

# Storytime with Dad

## The Ugly Duckling

Welcome to Storytime with Dad! Today we will be reading The Ugly Duckling.

It was a warm summer day in the countryside. The fields were full of tall golden wheat, green oats, and hay stacked high in the meadows. A stork walked around on long red legs, clacking his beak in a language he had learned from his parents. All around were quiet forests and deep, still ponds. It was the perfect place for animals to live.

Near one of the ponds, beside a cozy farmhouse, sat a mother duck. She was tucked under big green leaves, hidden away in a quiet spot. She was sitting on her nest of eggs, waiting for them to hatch. She had been sitting for a long time and was getting tired. The other ducks preferred swimming in the river or chatting together rather than climbing the slippery bank to sit with her.

Finally, the eggs began to crack. "Peep! Peep!" came the sounds of little ducklings breaking out of their shells.

"Quack, quack," said the mother, and they quacked back at her as best they could. The ducklings looked around at the big green leaves. "What a big world this is!" they said.

"This isn't the whole world," their mother said. "There's the garden, and beyond that is the field where the farmer lives. But we'll go there later."

Then she stood up. "Wait a moment," she said. "One of the eggs is still here. And it's the biggest one. Why is it taking so long?"

Just then, an old duck came by to visit.

"How's everything going?" she asked.

"Well," said the mother duck, "most of the eggs have hatched. But the biggest one is still here. I don't know what's in it."

"Let me see," said the old duck. She looked at the egg. "Oh, that's a turkey egg. I once hatched one by accident. They don't like water and don't know how to swim. My advice: leave it alone and teach your other children to swim."

"I've waited this long," said the mother duck. "I might as well see it through."

Soon after, the big egg cracked open. Out came a large, gray bird - not yellow like the others, and not cute either.

"Oh dear," said the mother. "You're not like the others at all. Could you really be a turkey? We'll find out soon enough when we go for a swim."

The next day, the sun was shining, and the mother duck led her ducklings down to the river. She jumped in with a splash. "Quack, quack," she called.

One by one, the ducklings jumped in. The water closed over their heads, but they all popped back up and paddled around happily. Even the big, gray duckling swam perfectly.

"Well, he's definitely not a turkey," said the mother. "He swims beautifully! He's just... different. Maybe not so ugly if you look at him the right way."

She gathered her ducklings. "Stay close to me," she said. "We're going to the farmyard to meet the others. Watch your step, and whatever you do - stay away from the cat."

At the farmyard, everything was noisy and busy. Two duck families were fighting over a fish head, which a sneaky cat snatched away.

"See, children?" said the mother duck. "That's how life is."

She showed them how to walk with good manners. "Keep your toes apart, head high, and bow politely to the old duck with the red ribbon around her leg. She's very important and that ribbon means everyone knows not to lose her."

The ducklings tried their best to behave, but the other ducks in the yard noticed the odd one right away.

"What's that strange one?" a duck muttered. "We don't need any more birds around here - especially not ugly ones." One of them flew at the gray duckling and pecked his neck.

"Leave him alone," said the mother. "He's not hurting anyone."

"But he's so big and weird-looking," said another.

"All the others are cute," said the fancy duck with the ribbon. "That one is just... wrong. Can't you do something about him?"

"I'm afraid not," said the mother. "He may not be handsome, but he's a good swimmer, and he's kind. Maybe he'll grow into his looks."

But the poor duckling had a terrible time. The chickens pecked at him. The other ducks pushed him out of the way. Even his brothers and sisters wished he would go away. "You're so ugly," they told him. "Why don't you just leave?"

His own mom tried to make him feel better, but it was hard to believe her when everyone else kept being mean.

The girl who fed the animals kicked him out of her way. At last, the poor duckling couldn't take it anymore. He ran off and flapped over the fence into the bushes. The little birds in the hedge flew away in fright.

"They're scared of me because I'm so ugly," he thought.

He kept going until he came to a large marsh, where wild ducks lived. He spent the night there, tired and alone.

In the morning, the wild ducks noticed him. "What kind of duck are you?" they asked.

He didn't know how to answer. "You're very ugly," they said, "but if you don't try to marry one of us, we won't bother you."

He didn't want to marry anyone. He just wanted to be left alone.

Two young wild geese landed nearby. "You're so ugly, it's actually kind of cool," one of them said. "Want to come with us? There's another pond nearby with a bunch of single geese."

