

# The Ugly Duckling

Originally by Hans Christian Andersen. This version by Bob Wilson at [autoenglish.org](http://autoenglish.org)

<a farm yard>

It was springtime on the farm. A mummy duck was sitting on her eggs and she was very uncomfortable. Her previous pregnancies had been much easier. Anyway, mummy duck had been sitting on her eggs for a month now and she was fed up. To make things worse, her husband, Drake, was away on business, as usual.

Some creatures think that work is more important than family. Do you know anyone who thinks that work is more important than family?... and yet, the birth of our children is a moment of pure magic and it would have been nice for Mummy Duck if her husband had been there. (It's such a shame to miss something so special in life for work, and in the end the company is never grateful for your sacrifices. They couldn't care less). Nevermind.

Suddenly she smiled. And stepped off her nest. There were little crunchy sounds and cries that sounded like peeps. Peep-peep, peep-peep. After quite a struggle, the first duckling was out. He was beautiful and as yellow as a banana and his beak and feet were pink. When the next egg cracked open, he helped his sibling, which means brother or sister, to get out. What a nice little duckling! Soon all the eggs were hatched and the ducklings were making a lot of peep-peep noises.

Wait a minute. What's this? It's a big blue egg with the name Nussy written on it in black ink. Ah, so that's why Mummy Duck was so uncomfortable!

Wait a minute. What's this? It's hatching!

My goodness! What a strange-looking duckling! Oh. She's not as pretty as her brothers and sisters.

The duckling was bigger than her brothers and sisters, her siblings, and instead of being as yellow as a banana, she looked like the colour of a handkerchief dropped in a muddy puddle. His beak and feet were black.

Hmm. Just as well Daddy Duck, I mean Drake, is away on business. He might have created a scene.

Mummy Duck was already on her way to the farm pond and the lovely fluffy yellow ducklings were following behind in perfect line, peep peeping all the way. The ugly duckling joined them at the back of the line as they crossed the farm yard.

The other farm animals looked on at this happy sight: Mummy Duck was taking her children for their first swimming lesson.

Wait a minute! What's this? Gosh!

"What an ugly duckling that last one is," commented the farm animals, when they saw Nesy.

"She looks like a ball of dirty snow," said a silly cow. And the whole farm yard laughed.

"What's her name," asked the farm cat.

"Nesy," replied the farm dog, "it said on her egg."

"You mean Nesy the Loch Ness Monster," snorted a pig and the whole farm yard laughed again.

"At least I'm not rude," answered Nesy.

Hearing this, the farm rooster whose name was Justin, flew at the ugly duckling and puffed himself up.

"Who do you think you are, parading across my farmyard?" shouted Justin to the ugly duckling.

"I was just following my mother," replied the ugly duckling.

"Your mother?" scoffed the rooster. He then turned around and said to all the chickens and other animals in the yard.

"Did you hear that? This here creature thinks Mummy Duck is her mother."

"Her mother!" echoed all the hens. And they laughed so much they nearly clucked their heads off.

As Nesy ran to catch up to the line, she thought, "Justin is so handsome. If only he weren't so rude, I'd be a fan."

<a farm pond>

The farm pond was a dirty little affair. It looked like pea soup and didn't smell very nice. The farm ducks didn't seem to mind though. Nesy the ugly duckling quickly outswam her brothers and sisters and bumped into Mummy Duck's tail which really annoyed Mummy Duck.

"Go away. You're embarrassing me," said Mummy Duck and the ugly duckling burst into tears. By the look of things, her mummy didn't love her very much and this made her feel really really sad. And it was only her first day on the planet.

Things didn't get any better for Nussy, the ugly duckling. The farm animals forced her to leave the farm, although they told a lie about it and said she had run away, which wasn't true. Luckily, Nussy was really really clever and really really strong.

<a beautiful lake with reeds and rushes>

By asking lots of wild animals along her way, she found a big, beautiful lake with clean water and lots of reeds and rushes for shelter. Although she didn't have any friends, she talked to the wild ducks quite a lot. They were chatty and far more clever and much more polite than the farm ducks. That summer she ate loads of pondweed and delicious wigeon grass and tadpoles and crunchy insects. She grew big and even stronger.

There were wild geese on the lake during the summer. They were very beautiful but very rude. They weren't very nice to Nussy, calling her ugly all the time.

