

A Pig  
Called  
Heather

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Holiday House / New York

# *For Curly*

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First published in 2013 in the United Kingdom by Templar Publishing, Dorking  
First published in the United States of America in 2015 by Holiday House, New York

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Printed and Bound in December 2014 at Maple Press, York, PA, USA

[www.holidayhouse.com](http://www.holidayhouse.com)

First American Edition

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Oulton, Harry.

A pig called Heather / by Harry Oulton. — First American edition.

pages cm

“First published in 2013 in the United Kingdom by Templar Publishing, Dorking.”

Summary: “When Heather the pig’s best human friend, Isla, must leave the farm for London, Heather sets out on a quest to find her”— Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-8234-3290-5 (hardcover)

[1. Human-animal relationships—Fiction. 2. Pigs—Fiction. 3. Farm life—England—Fiction. 4. Voyages and travels—Fiction. 5. England—Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.O904

[Fic]—dc23

2014022690

# Chapter 1

# Hats & Carrots



When the pig called Heather woke up after lunch, the first thing she thought was that she had absolutely nothing to do. That was good—doing nothing was one of her best things, and also one of the things she did best. So while she thought about doing nothing and how nice it was going to be, it occurred to her that doing nothing might be even nicer if you could think about nothing while you were doing it.

She went and found her best friends, Rhona, the goat, and Alastair, the sheepdog.

“I’m off to the field.”

“What for?” asked Rhona.

“No reason,” replied the pig.

“What are you going to do?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“That’s right. Nothing.”

“Can we come?”

“I’d rather you didn’t. It’s easier to do nothing if you’re on your own. I’m going to try and think about nothing as well.”

Of course, if you’ve ever tried to think about nothing, you’ll know it isn’t really possible, mainly because the moment you think you’re thinking about nothing you realize that you are in fact thinking about something, even though that something is nothing. And that’s exactly what Heather was thinking when two brand-new thoughts barged into her head like envelopes through a mailbox.

Isla, and the shiny thing.

Isla was her best friend. Always had been. Best two-legged friend, that is. Heather could remember when Isla’s mum was walking around with a huge tummy telling them all she was going to have a baby. Then Isla was born and was soon zooming around the farmyard on her bottom, wearing diapers and eating mud. She learned to stand by using Heather’s tail to pull herself up and then wobbling, one jammy hand on Heather’s back and a triumphant grin on her face. She’d spent hours making Heather kneel down, like a camel, so that she could climb on her back and parade around the farmyard. Her first day at school, her panic when her first tooth fell out, her shout of triumph when she finally managed to climb the tree by the ruin, and her yelp of alarm as she fell off it.

There were bad memories too. In particular, the awful

evening when Isla came running out of the house in floods of tears and hid in the corner of the barn with Heather, crying and crying because her mother had died. Isla stayed in the barn that night. Her dad came out to see her, but she said she didn't want to be in the house and he seemed to understand that. She clung to Heather all night, like a very large, very sweaty piglet.

After that she'd spent more and more time with Heather. Quite often she fell asleep in the barn and then her dad would come and carry her inside, fast asleep. Heather had seen her grow into this amazing little girl—thoughtful, naughty and so chatty! From the moment she'd said her first word—"tractor"—she hadn't stopped talking.

So why had she not come to see Heather for two whole days? Something was wrong.

The shiny thing was right in the middle of her field, and it glinted every time the sun came out from behind the clouds and shone at it. What was it?

Heather went over to investigate. It was small and round, and although it was covered in earth, it still managed to twinkle at her. She sniffed at it but it didn't smell of very much. She gingerly took a bite, but it was very hard and tasted like blood so she spat it out again quickly. It was annoying, though—she didn't like having something in her field that she couldn't either identify or eat. She could bury it again, but then she'd always know it was there. The answer came to her when she heard the familiar *thump, thump, thump* of Isla's skipping rope. Isla would know what it was. Isla was really clever. She always knew stuff

like that. And maybe she could find out why Isla wasn't talking to her. Get rid of both thoughts at once. Then her head would be nice and empty again. Trying to avoid biting into it, she put the thing in her mouth and walked over to the gate that separated the field from the back garden.

