

## The Ugly Duckling

From Children's Classics in Dramatic Form

A Reader for the Fourth Grade

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### Scene I

Time: One summer morning

Place: The farmyard at the Moor farm

Characters: Madam Duck  
First Duckling  
Second Duckling  
The Ugly Duckling  
Third Duckling  
Turkey  
Gray Gander  
White Goose  
Plymouth Rock Hen  
Red Rooster

*(Madam Duck enters the farmyard with her new brood of ducklings. The other fowls approach.)*

TURKEY: *(Showing displeasure)* A new brood of ducks! Look you all—a new brood of ducks!

GRAY GANDER: *(Also displeased)* As if there were not enough of us here already!

WHITE GOOSE: *(Likewise displeased)* True enough. I can scarce find a corner for my afternoon nap!

RED ROOSTER: It seems to me, Madam Duck, that you should not have brought us a new brood this summer.

MADAM DUCK: What is that you are saying?

TURKEY: It seems to all of us, madam, that there is no room here for a new brood.

PLYMOUTH ROCK HEN: Friends, be just. Madam Duck has a perfect right to bring her ducklings here. Besides, the children are quite pretty.

MADAM DUCK: They are beautiful! You shall all see that for yourselves. Come, children, into a row with you!

*(The Ducklings form themselves into a row. The Ugly Duckling is last.)*

MADAM DUCK: Legs wide apart! Toes out! Now speak prettily to my old friends.

DUCKLINGS: *(All but the last)* Quack! Quack!

MADAM DUCK: There now. Are they not charming?

GRAY GANDER: *(Looking down the row)* Why, yes, they all seem graceful enough. Here, wait a moment! Does that last one there belong to you?

*(All the fowls look at the last Duckling.)*

MADAM DUCK: Oh, yes! He is larger than the others and perhaps not so pretty, but...

TURKEY *(Interrupting)* Make no excuses for him, madam. We can see for ourselves what he is.

GRAY GANDER: In all my life I never saw anything so ugly!

WHITE GOOSE: He is neither duck nor goose!

PLYMOUTH ROCK HEN: Nor duck nor chick!

TURKEY: I'd be ashamed to have a turkey look like that!

RED ROOSTER: I'd allow no hen of mine to claim him!

MADAM DUCK: Come now, come now, friends. The poor child is not pretty, but he is good, and he can swim even better than the others.

TURKEY: That he can swim well is nothing to me!

RED ROOSTER: Nor to me! He should be driven out, I say!

MADAM DUCK: Let him alone; he is not doing any harm.

FIRST DUCKLING: But, Mother, no one will look at us if he stays with us!

MADAM DUCK: *(Thoughtfully)* Now perhaps it may turn out that way.

SECOND DUCKLING: I'll no walk about with him!

THIRD DUCKLING: Nor I!

MADAM DUCK: Well, well! He must be uglier than I thought.

FIRST DUCKLING: Besides, dear mother, he will not quack.

MADAM DUCK: What is this? Did he not quack but just a moment ago?

SECOND DUCKLING: He turned his toes out, but quack he would not.

THIRD DUCKLING: It is true, dear mother.

MADAM DUCK: *(To the Ugly Duckling)* Quack! Quack now at once!

*(The Ugly Duckling tries to quack, but chokes. The fowls laugh and jeer at him.)*

GRAY GANDER: Ha, ha! There's a "quack" for you!

WHITE GOOSE: Ha, ha!

PLYMOUTH ROCK HEN: Ha, ha!

RED ROOSTER: Ha, ha!

TURKEY: Ha, ha!

MADAM DUCK: *(angrily)* Once more I tell you, quack!

*(The Ugly Duckling tries again. He chokes.)*

ALL FOWLS: Ha, ha, ha, ha!

UGLY DUCKLING: *(Weeping)* I'm sorry. I'd quack if I could.

MADAM DUCK: Ah, if you were only far away!

FIRST DUCKLING: I wish the cat would eat you!

SECOND DUCKLING: I wish the swans would kill you!

WHITE GOOSE: And they will when they see him, you may be sure of that.

GRAY GANDER: *(Nodding)* Aye, they'll not suffer such an ugly creature to swim in the brook!

RED ROOSTER: We must drive him off – that's clear!

*(Running at the Ugly Duckling)*

Come now, out with you!

PLYMOUTH ROCK HEN: (*Pecking Duckling*) Out with you!

UGLY DUCKLING: Mother, save me!

MADAM DUCK: Call not on me!

GRAY GANDER: (*Striking duckling with his wings.*) Out with you!

UGLY DUCKLING: (*Running to Ducklings*) Brothers, sisters, save me!

FIRST DUCKLING: Come not to us!

SECOND DUCKLING: We'll not save you!

THIRD DUCKLING: Away with you!

TURKEY: At him, hens to peck him! At him, geese to beat him! At him, all of you!

(*They all rush upon the Ugly Duckling, who escapes them, running out of the farmyard into the moor.*)

## SCENE II

TIME: The Next Winter  
PLACE: The Peasant's Cottage  
CHARACTERS: The Peasant  
His Wife  
Elizabeth  
The Cat  
The Hen  
The Ugly Duckling

(*The peasant enters the cottage, carrying the Ugly Duckling.*)

PEASANT: See what I'm bringing you!

WIFE: Why, it's a duckling – half frozen too!

PEASANT: I found him frozen in the pond. I had to break the ice to get him out.

ELIZABETH: Give him to me, Father. I will put him behind the stove.

PEASANT: (*Giving Duckling to Elizabeth.*) That's a good child.

