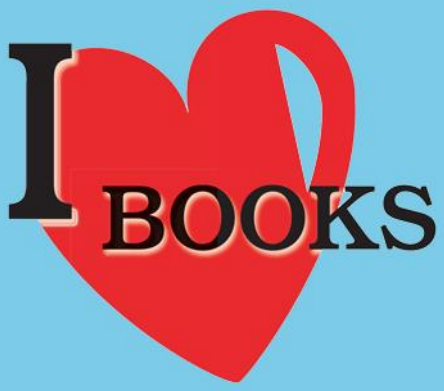


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Opening extract from

A Piglet Called Truffle

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For Dorothea
H. P.

For my family
E. S.





Chapter One
You Poor Little Thing

Jasmine was lying on her bed with her cats, reading her favourite magazine, *Practical Pigs*. It was a Friday afternoon in late November, and Jasmine, absorbed in an interesting article about rare breeds, was completely happy.

"Jasmine!" called her mum up the stairs. "I have to go to a calving at Carter's. Do you want to come?"

Jasmine swung her feet to the floor. Mr Carter was a grumpy old farmer with a permanent scowl on his face, but he kept pigs, and that was

reason enough to visit his farm. Jasmine's dad was a farmer, too, and he kept plenty of calves. But, despite Jasmine's constant pleading, there were no pigs at Oak Tree Farm.

"I'll be back soon," Jasmine murmured to the cats, stroking the tops of their heads. "Have a lovely sleep."

Marmite purred as Jasmine stroked her thick black fur. Toffee lay curled up on a blanket at the end of the bed, and didn't open his eyes as Jasmine left the room.

Jasmine's mum, Nadia, was standing at the bottom of the stairs in her coat and wellington boots, jingling her keys like she always did when she was impatient.

"Come on, Jas. Grab your coat, I need to go."

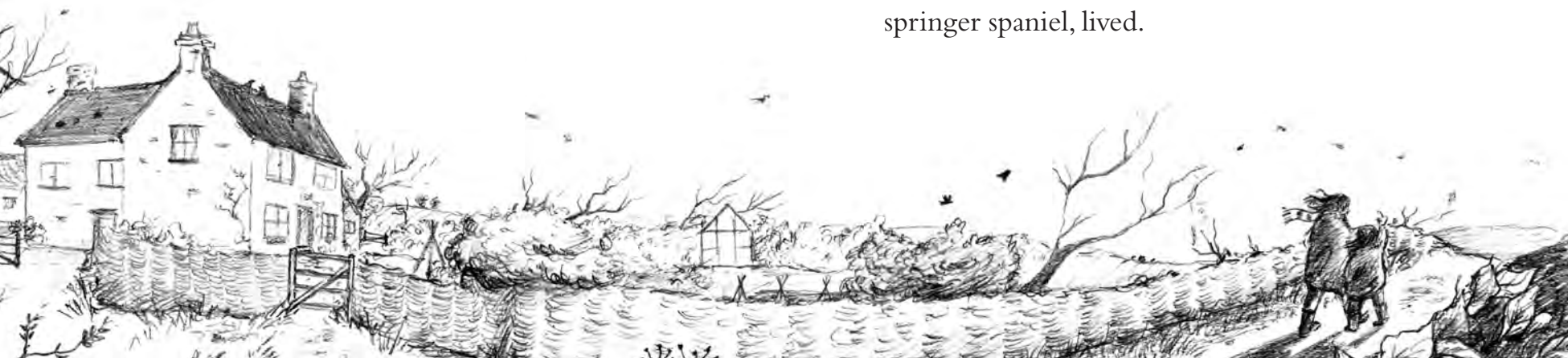
As a farm vet, Mum often got called out at inconvenient times. Jasmine sometimes thought farmers purposely waited until mealtimes to make their emergency phone calls to the vet.

Jasmine pulled her muddy waterproof jacket from its hook by the Aga cooker in the kitchen. Her older sister, Ella, sat at the kitchen table, frowning over a GCSE textbook. The table was covered with school books and files and scraps of paper and pens.

"We shouldn't be too long," Mum said to Ella. "I've put some jacket potatoes in the Aga."

"Uh-huh," said Ella, vaguely. She didn't look up from her books.

Jasmine and Mum walked out into the front garden, past the kennel where Bramble, the old springer spaniel, lived.



The kennel always made Jasmine sad these days. Until last month, there had been two dogs living there. But Bramble's sister, Bracken, had died of old age a month ago, and now Bramble was on her own. It must be so strange and lonely for her, Jasmine thought.

At the moment, the kennel was empty. Bramble was out in the fields with Jasmine's dad.



Mum opened the gate. "Manu, Ben, I'm going out on a call," she called into the tangle of bushes at the edge of the farmyard.

There was a rustling noise and two faces, smeared with mud, poked out through the damp twigs. One belonged to Jasmine's five-year-old

brother, Manu, and one to his best friend, Ben, who lived in the house at the end of the farm road.

"Do you want some of our crumble?" asked Manu. He thrust a washing-up bowl through the leaves.