Bang-bang! Bang-bang! A beautiful goose fell out of the sky and landed in the reeds near Nussy. Suddenly a black hunting dog splashed his way between the reeds and stopped in front of Nussy. He looked at her for less than a second and then he saw the dead goose which he picked up in his mouth and splashed off again, disappearing between the reeds the same way he had come.

<smoke drifts across the lake>

The sound of the guns continued for most of the morning and there was smoke on the water. Blue smoke – the final mist for many a wild duck and goose that day.

For Nussy, our sad friend, the world was getting worse. "What a cruel planet this is," she thought, "really really cruel."

<snow effect and frozen lake>

Summer turned to autumn and autumn to winter. And the lake froze. The ugly duckling was so cold she couldn't move and was near the end. Thankfully, a kind farmer found her all huddled up and took her home.

<another farm yard with falling snow>

Nessy spent the coldest part of winter in the farmer's barn and so was saved. She noticed that the farm animals were scared of her and so weren't nasty, although she didn't feel very welcome. The farmer's son was a horrible little boy and threw stones at Nessy whenever he was out of sight of his father. He did this because he was jealous.

One day when the ugly duckling was crossing the yard he heard strange cries coming from the sky. And the swoosh swoosh of large beating wings. She looked up. Were they angels? They were brilliant white and beautiful to see. Nessy felt something new in her heart. It was joy but she didn't know that yet, because it was the first time she had felt joy in her entire life, which had been really really sad and really really difficult until that day. She wanted to jump in the air. She wanted to shout at the top of her voice.

The other animals looked amazed but kept quiet. Even the rooster shut up, for once in his life.

Then the horrible little boy noticed that something strange was happening. He ran up to Nessy with a stick and started hitting her. For the first time in her life she stood up to someone being nasty to her. Nessy flapped her huge wings and hissed at the boy. And to her great surprise, the boy was a coward. She didn't yet know that all bullies are cowards. He dropped the stick and burst into tears. The farmer saw and Nessy saw that the farmer saw and so she knew it was time to leave. She wanted to thank the farmer for saving her life and looking after her but she knew now that it was quite impossible.

<zooming to a gate>

She looked ahead of her toward the farm gate and ran. And she flapped her huge, strong white wings. She ran and ran and flapped and flapped and after running thirty metres something strange happened to her, for the first time. This was to be a day of many first times.

Her feet left the ground, I mean they were floating in the air. Nessy was flying. But now, the farm gate was getting closer and so she beat her wings harder and just made it over the gate by a hair's breadth or as some people say, a hare's breath, without crashing into it.

<aerial shot of countryside>

She followed the farm road and gained height and then she had a nice idea. When she was high above the trees she flew round in an arc. She could see her farmer friend standing in the yard. She flew over him, hooting her strange cry. She saw him wave, a wave goodbye.

Flying was fun. Boy was it fun. Whooshing over the trees, flying into the sun. She could see for miles and miles. Lakes and rivers glistened in the gentle spring sunshine like silver plates. She started to realise what it was to feel joy and suddenly she didn't care about anything anymore. She was happy.

"I'll follow the angels," she thought. "Maybe they're on their way to Heaven."

Next, she flew over the farm where she was born but didn't even notice, not even the small and smelly pea green pond with its silly farm ducks, where her brothers and sisters must be. Nussy was an angel flying high through a magnificent blue sky and the air was pure.

"Oh there you are," she suddenly heard a voice to one side.

And then she was flying among angels.

"What's your name?" asked the wonderful swan.

"Nussy," she said.

"Nussy?" repeated the bird, "That's no name for a swan."

Nussy couldn't believe her ears.

"We'll call you Vanessa."

"You must be the missing egg," commented another flying swan. "A naughty little boy stole you from the lake and put you in the nest of a farm duck last spring."

That explained everything.

There was more good news. All the swans belonged to Her Majesty the Queen and they were under her protection and so nobody was allowed to hurt them.

The ugly duckling had had a terrible start in life but she had been really really brave and finally had had some luck and managed to escape from the creatures who are rude and the creatures who are cruel. And so she was able to find her true place in life and be among folk who loved her and cared about her and understood her. Thank goodness!

The swans took Vanessa to many beautiful lakes. One in particular which had a waterfall which was very relaxing on warm summer evenings. She put her head under her wing, closed her eyes and and cried some tears of happiness before she fell asleep, surrounded by friends and the soothing sounds of summer.