Heather spat out the shiny thing and then put her trotters onto the top of the gate and oinked loudly. No response from the garden. She oinked again, louder. Still no response. Isla must have her iPod on. Heather sighed. She didn't like squealing, but it looked like she had no choice. She checked nobody important was listening, took a deep breath and squealed, just like a pig.

Isla looked up, grinned, got her feet all tangled up in the skipping rope and fell in a heap on the ground.

She picked herself up, unplugged her headphones and ran over. "Heather Duroc! There you are! I've been looking everywhere for you. Where were you?"

She was called Heather Duroc because she liked eating heather, and she was a Duroc pig. Her mother had been called Eggshells Duroc, her father Potatoes Duroc, one of her sisters had been named Yogurts Duroc and her brother, after an unfortunate incident when the back door was left open and the kitchen unattended, had always been known as Chocolate Mousse Duroc.

"I've finally got Dad to agree that you can come to school with me tomorrow. I didn't want to get your hopes up so that's why I didn't say anything before, but tomorrow's pet day at

school and Dad says I can take you! Not that you're a pet or anything, I mean, you're like a proper working animal, but because we're such good friends I asked Dad if it would be okay and he said yes. So tomorrow morning we'll get the school bus together and you can spend the whole day at school with me!"

School! Heather gulped and pushed her snout into Isla's hand so the little girl wouldn't realize how nervous she was. She didn't know what happened at school, although Isla seemed to do a lot of counting. She did say lunch was nice, though, so it couldn't be all bad.

Heather remembered that she'd had something important to ask Isla, so she dropped to the ground, picked up the funny thing in her mouth and stuck out her tongue with the thing on it.

"Ooh, an old coin. That's pretty. Where'd you find it?"

"Isla, come on, love—it's teatime!" shouted Farmer Wolstenholme from over by the house.

Heather waved her snout back toward the middle of the field, but she wasn't sure if Isla registered.

"I've got to go now—Dad's calling me in. I'll come out and see you later." She pocketed the coin, leaned across the fence and whispered, "Dad's done carrots for tea so I'll try and smuggle some out to you!"

That sounded promising and Heather snuffled contentedly as her friend raced across the farmyard to where her dad was waiting for her. She watched her fondly, amazed as always at the amount of energy contained in that little body with its spindly

arms and bandy legs. Always on the move, always so excited about everything, always trying to squeeze even more juice out of the day. It made Heather feel tired just watching her. Maybe that was why they got on so well. Isla reminded Heather of one of her piglets, and as Heather couldn't answer her, Isla got to talk and talk without ever having to stop.

She was enjoying thinking about Isla, so she was extra cross when a strange van drove into the farmyard and parked a new thought in her head. The van was white and gold, and on top of it were perched three huge plastic chickens, bent over and with their wings out, looking like they were going to take off at any second.

"*Busby's Birds*. Must be a chicken farmer," said Rhona, who had just arrived and was reading what was written on the side of the van.

A tall, angular man uncoiled himself from inside it like a snake being charmed out of a basket.

The man looked around him, nodded in a pleased fashion and reached for his cell phone. He dialed and held it to his ear as he looked around him.

"I'm at the farm now. You were right, it's perfect." He listened for a bit, nodding all the time and then he smiled, his teeth white and gleaming. "I've not seen the cellar yet, but if it's as big as you say it'll do us just fine."

He hung up and walked over toward the farmhouse.

Heather was curious. "What does he want? We're not a chicken farm."

“I don’t know,” replied Rhona, “but that’s a ridiculous name. Everyone knows a busby is a hat. Soldiers wear them. Like the ones who guard Buckingham Palace, where the Queen lives.”

“Doesn’t the Queen wear a crown?” asked Heather, a bit confused.

