

The Ugly Duckling

Story

Once upon a time there lived a mother duck. She was anxiously awaiting the time for her eggs to hatch. One fine spring day she felt them move. One by one, the little ducklings inside cracked through their eggs, and poked their beaks out into the world. Ah! Such lovely little yellow ducklings. But one of the eggs did not hatch. It was larger than the rest, and the mother duck was worried. She tried and tried to coax the duckling out, but it would not come. Finally, the egg started to crack and out came the last duckling! But this duck was not like the rest of his brothers and sisters. He was gray, had a long neck, and he was rather large and awkward. The duckling's brothers and sisters teased and made fun of him! They called him ugly and clumsy. They nipped at his feathers and told him he would never grow up to be a great duck like they were going to be.

The poor little duck was so sad that after a while he decided to run away. Soon he came to a group of wild ducks. They let him share their water hole, but they, too, did not care for the little duckling. They were noisy, rude, and very wild. The duckling did not like living with the wild ducks, but he didn't know where else to go. When summer turned into fall, the wild ducks got ready to fly south. The ugly duckling did not want to be left alone, so he decided to go with them, but they refused to let him come.

The winter wore on, long and lonely and cold. Spring returned at last, and the duckling went to find some food at a nearby pond. It was a beautiful day. From a distance he could see a flock of beautiful white birds feeding and amusing themselves in the pond. The duckling was ashamed to approach the pond. He feared these beautiful creatures would make fun of his ugly gray feathers and ungainly manner. He

approached the water's edge fearful of seeing his own reflection. To his amazement, however, he saw that he had beautiful white feathers. Instead of a too-long neck, he had a graceful, slender neck. And his once awkward body was now sleek and fair. He was just like those beautiful white birds!

One of the swans called out to him, "Who are you? I have never seen you before."

"Oh, I am no one," answered the duck timidly.

"Well, come and play with us for a while! We always like meeting new swans!" The duckling joined them with excitement, for he realized he was not a duckling at all, but a beautiful swan!