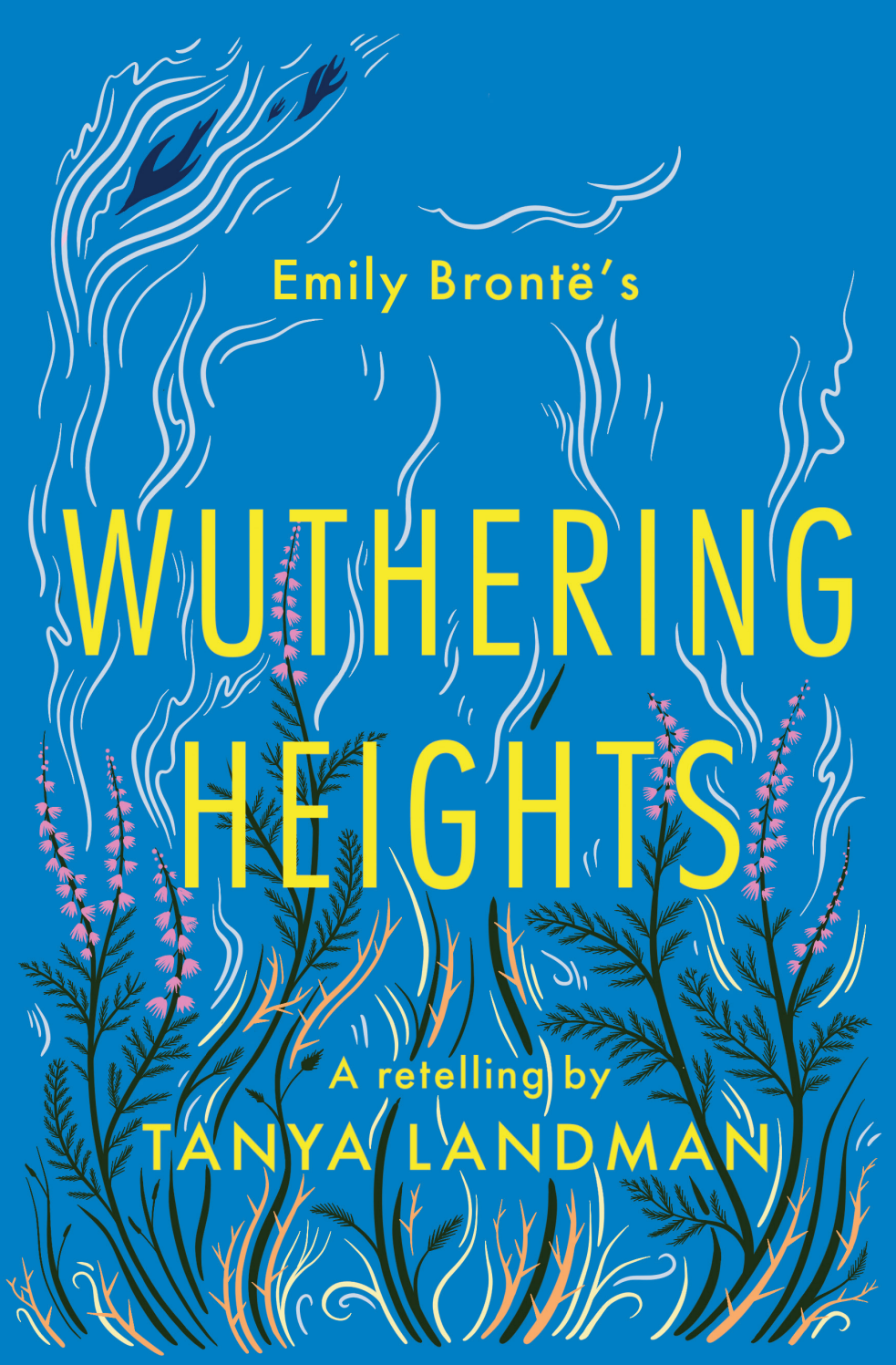

Emily Brontë's
WUTHERING HEIGHTS
A retelling by
TANYA LANDMAN

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Barrington Stoke

ALSO BY TANYA LANDMAN

Two Words

Passing for White

One Shot

Jane Eyre: A Retelling

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For Isaac and Jack: a Joseph-free version



A stranger is lying in my bed. He has helped himself to my books. His pudgy fingers are tracing the words I wrote as a child. Words meant for no one but myself. Words no one else should read.