“She does. It’s how you know she’s the Queen. But this man’s a chicken farmer. Named after a hat. I don’t like it. Or him.” She turned away gloomily. “How are you, anyway?”

“Exhausted. Rhona, what exactly do you do at school?”

“Why?”

So Heather started to tell her about Isla and pet day and together they headed off to the barn for their supper. The trough was full of delicious slops and Heather dove in straight away. For quite some time she was too busy eating to say anything, and then suddenly she stopped. Something very alarming had just occurred to her. She sat down on her haunches and looked so worried Rhona stopped eating and raised an eyebrow questioningly.

Heather swallowed. “Do you think the hat man is staying for tea? Only, Isla promised me carrots. If he stays there may not be any left.”

## Chapter 2

# Pets & Robbers



It was pet day and Isla and Heather were at the bus stop.

“Today’s going to be so, so cool. This is the first year I’ve been able to bring in a pet for pet day because we’ve not had it because of foot and mouth disease. Miss Stephenson says it doesn’t matter if we don’t have anyone to bring, but all of us in my class have definitely promised that we’re all bringing an animal in, even Tullynessle Morag and she hasn’t even got a pet so she’s going to borrow her neighbor’s cat, although she says he’s really old so he might be a bit freaked because it can get really noisy at school, so she thinks her mum might just make her catch a spider or something, because they can be pets too, like when Callum brought in his stick insect for show-and-tell, and we all tried to spot him in the case and it was really hard because he was green like a leaf and shaped like a stick so he

was completely impossible to find. And he didn't move. Camouflage. That's what Miss Stephenson said. She said it's like when you wear white things in the snow or green things in the jungle, so that people can't see you. Callum said he could see him but I don't think there was anything in there at all. Just loads of sticks."

The bus pulled up and they got on. Isla was still talking.

"...So Millie's probably my best friend. She's called Millie Raphael-Campbell because her dad's Scottish but her mum's mum was like this really cool South American Indian woman who lived by this huge river called the Amazon and it was miles from anywhere so she used to go to school on a boat! How cool is that? This is her stop. Look, she's got her chickens with her! Hi Millie, this is Heather, she's coming to school today." She leaned forward and whispered to her friend, "I think she's a bit nervous so be nice to her." Then she leaned back again. "You've got your chickens, that's so cool, what are they called? We're going to have the best day!"

Isla's friend had straight black hair, and when she grinned at Heather it made her eyes twinkle like an apple when the sun hits it. That thought made Heather's tummy rumble. "Hi Heather, Isla talks about you all the time! It's so good you're red. All my cousin Mac's pigs are pink, except some of them have got black splotches, you know, because they're Saddlebacks." Then she held up a big basket full of chickens and started introducing them. "That's Tikka Masala, this one is Korma, that one in the corner's Tandoori, here's Butter and the speckled one's Biryani.

I was going to bring Karahi as well, but Mum wouldn't let me. Iain said he'd try and bring Daisy but you know what his dad's like, he's so protective he won't hardly let her out of his sight!"

Heather gulped. Millie talked even faster than Isla! If everyone at school talked that fast, how was she going to understand anyone?

The bus slowed down and turned in to Old Meldrum School. It was a low, wide building with a high bit in the middle. Sort of shaped like Isla when she stretched her arms out and ran down the hill. The bus pulled up right where Isla's nose would have been and there was a loud hiss as the driver opened the door and everyone pushed and barged to get off. Heather stared out of the window and her heart sank again. There were people everywhere, all chatting, and they all seemed to know each other.

Isla was already off the bus, but Heather hadn't moved. She couldn't. She wasn't ready for this. Isla stuck her head back inside when she realized Heather wasn't with her.

"Come on, what you waiting for?"

But Heather was frozen. She couldn't get up from the seat.

Isla came back onto the bus and put her arm around her. "Come on, we're here now, everyone's waiting."

Heather sank farther into the seat. Why was she here? She didn't belong here. She just wanted to go back to the farm.

The figure of the lady bus driver loomed over them as she looked down at the two friends. "Will I take her back home, Isla pet?"