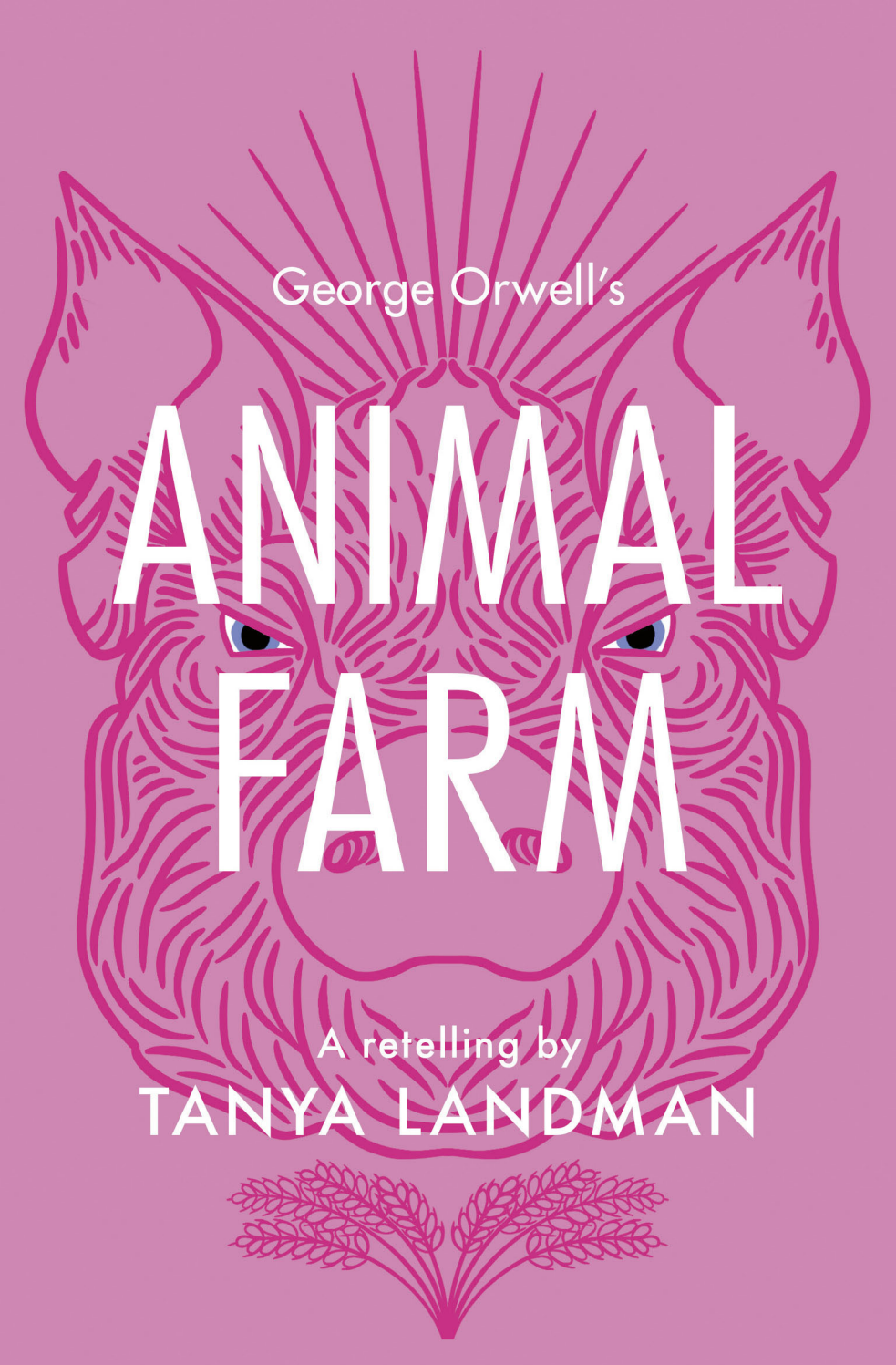

George Orwell's
ANIMAL FARM
A retelling by
TANYA LANDMAN

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A Fairy Story

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To Mark and Jane



1.

Mr Jones locked the hen-houses at Manor Farm for the night but was too drunk to remember to shut the chickens' small pop-hole doors. The light from his lantern danced as he lurched across the yard. At the back door, Mr Jones kicked off his boots and poured a last glass of beer. Then he made his way to bed, where Mrs Jones was already snoring.

There was a stirring in the farm buildings the moment the light in their bedroom went out. A rumour had gone around that old Major, the prize boar, had had a strange dream the night before and wanted to tell the other animals about it. Everyone had agreed to meet secretly in the barn as soon as Mr Jones was out of the way.

Major was a majestic pig, with a wise and kindly appearance. He was waiting on a sort of platform at one end of the barn as the animals began to arrive. First were the dogs and pigs, who settled themselves in front of him. Hens perched

on windowsills, pigeons on rafters. The sheep and cows lay down behind the pigs.

