

A Girl Called

Deirdre Duck

by

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Chapter 1: Deirdre

Deirdre Duck should have been used to it.

After all, she had been called Deirdre Duck all her life. And all her life – well, for at least as long as she could remember – she had been teased by other children.

“Quack! Quack!” they would shout as she walked by. “Do you want some bread?”

Deirdre tried not to take any notice but it was very hard. And to make matters worse, Deirdre was dumpy and walked with a bit of a waddle, rather like a duck.

Her mum sent her to ballet and gym lessons in the hope of making her graceful, but it hadn’t worked so far. And so the teasing went on.

Deirdre had once asked her dad if she could change her name.

“Nonsense my little duckling,” he had said. (Deirdre wished he wouldn’t call her that.) “Ducks we are and Ducks we stay. You must be proud of being a Duck.”

Deirdre wasn’t. She wished she was a Smith or a Murphy or an Oakley – anything rather than a Duck.

She was particularly fed up at the moment. Two boys at school, Paul and Derek, were making her life a misery with their teasing. One day they got her so cross that she screamed at them to stop. That got *her* into trouble.

“You shouldn’t take any notice,” scolded the teacher crossly. “Teasing can’t hurt, you know. Just let it slide off you – like water off a duck’s back. Oh, I, er, whoops!”

Too late he realised what he had said. The class fell about laughing. Deirdre fumed.

Deirdre’s mum saw that she was miserable. So she took her shopping and bought her some snazzy new clothes to cheer her up. She still had hopes of turning Deirdre into an elegant young lady.

Deirdre had hopes of turning into a duck. That would solve all her problems. She wouldn’t mind being called a duck then. She could go and live on the duck pond in the park and be happy.

So she started eating lots of bread (she didn’t fancy pond weed much) and started to go swimming every day. She had two baths a day as well – the more time she spent in the water, the quicker she reckoned she would become a duck.

But nothing happened except that she got a bit less dumpy (because of all the exercise), and a bit more spotty (because she only ate bread which wasn’t very healthy).

Next Deirdre tried another approach.

Perhaps her mum was right – perhaps if she smartened up her appearance, people would be nicer to her. So she tried out new hairstyles and pinched some of her mum’s clip-on earrings to wear at school. But no one noticed. They kept on quacking at her.

Chapter 2: The duck

One afternoon, after a particularly bad day of teasing, Deirdre put on her snazziest outfit, took a whole loaf of bread from the kitchen and went to the park.

The duck pond was very big and one end of it stretched into a woody area where not many people went. Deirdre wanted to be alone and so that was where she headed. As she got close, she became aware of a commotion. There was a lot of quacking and splashing.

Deirdre hurried to the edge of the pond. There, by a clump of reeds, was a little duckling thrashing around madly. It was tangled up in some fishing line which had been carelessly discarded.

Its mother was frantically trying to help it by pecking at the line. But that was doing no good and the more the duckling struggled, the more it got tangled up.

The mother duck saw Deirdre coming. "Help!" she quacked.

"Good grief," said Deirdre to herself. "Perhaps I *am* turning into a duck after all! I can understand what that one's saying!"

"Please!" called the duck. "Please help!"

Without a thought for her trendy new runners, Deirdre leapt into the murky water of the pond. The mud swirled around her knees. It lapped onto her brand new fashionable lilac hotpants but Deirdre didn't care.

She delved into the depths of her really cool handbag and pulled out her nail scissors. (Deirdre had loads of nail scissors – one of her aunts gave her a pair every Christmas.) Nursing the duckling in one hand, she began snipping away at the fishing line. It was tough but Deirdre managed to hack through.

At last the duckling was free. Deirdre carefully placed the little bird next to its mother on the pond. She turned and waded to the bank.

"Wait a minute," called the duck.

Sheltering her sobbing baby under one wing, she swam up to Deirdre who was still knee-deep in mud.

"I can't thank you enough!" cried the duck. "You've saved my duckling. Is there anything I can do to repay you?"

"I'm glad I could help," replied Deirdre, feeling a bit strange, talking to a duck.

Then a thought crossed her mind.

"As a matter of fact, there *is* something you could do. Let me get out of the pond before the park-keeper sees me and I'll tell you."

Deirdre clambered out of the pond and dried her wet legs as best she could with her hanky. She emptied the water (and a couple of tiddlers) out of her runners and hung them in a nearby tree to drip dry. She wrung out some of the water from her hotpants.

Then she and the duck sat down in some bushes and had a long, long chat. Eventually Deirdre started shivering because she was still damp, so she put on her soggy runners, said goodbye and started to squelch her way home.

“See you tomorrow morning at your house, then!” called the duck after her. Deirdre turned, waved and nodded.

Chapter 3: Is Deirdre a duck?

Early – very early – next morning, there was a lot of activity at Deirdre’s house.

If you had been passing by, you would have seen a window open stealthily. You would have spotted a duck swoop down from the sky and glide in.

Then you would have been surprised to notice a shadowy figure climb out through the window and shin down the drainpipe. You would have watched with your mouth open as the shadowy figure disappeared in the direction of the park.

You would have hung around for a few minutes to see if the duck flew out again. When it didn’t, you would have shrugged your shoulders and gone on your way, wondering what all that was about.

Deirdre was late down to breakfast.

