

THE UGLY DUCKLING

It was so beautiful in the country. It was the summer time. The wheat fields were golden, the oats were green, and the hay stood in great stacks in the green meadows. All around the meadows and cornfields grew thick woods, and in the midst of the forest was a deep lake. It was very beautiful, it was delightful in the country.

In a sunny spot stood a pleasant old farmhouse. From the walls down to the water's edge grew great burdocks. In this snug retreat sat a duck upon her nest. She was watching her young brood. But she felt no pleasure. She was tired and bored. She seldom had visitors. The other ducks liked much better to swim about in the canals than to sit under the burdock leaves to have a gossip with her.

At length¹, one shell cracked, and soon another, and from each came a duckling that lifted its head and cried "Peep, peep."

"Quack, quack!" said the mother; and then they all tried to say it, too. **They looked all about them**² on every side at the tall green leaves. Their mother allowed them to look about as much as they liked, because green is good for the eyes.

¹ **at length** — наконец

² **they looked all about them** — они осмотрелись

“What a great world it is!” said the ducklings, when they found how much more room they had than when they were in the eggshell.

“Is this all the world?” said the mother. “No. Wait till you see the garden. It stretches down to the pastor’s field, though I never went there. Are you all here?” she continued. “No, not all; the largest egg still lies there, I see. I wonder how long. I’m really tired of it!”

And she sat down again.

“Well, and how are you today?” quacked an old duck who came to **pay her a visit**¹.

“Look, there’s one egg more. The shell is hard and does not break,” said the mother, who sat still upon her nest. “But just look at the others. What a pretty family! Are they not the prettiest little ducklings in the world? They are the image of their father! But he never comes to see me”.

“Let me see the egg that does not break,” said the old duck. “I think it’s a **Guinea fowl’s egg**². The same thing happened to me once, and it gave me a lot of trouble. They are afraid of the water. I quacked and clucked, but all **in vain**³. Let me take a look at it. Yes, I am right; it’s a Guinea fowl, believe me. Take my advice and leave it where it is. Come to the water and teach the other children to swim.”

“I think I will sit a little while longer,” said the mother. “A day or two more won’t matter.”

“Very well,” said the old duck. She rose and went away.

At last the great egg broke, and the latest bird cried “Peep, peep,” when he crept forth from the shell. How big and ugly he was! The mother duck stared at him and did not know what to think.

“Really,” she said, “this is an enormous duckling, and it is not at all like the others. Is he really a Guinea fowl? Well, we shall see when we get to the water. He must go into the water. If he won’t, I’ll push him”.

¹ **to pay her a visit** – нанести визит, провести

² **a Guinea fowl’s egg** – индюшачье яйцо

³ **in vain** – напрасно

On the next day the weather was delightful. The sun shone brightly on the green burdock leaves. The mother duck took her whole family down to the water and jumped in with a splash. "Quack, quack!" cried she, and one after another the little ducklings jumped in. The water closed over their heads, but they came up again in an instant and swam quite prettily. Their legs were paddling under them easily. The ugly gray duckling was also in the water, he was swimming with them.

"Oh," said the mother, "that is not a Guinea fowl. See how well he uses his legs! How erect he holds himself! He is my own child, and he is not so very ugly after all, if you look at him properly. Quack, quack! Come with me now. I will take you into grand society and introduce you to the farmyard. But you must **keep close to me**¹. Someone may tread upon you. Furthermore, beware of the cat!"

When they reached the farmyard, they heard a riot. Two families were fighting for an eel's head. But, after all, the cat carried it away.

"See, children, that is the life," said the mother duck. He was whetting her beak, she wanted the eel's head, too. "Come, now, use your legs, and let me see how well you can behave. You must bow your heads prettily to that old duck yonder. She is the highest duck here and has Spanish blood. Do you see she has a red rag on her leg? It is something very grand and a great honor for a duck. It shows that every one is anxious not to lose her. Both man and beast can notice her. Come, now. A well-bred duckling spreads his feet wide apart, just like his father and mother. Now bend your necks and say 'Quack!'"

