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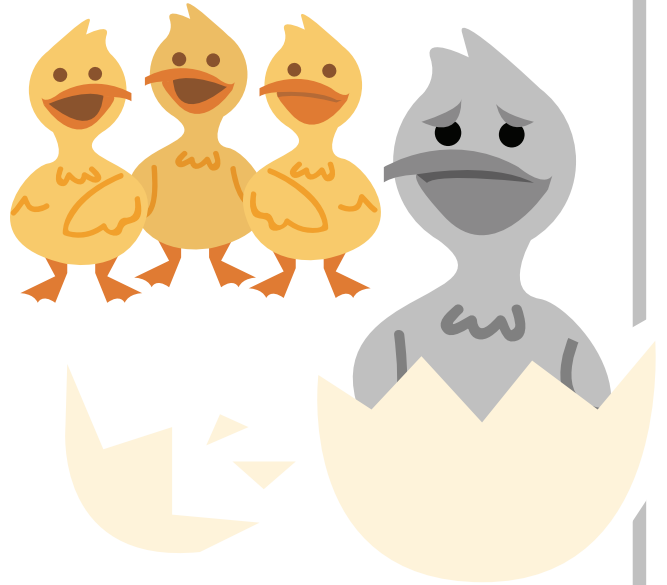
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THE UGLY DUCKLING

by Hans Christian Andersen

It was a beautiful spring morning on a small farm near the woods. In a cool, shaded corner, a duck built a warm nest to sit on her four precious eggs. Strangely, one of the eggs was much larger than the rest.

To her excitement, the eggs started to rumble and crack. One, two, three eggs popped open, and three little ducklings poked their heads into the world. At the same time, the biggest egg began to crack as well. To the mother's surprise, a big, gray duckling stumbled out of the egg! Although he was different, and not as cute as the other ducklings, she loved him nonetheless.



The next day, the duck introduced her family to the other animals on the farm. Seeing the strange gray duckling, the pig, mallard and mouse all burst out laughing. The poor duckling bowed his head in shame. He felt like he didn't belong. That night, as his family slept near the barn, the gray duckling decided to leave to find people that liked him for who he was.

Before long, he ran into a kind old woman, her rooster and her cat. She invited him into her home, and they all treated him like family. Over time, the little gray duckling began to grow. Although he was happy, he always felt something was missing.

One day, as he stared out on the pond, he saw a family of beautiful swans wading in the cool breeze. He wanted to go swimming with them. As he approached the pond, he saw his reflection for the first time. The ugly duckling had grown into a beautiful swan! From below, the cat and rooster happily watched their friend fly high in the sky. Finally, the little gray duckling had found himself.