But, the duckling didn't feel like going with them. Instead, he ran away with tears starting to well up in his eyes until he reached a tiny old cottage that looked ready to fall over. One door hinge was broken, so there was a small gap near the bottom. He slipped inside.

Inside lived a woman, a cat, and a hen. The cat was her pet and could purr, stretch his back, and spark with static when petted the wrong way. The hen laid good eggs and was also treated like a child.

In the morning, the old woman saw the duckling. "Oh! A fat duck! Maybe it'll lay eggs!" she said. So she let him stay for a while to see.

But the cat and hen didn't like him. "Can you purr?" asked the cat.

"No," said the duckling.

"Can you lay eggs?" asked the hen.

"No."

"Then stop talking," they said.

The duckling sat quietly in the corner, but he missed the fresh air and the feeling of swimming. "I want to be in the water again," he said.

"What a silly idea," said the hen. "Ask the cat. Ask the old woman. Would they want to swim? Of course not."

"You just don't understand," the duckling said.

"Then you're strange and wrong," said the hen. "You should be grateful you're here."

But the duckling wasn't happy. So one morning, he left.

He found ponds and swam again, but all the other animals avoided him because he looked so odd.

Seasons changed. Autumn came. The trees turned golden, and cold winds began to blow. One evening, as the sun set, the duckling saw a group of magnificent white birds flying overhead. They were swans - so graceful and beautiful. He watched them in awe, stretching his neck and calling out. He didn't know what they were, but he loved them instantly.

"I wish I could be like them," he whispered.

Winter came. It was the hardest time of all. The duckling had to swim constantly just to keep a patch of water from freezing. One night, he became too tired. Ice formed around him, trapping him in place.

The next morning, a kind farmer found him frozen. He broke the ice and carried the duckling home. The warm kitchen helped him feel better. But when the children tried to play with him, he panicked and made a mess. The woman screamed, and the duckling flapped around the house before escaping out the door.

Winter dragged on, cold and lonely. But finally, spring came.

One morning, the duckling felt strong. He spread his wings and flew. He flew over fields and into a beautiful garden with blooming trees and sparkling water.

Three swans glided on the pond. He recognized them - they were the birds he had seen before. His heart ached. "They'll probably be mean to me too," he thought. "But I'd rather be near them than be alone again."

He swam toward them, lowering his head in fear. "Please just get it over with quickly," he whispered.

But when he looked down into the water, he saw something amazing. His reflection was no longer gray and awkward - it was elegant and white, with a long neck and shining feathers.

He was a swan.

The other swans welcomed him, gently brushing his neck with theirs. Children in the garden saw him and cried, "Look! A new swan! He's the most beautiful one of all!"

The poor bird didn't know what to do. He wasn't proud - just incredibly happy.

He had been teased and bullied, chased and lonely. But now, he finally belonged. He wasn't an ugly duckling after all.

He had always been a swan.

The End.



Oh boy, where to begin! Well, this story is a well known classic by Hans Christian Andersen, and it was first published back in 1843. I want to give a huge thanks, though, to my listener Nia for her story request. Although this was a story that was already written, I took this fun opportunity you gave me to update the language and make a version that was easier to read than the one written almost 200 years ago! I hope you liked my version, the story pretty much stayed the same, with many of the same lessons, so let's go ahead and think about what we might learn.

One of them is about kindness. If you are a regular listener of the podcast, then you know I am always trying to encourage you to be kind to other people. You can see in this story how the ugly duckling is very sad all the time, because everyone keeps telling him he's ugly and highlighting that his being different from them is a bad thing! And it's just not true.

We are each here on Earth for a reason. People have differences, sure, but if we want people to be the best version of themselves that they can be, then we need to see their differences as a good thing and celebrate it! Being different is what makes the world exciting! And that is a very good thing.

Just because the animal in the story didn't understand that the duckling was actually a swan, doesn't mean it was ugly! They just didn't understand how to see its beauty, and with time, they all eventually learned.

But, the biggest takeaway I have from this story is the way that the duckling saw themselves. The duckling, was actually the most beautiful swan in the neighborhood, but everyone kept measuring it against the standards of a duck or other animals! Can't lay eggs? You're not important. Can't purr like a cat? You're just not valuable enough to talk to.

And that's a shame. Everyone, human, duck, or swan, has value and is important.

So, do you have friends who are different than you? I'd love to hear about them and what sort of things you've learned from them or challenges you've faced together! Please write me and share your own stories at: [hello@storytimewithdad.com](mailto:hello@storytimewithdad.com).

Thank you for listening and I'll see you again next time.

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