The ducklings did it, but the other ducks stared, and said, "Look, here comes another brood! No room for them! And what a queer-looking bird one of them is; we don't want him here!"

And then one flew out and bit the poor duckling in the neck.

"Leave him alone," said the mother; "he is not doing any harm".

¹ **keep close to me** — держаться ко мне поближе

"Yes, but he is so big and ugly," said the spiteful duck, "and therefore we must beat him. It will do him good."

"The others are very pretty children," said the old duck with the rag on her leg, "all but that one. Transform him; he is really ill-favored."

"That is impossible, your grace," replied the mother. "He is not pretty, but he has a very good heart. Moreover, he swims as well as the others or even better. I think he will grow up pretty, and perhaps be smaller. He was too long in the egg, and therefore his figure is not properly formed".

Then she stroked his neck and smoothed the feathers and said:

"It is a drake, and drake may be not very beautiful. I think he will grow up strong and smart".

"The other ducklings are graceful enough," said the old duck. "Now **make yourself at home**¹, and if you find an eel's head you can bring it to me".

And so they made themselves comfortable. But everybody began to bite and push and beat the poor duckling who crept out of his shell last of all and looked so ugly. Not only the ducks but all the poultry.

"He is too big," they all said; and the turkey cock, who had spurs and fancied himself really an emperor. The turkey cock puffed himself out like a vessel in full sail and flew at the duckling. He became quite red in the head with passion. At first, the poor little duckling did not know where to go, and was quite miserable. He was very ugly and the whole farmyard laughed at him.

So it went on from day to day; it got worse and worse. Everybody was driving the poor duckling

away; even his brothers and sisters were unkind to him. They were saying:

"Ah, you ugly duckling! When will the cat eat you?"

And his mother was asking all the time: "Why were you born? What for?"

The ducks pecked him, the chickens beat him, and the girl who fed the poultry pushed him with her feet. So at

¹ **make yourself at home** — будьте как дома

last he ran away. He frightened the little birds in the hedge as he flew over the palings.

"They are afraid because I am so ugly," he said.

So he ran farther, until he came out on a large moor. Wild ducks inhabited it. Here he remained the whole night. He was feeling very sorrowful.

In the morning, when the wild ducks rose in the air, they stared at their new comrade.

"What sort of a duck are you?" they all said and came round him.

He bowed to them politely, but he did not reply to their question.

"You are exceedingly ugly," said the wild ducks; "but that will not matter if you do not want to marry one of our family."

The poor duckling had no thoughts of marriage. All he wanted was permission to lie among the rushes and drink some of the water on the moor.

He was on the moor for two days, there came two wild geese, or rather goslings.

"Listen, friend," said one of them to the duckling; "you are so ugly that we like you very well. Will you go with us and become a real bird? Not far from here is another moor, in which

there are some wild geese. All of them are unmarried. It is a chance for you to get a wife".

"Bang, bang", sounded in the air, and the two wild geese fell dead among the rushes. The water was tinged with blood.

"Bang, bang", echoed far and wide in the distance, and whole flocks of wild geese rose up from the rushes.

The sound continued from every direction. The sportsmen surrounded the moor. Some were even seated on branches of trees. They were overlooking the rushes. The blue smoke from the guns rose like clouds over the dark trees. As it floated away across the water, a number of sporting

dogs bounded in among the rushes. These rushes bent beneath them wherever they went. How they terrified the poor duckling! He turned away his head to hide it under his wing, and at the same moment a large, terrible dog

passed quite near him. His jaws were open, his tongue hung from his mouth, and his eyes glared fearfully. He thrust his nose close to the duckling, he was showing his sharp teeth, and then "splash, splash," he went into the water. The dog didn't touch him.

"Oh," sighed the duckling, "happily I am so ugly; even a dog does not bite me".

And so he lay quite still, while the shot rattled through the rushes. Gun after gun was fired over him. It was late in the day before all became quiet. But even then the poor duckling did not dare to move. He waited quietly for several hours and then he looked carefully around him. He saw, nobody. Then he hastened away from the moor as fast as he could. He ran over field and meadow till a storm arose.

