



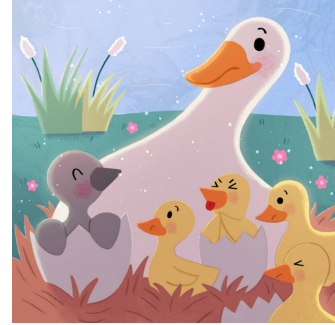
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The Ugly Duckling

Hans Christian Andersen

On the water's edge, a duck had been brooding on her nest for some time. One by one, the chicks emerged from their eggs. At last, the largest egg also bursts open. Startled, the mother duck looked at the chick that came out. That is a terribly large duckling! And it's grey, she thought.



"Come with me, children," said mother duck. "I will introduce you to the animals on the farm. That one chick looks so ugly," said the farm animals. And they began to tease him. Fortunately, the mother duck protected him. From that day on, the poor duckling that had hatched last and looked so ugly was bitten, pushed and made fun of by the other ducks.



In time, even his brothers and sisters began to bully him. Even his mother did not want him anymore. That's when the duckling decided to leave.

He arrived at a large swamp where wild ducks lived. There he stayed all night. He was tired and sad. When the ducks saw him the next morning, they yelled: "How ugly you are!" The duckling decided to stay and live in the swamp, far away from all other animals.



One autumn evening, a whole flock of beautiful birds came flying over. The duckling had never seen such beautiful animals. They were swans. That winter it got terribly cold. The duckling tried to swim for as long as he could. But he got so tired and when he could swim no more, he froze into the ice.



The next morning, a farmer found him and took him home. In the warm kitchen, the duckling regained consciousness. The children wanted to play with him, but he thought they wanted to hurt him. He flew outside and back to the swamp. All by himself, the duckling wandered the world for the rest of the winter.

Spring came at last. The duckling spread its wings. They rustled a lot more than before. He also moved faster. Before he knew it, he had landed in a big garden. He landed in the garden's pond. From the bushes he saw three beautiful white swans. The duckling recognized that they were the same birds that he had seen flying overhead a long time ago. He swam towards the swans. When he came close to them, he bent his head. But what did he see in the clear water? He saw his own reflection. He was no longer a clumsy, dark-grey chick. He had become a swan himself! How happy he was.



Some children came to the side of the pond. They threw bread into the water. "There is a new one! cried the smallest child and the others cheered, "Yes! And he is the most beautiful of them all!" Now he felt shy. He thought about how he had been bullied, and now the children thought he was the most beautiful! His feathers ruffled, he stretched his slender neck and thought happily: I could never have dreamed of being this happy, back when I was an ugly duckling.



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