.

He says he killed for love. It should chill me, and it does, but I can't give up my happiness. He was—he is—my happiness. He never has to do much, just appear at my door, rocking on the balls of his feet, silent, diffident, and all of him reaches me, like the mystery of wind: the way his high-top sneakers are slightly scuffed, crafted of white leather with thick long laces that he has wound round and round his ankles; how his socks are whiter still, bleached to brightness by the Chinese laundry on Eighth Avenue, two blocks from the room where he lives; even his comfortably baggy

denim overalls and the rectangular "Osh Kosh B'Gosh" label sewn on the front bib. I reach out to cover the label with both hands because suddenly it pierces my senses like a small sun, so ordinary and so uniquely him, and I call him my blue-collar baby—though he isn't really, he's a wanderer with a bitter privacy in him.

"Let's have a talk," I say.

"Let's not, Lynn," he replies, mocking an old cliché, "let's just say we did," as he holds me in my crooked hallway with the towering, narrow walls typical of pre-war apartments on the Upper West Side. I admire this hallway, because it seems like a room itself, a room so thin and long that it's useless, and yet here it stands in every apartment on the A line. The first time Kim visited he nicknamed this hall "the gallery" because I'd hung a series of prints by Balthus—flour-soft girls with their radiant, almost evil sexual heat—and he paused dutifully in front of each one, as polite and studious as if he were a guest being introduced to members of my family. It was a touching formality, because earlier that night he'd been in a car accident, and in spite of the pint of cognac I'd slipped him when we left the emergency room, he was walking with pain.

Whenever he comes to see me he stops first in my kitchen, opens the freezer, and in the bluish light untwists a can of Budweiser from a six-pack lying on its side. The can is fuzzed with ice that melts under his fingers. He taps it so it won't foam, pops the top open and drinks with the abandon of someone who can never appease his thirst because his thirst is of a different nature. Occasionally he'll spend the entire night making love to me, moving deep into my body with that same thirst—"I'm a perfectionist. Don't you realize that yet?"—so that I, who need exactly this kind of never-ending sex in order to feel whole, order him to stop. He stops. I can't stand it when he stops.

And so I tell myself there are many kinds of murder. Long before I met Kim I witnessed a murder, on a Labor Day weekend, and what stays with me after all these years is how easily I passed by. I was walking along Seventh Street in the East Village, wearing a snug, black lycra dress, with a peony-red silk scarf belted around my waist, going nowhere and feeling lonely, when twelve or fifteen boys spilled out of McSorley's, the battered Irish alehouse with scrolled iron windows, scarred tables and sawdust drifting like

snow across the floor. They came swerving into the street, whooping and howling, stabbing at trash bags heaped at the corner, prying out bottles and hurling them gaily into storefronts and cement stoops so that a glorious, carnival song of bursting glass filled the street—until one boy sunk a knife into another boy's chest and for a moment the two stood staring at each other, alert and stunned. The other boys scattered and disappeared.

He looked about sixteen, this stabbed boy, with his pocked face and sweat-soaked blonde hair and bony shoulders, and already he was dying. A crowd gathered around him. They seemed no different than the kind of crowd that throngs around a street performer, straining, half-awed by this boy's hipbones twisting, his eyelids fluttering.

A few blocks later I stopped for a hot dog. It was good, the soft cool bun, the crunchy skin in my mouth. I wanted to eat for hours. On my way home to the Upper West Side I stopped at fruit stands for pears and apples, chunks of chocolate, cheese—blue, brie, smoked—and I stood in the street and opened the plastic bag and began to eat with my fingers, eating as I moved, migrating home, brushing against strangers, waiting with the crowd for the light to change. I knew that for the next week I'd call up friends and say, "I saw a boy killed on East Seventh Street." I'd tell each friend a different part: how the kids erupted into the street, how they tore open trash bags as if they were disemboweling carcasses, how like a circus it all seemed, how a few small stigmata of blood dried on the boy's shirt and that was the only visible sign, death's neat little entry point, how I ate melting cheese in the afternoon sun. I would tell this, too: at the first fruit stand, the one on the corner, I bought a bottle of seltzer, shook it up and let it spurt like champagne over my fingers. I've always loved life when I could stand aside from it.

I stood thirty yards away from a murder, my world was safe, and I floated away like a new balloon.

I've lived in New York for eight years. After a while it becomes an addiction. It's morning and a policeman nudges a man with his nightstick; the man is swathed in blankets. Around the corner, a woman in a mink coat and running shoes buys bagels at the deli