Towards evening he reached a poor little cottage. It was ready to fall, and stood because it could not decide on which side to fall first. The storm continued so violent that the duckling could go no farther. He sat down by the cottage, and then he noticed that the door was not closed. There was, therefore, a narrow opening near the bottom. It was large enough for him. He slipped through very quietly, and got a shelter for the night.

Here, in this cottage, lived a woman, a cat, and a hen. The cat, whom his mistress called "My little son," was a great favorite. He could raise his back, and purr, and could even throw out sparks from his fur. The hen had very short legs, so she was called "Chickie Short-legs." She laid good eggs, and her mistress loved her very much.

In the morning they discovered the strange visitor. The cat began to purr and the hen began to cluck.

"What is that noise about?" said the old woman. She was looking around the room, but her sight was not very good. Therefore when she saw the duckling she thought it was a fat duck.

"Oh, what a surprise!" she exclaimed. "I hope it is not a drake, for then I shall have some ducks' eggs. I must wait and see".

So she allowed the duckling to remain for three weeks. But there were no eggs.

The cat was the master of the house, and the hen was the mistress. They always said, "We and the world". They believed themselves to be half the world, and the better half, too. The duckling had a different opinion on the subject, but the hen did not to listen to such doubts.

"Can you lay eggs?" the hen asked.

"No".

"Then cease talking!"

"Can you raise your back, or purr, or throw out sparks?" asked the cat.

"No".

"Then you have no right to express an opinion when sensible people are speaking".

So the duckling sat in a corner. He was very sad.

When the sunshine and the fresh air came into the room through the open door, he wanted to swim and spoke of it.

"What an absurd idea!" said the hen. "You have nothing else to do; therefore you have foolish ideas. Purr or lay eggs — and they will pass away".

"But it is so delightful to swim," said the duckling, "and so refreshing to feel the water when you dive down to the bottom".

"Delightful, indeed! It is a queer sort of pleasure," said the hen. "You must be crazy! Ask the cat — he is the cleverest animal. Ask him how he likes to swim, or to dive under the water. Of course, I will not speak of my own opinion. Ask our mistress, the old woman; there is no one in the world more clever than she is. Do you think she likes to swim and feel the water over her head?"

"I see you don't understand me", said the duckling.

"We don't understand you? Who can understand you, I wonder? Do you consider yourself more clever than the cat or the old woman? I will say nothing of myself. Don't imagine such nonsense, child. Thank your good fortune that we receive you here so well. Are you not in a warm room and in society from which you may learn something? But you are a chatterer, and your company is not very agreeable. Believe me, I speak only for your good. I may tell you unpleasant truths. But that is a proof of my friendship.

I advise you, therefore, to lay eggs and learn to purr as quickly as possible”.

“I believe I must go out into the world again”, said the duckling.

“Yes, do”, said the hen.

So the duckling left the cottage and soon found water on which he could swim and dive. But all other animals avoided him because of his ugly appearance.

Autumn came, and the leaves in the forest turned to orange and gold. Then, as winter approached, they fell and the wind whirled them into the cold air. The clouds, heavy with hail and snowflakes, hung low in the sky. The raven stood among the reeds and cried, “Croak, croak”. All this was very sad for the poor little duckling.

One evening, just as the sun was setting amid radiant clouds, there came a large flock of beautiful birds out of the bushes. The duckling did not see them before. They were swans; and they curved their graceful necks. Their soft plumage shone with dazzling whiteness.

They uttered a strange cry as they spread their glorious wings and flew away from those cold regions to warmer countries across the sea. They mounted higher and higher in the air.

The ugly little duckling had a strange sensation as he watched them. He whirled himself in the water like a wheel, stretched out his neck towards them, and uttered a cry. His cry was so strange that it frightened even himself. He could not forget those beautiful, happy birds! And when at last they were out of his sight, he dived under the water and rose again with excitement. He did not know the names of these birds, but he liked them.

He was not envious of these beautiful creatures; it never occurred to him to wish. Poor ugly creature! He just wanted to live with the ducks peacefully. That was all that he wanted.