"What sort of crumble?" asked Mum.

Jasmine peered into the bowl.

"Mud crumble, it looks like. With a crunchy dead leaf topping."

"It's got yew berries and acorns in, too," said Ben.

"It's dying crumble," said Manu.

"Dying crumble?" asked Mum.

"Yes," said Manu. "If you eat it, you die."

"It sounds lovely," said Mum, "but I think I'll pass. Daddy's checking the sheep in the Thirteen Acres and Ella's indoors if you need anything."

"OK," said Manu.

"Thank you, Nadia," said Ben. He was always super-polite to adults. That was how he got away

with being so naughty.

"And don't eat that crumble," called Mum.

"No, Nadia, we won't," said Ben. "Thank you, Nadia. Bye, Nadia." And their heads disappeared back into the bushes.



Mr Carter appeared from a cow shed as they drove into the farmyard. He was a stocky, middle-aged man, in a dirty waterproof coat and baggy dungarees tucked into enormous black wellingtons. As always, he had a scowl on his face.

"Afternoon, Jim," said Mum, getting out of the car.

Mr Carter didn't return the greeting. "Breech birth, I reckon," he grunted, as Mum opened the boot of the car and took out her cases of medicines and equipment. "Been straining for hours."

"Can I go and see the pigs?" asked Jasmine.

Mr Carter gave a grunt, which Jasmine took as

a yes. She was halfway across the yard when he called, "There's a sow just farrowed. Eleven, she's had."

Jasmine gave a squeal of delight. Newborn piglets!

"Watch out for that old sow, though," called the farmer.

"And disinfect your boots first," said Mum. "Here," she said, taking from the car boot a plastic bucket containing a bottle of disinfectant and a scrubbing brush.

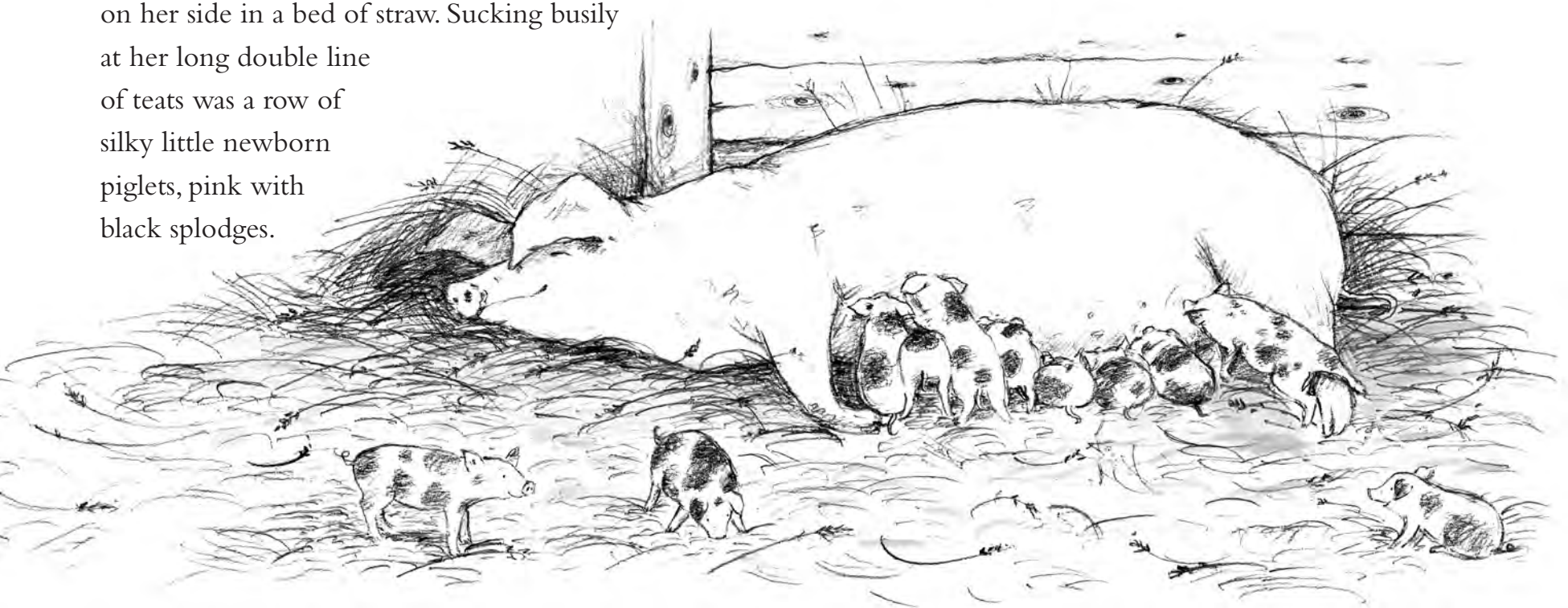
Jasmine took the bucket and filled it from the tap in the milking parlour. She poured disinfectant in, carried the bucket back to the yard and handed the scrubbing brush to her mother. Mum scrubbed her wellies and passed the brush to Jasmine, who did the same. It was one of those boring jobs that had to be done, like brushing your teeth. "We can't risk spreading infections between farms," Mum always said.