And now the stranger is speaking aloud the names I scratched into the paint on the window ledge.

Catherine Earnshaw – the girl I was born.

Catherine Linton – the wife I became.

Catherine Heathcliff – who I should have been.

Catherine Heathcliff – who I was in my heart.

Catherine Heathcliff – who I was in my soul.

The stranger pronounces each name in turn, uttering them over and over until the air swarms with Catherines. It's a calling. A summons. He's given me form, brought me into being – a child lost and wandering on the moor for twenty years but now come home.

He sees me, but he will not let me in. He is cruel, this stranger. I grasp his wrist with my small cold hand and beg most pitifully, but he shows no mercy. The stranger tries to prise my fingers from

his arm. When he cannot, he grinds my wrist on the window's broken glass. My blood runs down onto the window ledge, pooling, blotting out my names.

And now Heathcliff is here. Calling me, begging me, "Cathy, do come. Oh, do – once more! Oh, my heart's darling, hear me this time!"

"I am here," I tell him. Because I always have been.

But Heathcliff does not hear me. He does not see. He cannot.

Not yet.



1.

I was always too much of one thing and too little of the other. Too loud. Too rowdy. Too wilful. Not meek or mild or gentle enough. Not ladylike. Mother and Father and the maid scolded me constantly, "Why can't you be a good girl, Cathy? Why can't you behave?" The more they asked, the worse I got.

When I was six years old, Father said he was going to Liverpool. Sixty miles there, sixty miles back, and he was walking the whole way. If Father told us the reason for his journey, I can't recall it. He'd be gone three days, he said, and when he returned to Wuthering Heights he'd bring us presents.

When Father asked what we wanted, my brother Hindley said, "A fiddle." Father gave him a smile, for he liked to think of his son as a musician. Then Father looked at me. I saw the hope in his eyes. He wanted me to be like Beauty in *Beauty and*

the Beast and ask him for something simple that cost nothing. A kingfisher's feather perhaps, or the shell of a robin's egg, or the first rose of summer plucked from a hedgerow.

I opened my mouth to speak, but before the words came out I saw something else in Father's eyes, something deeper. It was a shadow of desperation, an expectation of disappointment. At that moment I knew I'd never measure up, no matter how hard I tried. It just wasn't in me to be the obedient, devoted daughter my father craved. And I was sick of trying to be her. So I said I wanted a whip with an ivory handle carved in the shape of tiger's head, inlaid with silver and gold, and with rubies for its eyes. It should be long and supple too so I could beat my pony to ribbons when it did not gallop fast enough.

I suffered two full days of Mother's nagging and the maid's scolding while Father was gone. My brother Hindley was allowed to do whatever he pleased and to go wherever he wanted, for boys will be boys. But I had to be sweet natured and obedient and help around the house.

On the morning of the third day I slipped away from Mother's grasp, running onto the moor, my skirts raised high, as barefoot as a beggar. I ran until the pain in my side tore at me so hard I could run no more. By then I'd reached the high, rocky crags. The day was warm and I lay back on the springy turf and shut my eyes. I could feel the earth pulsing beneath my back. I could hear the throbbing of its life force as if I were a baby in my mother's belly, listening to her heart beat. I felt a tug at my chest, something pulling at me, and then I was breaking free … I rose up out of myself into the spring air, flying with the lapwings into the blue sky, carried on the wind towards the billowing clouds. I looked down and could see my body far below me, scrunched up like a piece of waste paper. And being good or bad didn't matter any more. I was tumbling, spinning, whirling, purely and fully myself, while at the same time lost in Nature.

When I snapped back to my body on the ground, I could barely breathe. My ribs seemed as tight as a brutally laced corset. My body held me as securely as if it were a prison.