

"Brilliant, ferocious." —Michael Cunningham

WE THE ANIMALS



STIN TORRES

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WE WANTED MORE



WE WANTED MORE. We knocked the butt ends of our forks against the table, tapped our spoons against our empty bowls; we were hungry. We wanted more volume, more riots. We turned up the knob on the TV until our ears ached with the shouts of angry men. We wanted more music on the radio; we wanted beats; we wanted rock. We wanted muscles on our skinny arms. We had bird bones, hollow and light, and we wanted more density, more weight. We were six snatching hands, six stomping feet; we were brothers, boys, three little kings locked in a feud for more.

When it was cold, we fought over blankets until the cloth tore down the middle. When it was really cold, when our breath came out in frosty clouds, Manny crawled into bed with Joel and me.

"Body heat," he said.

"Body heat," we agreed.

We wanted more flesh, more blood, more warmth.

When we fought, we fought with boots and garage tools,

snapping pliers — we grabbed at whatever was nearest and we hurried it through the air; we wanted more broken dishes, more shattered glass. We wanted more crashes.

And when our Paps came home, we got spankings. Our little round butt cheeks were tore up: red, raw, leather-whipped. We knew there was something on the other side of pain, on the other side of the sting. Prickly heat radiated upward from our thighs and backsides, fire consumed our brains, but we knew that there was something more, someplace our Paps was taking us with all this. We knew, because he was meticulous, because he was precise, because he took his time. He was awakening us; he was leading us somewhere beyond burning and ripping, and you couldn't get there in a hurry.

And when our father was gone, we wanted to be fathers. We hunted animals. We drugged through the muck of the crick, chasing down bullfrogs and water snakes. We plucked the baby robins from their nest. We liked to feel the beat of tiny hearts, the struggle of tiny wings. We brought their tiny animal faces close to ours.

"Who's your daddy?" we said, then we laughed and tossed them into a shoebox.

Always more, always hungrily scratching for more. But there were times, quiet moments, when our mother was sleeping, when she hadn't slept in two days, and any noise, any stair creak, any shut door, any stifled laugh, any voice at all, might wake her, those still, crystal mornings, when we wanted to protect her, this confused goose of a woman, this

stumbler, this gusher, with her backaches and headaches and her tired, tired ways, this uprooted Brooklyn creature, this tough talker, always with tears when she told us she loved us, her mixed-up love, her needy love, her warmth, those mornings when sunlight found the cracks in our blinds and laid itself down in crisp strips on our carpet, those quiet mornings when we'd fix ourselves oatmeal and sprawl onto our stomachs with crayons and paper, with glass marbles that we were careful not to rattle, when our mother was sleeping, when the air did not smell like sweat or breath or mold, when the air was still and light, those mornings when silence was our secret game and our gift and our sole accomplishment — we wanted less: less weight, less work, less noise, less father, less muscles and skin and hair. We wanted nothing, just this, just this.