



## The Ugly Duckling



Once upon a time, there was a mother duck with glittering brown-grey feathers and a beautiful splash of blue. She was sitting on her eggs in the summer sun, settled comfortably on her nest, hidden among the reeds.



One morning, they began to move! When she got up, she found that every one of her eggs had hatched and that her beautiful ducklings, all yellow, had been born. Well almost all... Among them was an odd little duckling, all grey with a few black spots. What on earth had happened? Ducks don't give birth to ducklings this colour! How strange...

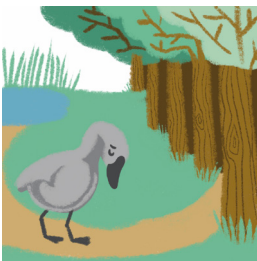


The mother duck, although taken aback, decided to take her little ones on an outing. The funny grey duckling lagged behind, not really sure what to do. To make matters worse, he was taller and heavier than his siblings.

[How many ducklings can you count?]



The four yellow ducklings were not very kind to the grey duckling. He was just too different from them, with his black beak, his grey feathers and his feet, which were webbed like theirs but black in colour. They bullied him relentlessly all day long. They cruelly called him the Ugly Duckling.



Our poor little grey duckling was so sad, so unhappy, that he decided to leave this strange «family» into which he had been born. He left with his head bowed, sobbing, hoping to find happiness elsewhere.



Autumn arrived. The trees began to turn magnificent colours: red, yellow, orange, brown. The duckling had grown but still had his grey feathers, dark bill and black webbed feet. Even the birds of the forest didn't like him and were mean to him. They constantly taunted and shunned him.



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Our ugly duckling continued on his quest to find friends; other birds who would accept him for the way he was. Along the way, he met some geese taking off for hot countries, who were his companions for a few days. Then hunting season arrived, and, alas! He was captured by hunters who were particularly delighted to have a decent duck to take home. Luckily, he managed to escape them and their fearsome dog.



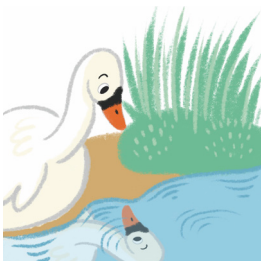
Soon, winter arrived, with freezing temperatures and a thick blanket of snow. An old man found the duckling hiding in the frozen grass. He was trapped in the ice. The man took pity on the duckling and decided to take him home to shelter from the cold.



The elderly couple who took in the duckling thought at first that they had a mallard, a female duck, who would provide them with delicious eggs all through the winter. But they were quickly disappointed. After a few weeks, the old woman became angry that she didn't have any eggs. *«That blasted duck! It's about time you were on my plate instead of me feeding you! »*



Her husband, taking pity on the duckling, who had grown considerably and whose plumage had lightened to become a very pale grey, decided to put him outside before his wife ate him for dinner! Poor little duckling, it seems that no one loved him. Off he went again in search of friends.



After flying for some time, our duck alighted at the edge of a lake. There, looking into the water, he suddenly realised that he was no longer an ugly duckling, but a magnificent swan! In fact, he had never been a duck! So that was the problem! Cygnets are born grey and are already larger than ducklings. His egg must have ended up in the duck's nest by mistake.



After so much sadness and disappointment, our handsome swan eventually settled with a flock of other swans, all as majestic as he was. Finally, our duck-turned-swan had found peace and happiness with his own kind! He went on to grow up into a most beautiful swan and lived happily ever after!