“You’d better go and tell her to get out of bed,” Mrs Duck said to Mr Duck. “She’ll be late for school.”

Mr Duck sighed and left his nice plate of bacon and eggs. He went upstairs and knocked on Deirdre’s door.

“Come on, duckling!” he called. “Breakfast’s ready.”

No reply.

“Hurry up, duckling!” He tried again. This time he heard a noise suspiciously like a quack.

“Now don’t be cheeky and get up!” He opened the door. He froze. There in the bed, instead of Deirdre – was a duck!

He turned and ran downstairs to get Mrs Duck.

“Quick, my love!” he cried as he ran. “Our daughter has turned into a duck!”

Mrs Deirdre glanced at the calendar. No, it wasn’t April Fool’s Day. What was this all about?

One look at her husband’s white face told her that he wasn’t joking. Hand in hand, they nervously went upstairs together.

The duck sat there very happily. “Quack!” it said in greeting as they appeared in the doorway.

“Deirdre, is that you?” asked Mr Duck.

The duck nodded.

“Oh, this is all our fault!” wailed her mother. “We shouldn’t have let you get teased all the time, Deidre. We shouldn’t have let you have all those baths! I shouldn’t have married a man called Duck!” She glared at her husband when she said that

“Now, now, my dear. Don’t let’s get carried away,” soothed Mr Duck. “If we go on as normal, I’m sure our Deidre will soon turn back into a little girl again, won’t you my duckling – er – duck?”

“What!” shrieked Mrs Duck. “We can’t carry on as normal. Look at Deidre – she’s a duck, a real duck. People will laugh at us!”

“Well, it seems that people laugh at us already,” sighed Mr Duck. “We mustn’t give in. We WILL carry on as normal. Now, Deidre, come and have some bread and I’ll take you to school in the car. It’s a bit far for you little legs to waddle.”

He bustled out of the room. Mrs Duck knew there was no arguing with him in this mood. She scooped the duck carefully off the bed and followed him downstairs.

Chapter 4: A duck at school

Sure enough, after breakfast Mr Duck drove the duck to school. He carried it to Deidre’s desk, surrounded by gaping pupils and teachers.

“Deidre’s not quite herself today,” he haughtily informed her teacher. “Kindly see to it that she gets some bread at lunchtime and don’t let her get trodden on in the playground.”

He patted the duck on the head. “Deidre, my dear, I’ll pick you up after school.” He marched out.

Silence reigned. No sniggers at all. Everyone – except one person – felt rather guilty. Even the children who had never teased Deidre themselves realised that they had never stood up for her either.

One of her two main tormentors, Derek, approached nervously. “Sorry!” he muttered. “I thought I was being clever. It was all Paul’s idea anyway!”

Paul wasn’t having that. He pushed Derek aside. “Huh! I’m not sorry!” he said angrily. “I said you were a duck, and you ARE a duck. Ha, ha, ha!” he laughed rudely.

But then he suddenly yelled, “AAAARGH!” because the duck flew up from the desk and seized his nose in its beak. It pulled and pulled and pulled.

All the other children burst out laughing.

“Get it off me!” yelled Paul. But no one helped and still the duck tugged at Paul’s nose.

“OK, OK, I AM sorry! I won’t be rude to you again, I promise,” he howled at last.

The duck let go, flew once round the classroom and disappeared through an open window towards the park.

Deirdre was waiting for the duck by the pond. She had been there since very early that morning, hiding in the trees and looking after the duck's baby.

She darted out when she saw her feathered friend return. The duckling squeaked with delight.

"How did it go?" asked Deirdre.

"Brilliantly!" laughed the duck. "I've had a wonderful time! I think you'll find that everyone will be a lot nicer to you from now on. And I know your mum and dad will be much more understanding."

"Thanks ever so much," sighed Deirdre. "Well, I'd better get off to school." She popped the duckling next to his mother. "See you tonight! Special treat for you – doughnuts!"

And with that she trotted off to school. She arrived at playtime and slipped into the playground. One by one her classmates spotted her and crowded round.

"Hello Deirdre!" smiled a girl called Alison, who was very trendy. "I saw you in the park yesterday with some really cool trainers and a brilliant bag. Where did you get them?"

"Wow! You were great this morning," gushed a boy called David Bullock who also suffered from Paul's rudeness. "You've really shown that Paul!"

"Deirdre, will you come with us to the adventure playground after school?" asked some other girls.

Deirdre glowed. She had never had such friendly attention before. She suddenly realised that from now on, she was going to enjoy being Deirdre Duck!

A note from the author

I hope you liked this story and it made you smile. I hope it made you think about how nasty bullies are too.

I've always loved writing. I wrote my first stories when I was about 7, all about Apple and Carrot! English was my favourite subject at school and I went on to study it at Oxford University. I did a postgrad degree in Publishing Studies and Stirling University and then began working as a desk editor. I took a few years out to be an accountant, but when we moved to Ireland from England in 1992, I set myself up as a freelance editor and indexer, and I've been doing that ever since. I'm married to Chris, have three children - Benjamin, Caitlin and Ruadhri - and since 2006 we've all lived in France on a 75 acre farm. We run a gite and carp and farm llamas, and also [edit ebooks](#).

My first books were published in 1996. I have around 30 to my name now and I'm moving into adult fiction and non-fiction, as well as carrying on writing for children and young adults.

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