

CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY

As the novella opens, Mr. Jones, the proprietor and overseer of the Manor Farm, has just stumbled drunkenly to bed after forgetting to secure his farm buildings properly. As soon as his bedroom light goes out, all of the farm animals except Moses, Mr. Jones's tame raven, convene in the big barn to hear a speech by Old Major, a prize boar and pillar of the animal community. Sensing that his long life is about to come to an end, Major wishes to impart to the rest of the farm animals a distillation of the wisdom that he has acquired during his lifetime.

As the animals listen raptly, Old Major delivers up the fruits of his years of quiet contemplation in his stall. The plain truth, he says, is that the lives of his fellow animals are "miserable, laborious, and short." Animals are born into the world as slaves, worked incessantly from the time they can walk, fed only enough to keep breath in their bodies, and then slaughtered mercilessly when they are no longer useful. He notes that the land upon which the animals live possesses enough resources to support many times the present population in luxury; there is no natural reason for the animals' poverty and misery. Major blames the animals' suffering solely on their human oppressors. Mr. Jones and his ilk have been exploiting animals for ages, Major says, taking all of the products of their labor—eggs, milk, dung, foals—for themselves and producing nothing of value to offer the animals in return.

Old Major relates a dream that he had the previous night, of a world in which animals live without the tyranny of men: they are free, happy, well fed, and treated with dignity. He urges the animals to do everything they can to make this dream a reality and exhorts them to overthrow the humans who purport to own them. The animals can succeed in their rebellion only if they first achieve a complete solidarity or "perfect comradeship" of all of the animals against the humans, and if they resist the false notion spread by humans that animals and humans share

common interests. A brief conversation arises in which the animals debate the status of rats as comrades. Major then provides a precept that will allow the animals to determine who their comrades are: creatures that walk on two legs are enemies; those with four legs or with wings are allies. He reminds his audience that the ways of man are completely corrupt: once the humans have been defeated, the animals must never adopt any of their habits; they must not live in a house, sleep in a bed, wear clothes, drink alcohol, smoke tobacco, touch money, engage in trade, or tyrannize another animal. He teaches the animals a song called "Beasts of England," which paints a dramatic picture of the utopian, or ideal, animal community of Major's dream. The animals sing several inspired choruses of "Beasts of England" with one voice—until Mr. Jones, thinking that the commotion bespeaks the entry of a fox into the yard, fires a shot into the side of the barn. The animals go to sleep, and the Manor Farm again sinks into quietude.