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THE UGLY DUCKLING

Once upon a time, there was a mother duck who was waiting excitedly for her ducklings to hatch. She had made her nest beside a quiet pond, surrounded by reeds, wildflowers, and shining water. It was a lovely and peaceful place, where the wind blew softly and the days seemed to pass calmly. Every day, she looked at her eggs with love, waiting for the moment when they would finally open.

—It will not be long now —she said happily—. Very soon I will meet my little ones.

One morning, the eggs began to move. One by one, they cracked open, and out came little yellow ducklings, soft and sweet. They were all small, round, and full of energy. Mother Duck looked at them with joy and gently gathered them close to her.

—What lovely little children I have! —she said with a smile.

But one egg was still left. It was a little bigger than the others. It took much longer to hatch, and Mother Duck began to worry.

—Why is this one taking so long? —she wondered.

At last, the egg cracked open, and out came a different duckling. He was bigger, had gray feathers, and did not look like his brothers and sisters. Mother Duck looked at him in surprise for a few moments. Then she came closer and looked at him more carefully.

—Well... you are my child too —she said tenderly—. Come along with us.

The days passed, and the ducklings began to walk, swim, and explore the place around them. Mother Duck taught them how to move across the water, how to search for food, and how to follow her through the field without wandering too far away. But the

gray duckling did not receive the same kind looks. Some of the animals on the farm saw him and said things that made him feel sad.

—What a strange duckling —said some.

—He does not look like the others —said others.

Even his own brothers and sisters sometimes moved away from him.

—You are not like us —they would say.

The duckling lowered his head and stayed quiet. He did not understand why everyone looked at him that way. He did not want to be different. He only wanted to play, swim, and feel loved like the others. Sometimes he tried to come close with a little hope in his heart, but almost always he ended up moving away again, sad and silent.

One day, feeling very unhappy, he decided to leave that place.

—Perhaps I will be better somewhere else —he thought.

So his long journey began. He walked through fields, crossed little paths, and reached other ponds, but nowhere did he seem to

belong. Some animals did not want him near them, and others simply looked at him with surprise. The duckling felt that no matter where he went, the same thing always happened.

Sometimes he sat beside the water and looked at his reflection.

—Why am I so different? —he asked sadly.

Time passed, and the cold days arrived. The wind blew strongly, leaves fell from the trees, and the sky looked gray. The duckling had to keep going, searching for a place where he could shelter himself. He was tired, lonely, and deeply wished to find somewhere he would be accepted.

During the winter, life became even harder. Sometimes he was hungry, and other times he felt so cold that he could hardly move. The water was icy, and the fields seemed silent and empty. Even so, he kept going, because deep in his heart he still had hope. Although he felt weak, he did not stop moving forward.

At last, spring arrived, and everything began to change. The sun shone again, the flowers started to bloom, and the air was filled with life once more. The duckling, now older and bigger, walked

to a beautiful and peaceful pond. There he saw some white and elegant birds gliding across the water.

They were swans.

The duckling stood still, watching them with admiration. They seemed so beautiful, with their white feathers, long necks, and graceful way of moving. He had never seen birds so elegant and calm.

—They are so beautiful —he whispered—. They surely would never want me near them.

Even so, he decided to go closer. He thought that even if they turned him away, at least he would see them up close once. He walked slowly to the edge of the pond and lowered his head shyly.

But when he looked into the water, he saw something that completely surprised him.

He was no longer a gray and awkward duckling.

His reflection showed a large, white, beautiful bird.

—Is that really me? —he asked, unable to believe it.

Yes. All that time, the ugly duckling had not been an ordinary duckling at all. He had really been a young swan who was still growing. That was why he looked different, why he did not fit in with the ducklings, and why his change had come little by little.

The other swans came closer peacefully and welcomed him kindly.

—Welcome —they said—. Come and swim with us.

The young swan felt a great joy fill his heart. For the first time, he did not feel strange, lonely, or out of place. He understood that there had never been anything wrong with him. He had simply needed time to grow and discover who he truly was.

A little later, some children walking near the pond saw him swimming with the other swans.

—Look! —they said happily—. That swan is so beautiful!

The young swan heard those words and remembered the days when he had felt sad and rejected. Now he understood that being different was not something bad. Sometimes, what seems strange today may reveal something very special tomorrow.

And so, among quiet waters, spring flowers, and clear skies, the former ugly duckling lived happily as a beautiful swan, always remembering that everyone has their own time to grow and shine.

THE END

