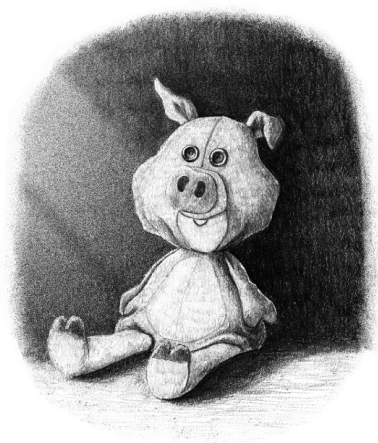


J.K. ROWLING

THE
CHRISTMAS
PIG



ILLUSTRATED BY JIM FIELD

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DUR PIG

Dur Pig was a small toy pig made of the same material as a soft towel. He had little plastic beans in his tummy, which made him fun to throw. His squishy trotters were exactly the right size to wipe away a tear. When his owner, Jack, was very young, he fell asleep every night sucking Dur Pig's ear.

Dur Pig got his name because when Jack started to talk, he said "dur pig" instead of "the pig." When new, Dur Pig had been salmony-pink, with shiny black plastic eyes, but Jack couldn't remember Dur Pig looking like that. Dur Pig had surely always been as he was now: grayish and faded, with one ear stiff from all the sucking. Dur Pig's eyes fell out, leaving tiny holes in his face for a while, but then Jack's mum, who was a nurse, sewed little buttons in place of the missing plastic beads. When Jack came home from nursery that afternoon, Dur Pig was lying on the kitchen table wrapped up in a woolen scarf, waiting for Jack to take off the little bandage covering his eyes. Mum had even made Dur Pig a set of medical notes: "DP Jones. Operation to attach buttons. Surgeon: Mum."

After his eye operation, everyone started calling Dur Pig “DP” for short. From the time he was two years old, Jack would never go to bed without DP, which often caused problems, because when bedtime came, DP was usually nowhere to be found. Sometimes it took Mum and Dad a long time to find DP, who turned up in all kinds of places: hiding inside one of Dad’s shoes or scrunched up in a flowerpot.

“Why d’you keep hiding him, Jack?” Mum asked every time she found DP curled up in a kitchen drawer or hidden beneath a sofa cushion.

The answer was private, between Jack and DP. Jack knew DP liked cozy spaces where he could snuggle up and sleep.

DP liked doing exactly the same things Jack did: crawling under bushes and into hidey-holes and being thrown up in the air, Jack by his Dad, and DP by Jack. DP didn’t mind getting dirty, or being dropped accidentally in a puddle, as long as he and Jack were having fun together.

Once, when Jack was three, he put DP in the recycling bin. When he’d heard Mum say the bin was for recycling, Jack thought it had something to do with bike rides, so he waited for Mum to leave the kitchen, then dropped DP in there, imagining he’d have a little spin around when the lid was on. Mum laughed when Jack explained why he was peeking in the bin to try and catch the things moving. She explained that “recycling” meant something very different to going for a bike ride. All the things in the bin were going to be taken away and turned into other things, so they’d have

a whole new life. Jack definitely didn't want DP to go away and be changed into something else, so he never put DP in the recycling bin again.

All his adventures gave DP his interesting smell, which Jack liked very much. It was a mixture of the places DP had gone on his adventures, along with the warm dark cave under Jack's blankets, and just a trace of Mum's perfume, because she always hugged and kissed DP, too, when she came to say good night to Jack.

Every now and then, Mum would decide DP had gotten a bit too smelly and needed a good clean. The first time DP ever went in the washing machine, Jack had lain on the kitchen floor and screamed with rage and fear. Mum had tried to show Jack how much DP was enjoying swirling around in the washing machine, but it wasn't until DP was back in the cave under Jack's blankets that night, soft and dry and smelling of washing powder, that Jack really forgave Mum. He soon got used to DP going in the washing machine, but he always looked forward to DP returning to his natural smell.

The very worst that ever happened to DP was when Jack was four, and lost him at the beach. Dad had already packed up the towels and Mum was helping Jack back into his sweatshirt, when Jack suddenly remembered burying DP somewhere, though he couldn't quite remember where. They searched until the sun was setting and the beach was almost empty, and Dad got really cross, and Jack wailed and sobbed, but Mum kept telling him not to give up hope, and digging all round with her hands. Then, just

CHAPTER 1

as Dad was saying they'd have to leave without DP, Jack dug his bare foot into the sand and his toes hit something squashy. Jack pulled DP out, sobbing with happiness, and Dad said that DP was never to come to the beach again, which Jack thought very unfair, because DP loved sand, which was why Jack had buried him in the first place.