WIFE: Handle him tenderly, daughter.

ELIZABETH: *(Taking off her shawl.)* He shall lie upon my shawl. You poor, dear, ugly little duckling!

*(She places the Duckling upon the shawl behind the stove, near the Cat and Hen.)*

PEASANT: It is the duckling I told you of!

WIFE: The one you saw on the pond yesterday?

PEASANT: Aye, and the day before, and all winter long, for that matter. Yesterday I saw him try to join the wild ducks on the river, but they drove him back to the pond.

ELIZABETH: Poor duckling! The pond was freezing then!

PEASANT: *(Nodding)* Then he tried to find a place among the rushes on the moor, but the birds drove him from there.

ELIZABETH: Why did they all treat him so, Father?

PEASANT: I do not know, unless it is because he is so ugly.

WIFE: Come now to dinner, Father and Elizabeth. By the time we have finished, our duckling will be warmed and awake.

*(They go into the kitchen. The Duckling stirs and looks about.)*

HEN: Can you lay eggs?

DUCKLING: *(Politely)* No, madam.

CAT: Can you set up your back?

DUCKLING: No, dear sir.

CAT: Can you purr?

DUCKLING: *(Frightened)* No.

HEN: Then you can't stay here.

DUCKLING: Do not drive me out, I pray you!

CAT: Will you learn to purr?

HEN: And to lay eggs?

DUCKLING: (*Sadly*) Alas, I can do nothing but swim.

CAT: Swim! Well, I must say that is very queer.

DUCKLING: Oh, no, dear sir! It is most pleasant when the waters close over your head and you plunge to the bottom.

CAT: Plunge to the bottom, indeed! I'd never think of doing such a silly thing!

HEN: Nor I!

CAT: It is clear you can't remain here.

DUCKLING: Where am I to go?

CAT: Go lie in the rushes. The birds flew south this morning.

DUCKLING: I shall starve there.

CAT: It would really be a good thing for you if I should eat you.

DUCKLING: I'd thank you to do so, dear sir.

HEN: Eat him, since he is so willing. He is too ugly to live.

CAT: (*Turning away*) I can't, he is too ugly to eat.

(*To the Duckling*) Come, out with you!

HEN: (*Running at him*) Yes, yes! Out with you! Out with you!

(*They push the Duckling out of the door into the snow.*)

DUCKLING: Alas! What shall I do? Where shall I go? Why was I made so ugly that everyone despises me?

### SCENE III

TIME: The next spring  
PLACE: The brook on the Moor Farm  
CHARACTERS: The Ugly Duckling  
The Mole  
The Father

The Mother  
The Children  
The Swans

*(The Ugly Duckling sits on the hill of a Mole near the brook which winds through the Moor Farm.)*

MOLE: *(From the mole hill)* Will you please move? I wish to come out.

DUCKLING: *(Rising quickly)* Why it is a mole hill I've been sitting on!

*(The Mole comes out from the hill.)*

I'm sorry, my friend Mole, I didn't notice your hill.

MOLE: Who are you?

DUCKLING: Madam Duck of this farm is my mother.

MOLE: That can't be! You are no duck.

DUCKLING: Yes, but I am. Only, I am uglier than any duck in the world.

MOLE: You have not the voice of a duck. You do not speak with the quack of which they are so proud. And then, if you are truly a duck, why are you not with your family?

DUCKLING: They drove me out last summer because I was ugly and could not quack.

MOLE: Then why have you come back?

DUCKLING: To let the swans kills me.

MOLE: What! To let them kill you?

DUCKLING: I would rather be killed by those beautiful birds than pecked by the hens, beaten by the geese, or starved with hunger in the winter.

MOLE: Perhaps you are not so ugly now as you were then.

DUCKLING: I have not looked at myself in the water since spring came and took the ice away. But I know well enough how dark and badly formed I am. The swans will kill me if I date to approach them.

*(A noise is heard in the distance.)*

MOLE: They are coming! Go, while there is yet time.

DUCKLING: There is no place to go to. All winter long I was driven from moor to moor. I could not make a friend. I no longer wish to live.

*(The swans are seen swimming down the brook.)*

MOLE: They are here! Do not go to them, I pray you!

DUCKLING: *(Shaking head)* Farewell!

*(He flies to the water and swims toward the Swans. They see him and rush to meet him with outstretched wings.)*

DUCKLING: Kill me! Kill me!

FIRST SWAN: Kill you! Why, we have come to welcome you, beautiful stranger.

SECOND SWAN: We saw you from afar and came to meet you.

THIRD SWAN: We are so happy to have you with us!

*(Enter several children)*

FIRST CHILD: See, there is a new swan!

SECOND CHILD: *(Calling)* Father, Mother, come! There is another swan!

*(Enter the father and mother.)*

FATHER: What were you calling?

THIRD CHILD: A new swan has come! Look!

MOTHER: I see him! He is beautiful!

FATHER: He is very young, but he is the most beautiful of all!

FOURTH CHILD: See how the others stroke him with their beaks!

MOTHER: They are showing him how glad they are to have him with them. See how they swim around him and how gently they touch him!

FATHER: I have never seen anything so pretty. How happy the new swan is! See how he rustles his feathers! See how proudly he curves his slender neck!

FIRST CHILD: And see how he looks at himself in the water!



SECOND CHILD: Let's get bread and cake for him!

THIRD CHILD: Yes, yes!

FOURTH CHILD: Yes, yes!

*(The children run off, followed by the father and mother.)*

MOLE: *(Going into his hill.)* It was not so bad after all, not to have the family quack!