Boxer and Clover, the carthorses, came in together very slowly. They set down their vast hoofs with care in case any small animals were hidden in the straw. Then a brood of motherless ducklings filed in, cheeping. Clover used her foreleg to make a wall around them, and the ducklings snuggled up and fell asleep.

Next came Muriel, the goat. Then Benjamin, the donkey – the oldest animal on the farm. He was also the most bad-tempered, although he was devoted to Boxer. Mollie came in late chewing a lump of sugar. She was a foolish, pretty white mare who pulled Mr Jones's sporty little trap to town on market days. Mollie took a place near the front where everyone could see her tossing her mane and showing off the red ribbons that were tied into it.

Last came the cat, who settled into the warmest spot and didn't listen to a word. The only animal not present was Moses, the tame raven that Mr Jones kept as a pet.

When they were settled, Major cleared his throat and started to speak.

"Comrades, before I tell you about my dream, I have something else to say ... I am very old. I shall

not be with you for much longer. But before I die, I wish to pass on my wisdom.

"What is the nature of this life of ours?" Major asked, and then began to answer his own question: "Let's face it: an animal's life is miserable, laborious and short. We're born, then fed just enough to keep us alive. While we breathe, we work. When we're no longer useful, we're killed with hideous cruelty. An animal's life is misery and slavery: that is the plain truth.

"But is this simply part of the order of nature? Is the land so poor that we can't live comfortably? No! The soil is fertile, the climate good. We could live in comfort and dignity.

"So why do we live miserably? Because the produce of our labour is stolen by human beings! The answer to our problems can be summed up in one word – Man. Man is our enemy. Remove him, and hunger and hard work vanish for ever!

"Man serves no one but himself," Major went on. "He is the only creature that consumes but does not produce. Man doesn't give milk, he doesn't lay eggs and he's too weak to pull a plough. Yet he rules over us. Our labour tills the soil, our dung fertilises it and yet not one of us owns more than our bare skins.

"You cows – your milk should feed your calves, but instead every drop goes down Man's throat. Hens – how many of your eggs hatch into chicks? Clover – your foals were sold at market, and you'll never see them again!

"And our miserable lives are not even allowed to end naturally! I'm one of the lucky ones. I'm twelve years old and have fathered over four hundred children. But no animal escapes the knife in the end."

Major continued, "You young porkers will scream your lives out on the block within a year. Boxer, when your muscles lose power, Jones will send you to the knacker – he'll cut your throat and feed you to the foxhounds. Dogs, when you grow old, Jones will tie a brick around your necks and drown you in the nearest pond. But if we get rid of Man, the produce of our labour would be our own. We could be rich and free almost overnight.

"What must we do?" Major asked, without waiting for an answer. "Work, comrades! We must be in perfect unity. Night and day, body and soul, we must work to overthrow the human race! That is my message to you, comrades: Rebellion!

"When will it come?" he cried. "In a week? In a hundred years? I don't know. But one day,

justice will be done. Fix your eyes on that. Pass my message on to those who come after you so that future generations will carry on the struggle until it is victorious. Never forget: all men are enemies. All animals are comrades."

Just then, there was a sudden uproar. Four large rats had crept out of their holes to listen to Major, but when the dogs spotted them, they fled, fearing for their lives.

Major raised his trotter for silence. "Comrades, there is a question here we must consider. Are wild creatures our friends or enemies? Let's vote on it. Are rats comrades?"

A huge majority decided they were. There were only four who disagreed – the three dogs and the cat (who was later found to have voted on both sides).

Major continued: "Remember this: whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs or has wings is a friend. Remember also that as we fight Man, we must never become like him. When Man is conquered, no animal must ever live in a house or sleep in a bed, wear clothes, drink alcohol, smoke tobacco, touch money or engage in trade. Above all, no animal must ever be a master over others. Weak or strong, clever or

simple, we are all brothers. No animal must ever kill any other animal. All animals are equal."

Major then began to speak of the dream he'd had the night before – a dream of a world without Man. It had reminded him of a song his mother had hummed when he was a piglet. She had only known the first three words.

"But last night," Major said, "all the words of the song came back to me. I'm sure they were sung by the animals of long ago. I'll sing it now. I'm old. My voice is hoarse, but when I've taught you the tune, you can sing it better for yourselves. It's called 'Beasts of England'."

It had a stirring tune, and the words were full of hope and joy. They promised a golden future time when Man would be overthrown and the fields would be trodden by beasts alone. They promised a time of kindness, when cruel whips and bits and spurs would vanish for ever. The words of the song urged everyone to work together towards that glorious, golden future, even if they themselves died before it came.

The song threw all the animals into wild excitement. Almost before Major reached the end, they were joining in. The cows lowed, the dogs whined, the sheep bleated, the horses whinnied

and the ducks quacked it. Mr Jones woke to the noise, thinking a fox was in the yard. Seizing his gun, he fired a shot into the darkness. The meeting broke up, the animals fled to their places and the whole farm was asleep in a moment.