The winter grew colder and colder; he swam about on the water. But every night the space on which he swam became smaller and smaller. At length it froze so hard that the ice in the water crackled as he moved. The duckling became exhausted at last and lay still and helpless.

Early in the morning, a peasant who was passing by, saw him. He broke the ice in pieces with his wooden shoe and carried the duckling home to his wife. The warmth revived the poor little creature. But when the children wanted to play with him, the duckling was afraid of them. So he started up in terror, fluttered into the milk pan, and splashed the milk about the room.

Then the woman clapped her hands, which frightened him still more. He flew first into the butter cask, then into the meal tub and out again. The woman screamed and struck at him with the tongs; the children laughed and screamed and tried to catch him. But he escaped luckily.

The door was open; the poor duckling slipped out among the bushes and lay down exhausted in the snow.

It is very sad to relate all the misery and privations which the poor little duckling endured during the hard winter. But when it passed he **found himself**¹ one morning in a moor, amongst the rushes. He felt the warm sun and heard the lark. It was a beautiful spring.

Then the young bird felt that his wings were strong. He flapped them against his sides and rose high into the air. They bore him onwards, and finally he found himself in a large garden. The apple trees were in full blossom, and the fragrant elders bent their long green branches down to the stream. Everything looked beautiful in the freshness of early spring. From a thicket came three beautiful white swans. They were rustling their feathers and swimming lightly over the water. The duckling saw these lovely birds and felt more unhappy than ever.

“I will fly to these royal birds,” he exclaimed, “and they will kill me because. I am very ugly, and I must not approach them. But it does not matter. Let them kill me. It’s better. The ducks peck me, the hens beat me, the maiden who feeds the poultry pushes me. If they don’t kill me, I’ll starve with hunger in the winter”.

Then he flew to the water and swam towards the beautiful swans. When they saw the stranger they rushed to meet him.

¹ **found himself** – очутился

“Kill me,” said the poor bird and he bent his head down to the surface of the water and awaited death.

But what did he see in the clear stream below? His own image—no longer a dark-gray bird, ugly and disagreeable, but a graceful and beautiful swan!

He was born in a duck’s nest in a farmyard but he came from a swan’s egg! He now felt glad. He suffered sorrow and trouble, and it enabled him to enjoy all the pleasure and happiness around him. The great swans swam round the newcomer and stroked his neck with their beaks.

Into the garden presently came some little children and threw bread and cake into the water.

“See,” cried the youngest, “there is a new one;” and the rest were delighted, and ran to their father and mother. They were dancing and clapping their hands and shouting joyously,

“There is another swan here; a new one!”

Then they threw more bread and cake into the water and said,

“The new swan is the most beautiful of all, he is so young and pretty!”

And the old swans bowed their heads before him.

Then he felt quite ashamed and hid his head under his wing. He did not know what to do, he was so happy! But he was not at all proud. They persecuted and despised him for his ugliness, and now they said he was the most beautiful of all the birds! Even the elder tree bent down its boughs into the water before him, and the sun shone warm and bright.

Then he rustled his feathers, curved his slender neck, and cried joyfully, from the depths of his heart,

“I never dreamed of such happiness while I was the despised ugly duckling!”

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

Many years ago there lived an Emperor who was so monstrous fond of fine new clothes that he spent all his money on it. He wanted to be really smart. He didn't care about his army, he didn't care about his people. He only wanted to show his new clothes. He had a coat for every hour in the day. As people say about a king, that "he's holding a council", so in this country they always said, "The Emperor is in his dressing room".

In the great city where he lived, life was very pleasant. Lots of strangers came there every day; and one day there arrived two swindlers. They said that they were weavers, and said they knew how to make the loveliest dress in the world. Not only were the colours and patterns extraordinarily pretty, but the clothes had this marvellous property: they were invisible to anyone who could not work well or was intolerably stupid.

"Very excellent clothes those must be," thought the Emperor; "if I put them on, I'll be able to tell which are the men in my realm who aren't fit for the posts they hold. I'll be able to tell clever people from stupid ones¹. I must have these clothes!"

¹ to tell clever people from stupid ones — отличить умных людей от глупых