Now that her boots were thoroughly

disinfected, Jasmine splashed through the muddy puddles to the pigsties. Every sty had a stable door. The bottom halves were bolted shut, but the top halves were open.

Jasmine leaned over the half-door of the first sty and peered in. It was empty. The second sty contained one old sow lying asleep on a pile of straw. But there were rustling and grunting noises coming from the third one.

Jasmine looked in. A sleek Large White pig lay on her side in a bed of straw. Sucking busily at her long double line of teats was a row of silky little newborn piglets, pink with black splodges.



Their tiny curly tails wriggled with delight as they drank their mother's milk.

Jasmine grinned at the scene. "You," she said to the piglets, "are so lovely. And you," she told the sow, "are very clever."

Even though Mr Carter had already told her there were eleven piglets, Jasmine couldn't resist counting the row of little bodies packed tightly together.

Yes, there were eleven.

But then something caught her attention. At the far end of the row, from underneath the biggest and fattest piglet in the litter, there was a movement in the straw. A rustling sort of movement.

Was it a mouse?

Jasmine looked more closely. There was another movement, and she saw a little patch of pink beneath the straw.

Jasmine tugged at the bolt on the sty door. It didn't budge. She wriggled and pulled and gradually inched it back until, with a final jerk, it came free. She stepped inside the sty and leaned over the door to bolt it shut again. The pigs didn't look like they were planning to escape, but you could never be sure.

"It's all right," Jasmine reassured the sow. "I've just come to look."

Slowly and quietly, so as not to disturb the feeding babies or alarm the new mother, she crept along the row to where the biggest piglet

was feeding, tucked just in front of the sow's hind legs. Yes, there was definitely something underneath it, almost buried in the straw.

Jasmine crouched down. Gently she lifted the warm, soft body of the biggest piglet. It squealed indignantly, and the mother raised her head and bared her yellow teeth with a low growl. Jasmine hastily laid the piglet next to another teat.

The sow laid down her head again, alarm over. Jasmine gently parted the straw where the big piglet had been lying.

There, shivering convulsively, lay the smallest piglet Jasmine had ever seen.



It was about half the size of the others, and not much bigger than Jasmine's hand. It clearly didn't have the strength to push its way through its brothers and sisters to get a drink.

"Oh," she said. "Oh, you poor little thing."

She scooped up the trembling runt, feeling the bones beneath its thin skin. It didn't make a sound. She picked off the pieces of straw from around its mouth and snout, and laid it gently in front of a free teat. Its wet little snout was touching the teat, but the piglet didn't open its mouth. Its tiny tail hung limp and straight.

It must be too weak to feed, she thought. She had to tell Mr Carter straightaway. He had said there were eleven piglets. So he hadn't seen the runt.

"Don't worry," she murmured to the tiny pig. "I'm going to get help."



Chapter Two

The Scrawniest Runt I've Ever Seen

Jasmine left the sty, bolting the door after her. There was no time to lose. At any moment, the little piglet might get trampled and crushed by the others.

The farmer was striding towards the sties, pushing a wheelbarrow containing a bucket of pig feed.

"Mr Carter," said Jasmine, "did you know there's actually twelve piglets in that new litter?"

Mr Carter grunted. "Eleven."

"I thought there were eleven, too, but then

I saw there was a tiny little runt underneath the others. They were sitting on top of it and it couldn't feed. I put it right by the teats but I think it's too weak to suck."

Mr Carter grunted. "It'll have to take its chances. I haven't the time to see to it, and there's nobody else about."

Jasmine stared at him, outraged. How could he be so uncaring?

"But it will die if nobody helps it."

The farmer peered through the door of the sty at the newborn litter. He whistled. "That's the scrawniest runt I've ever seen. It'll never survive. Should put it out of its misery."

"Kill it?!" Jasmine shrieked. "No! You can't do that!"

Mr Carter picked up a battered shovel that was leaning against the wall, threw it into the barrow and opened the door of the middle sty. He wheeled the barrow inside. The old sow heaved herself to her feet.

Jasmine thought fast. She knew her parents wouldn't approve, but they wouldn't want the poor little pig to die, would they?

She plucked up her courage. "Would you let me take the piglet?" she asked. "I could look after it and then bring it back when it's stronger."

Mr Carter scowled as he tipped the bucket of meal into the sow's trough. A floury cloud rose all around him. "Wouldn't do no good. It would smell different from the others when it came back. The sow would reject it and the young ones would bully it."

"Well, could I just keep it, then?"

Mr Carter snorted. "Don't be daft. What do you know about pigs?"

"I could learn. I read *Practical Pigs*."

Mr Carter gave a laugh that was worse than his snort. "It hasn't got a chance, that one. Survival of the fittest, that's what it is. Nature's way."

He pushed the barrow to the far corner of the sty and began to shovel up the muck.