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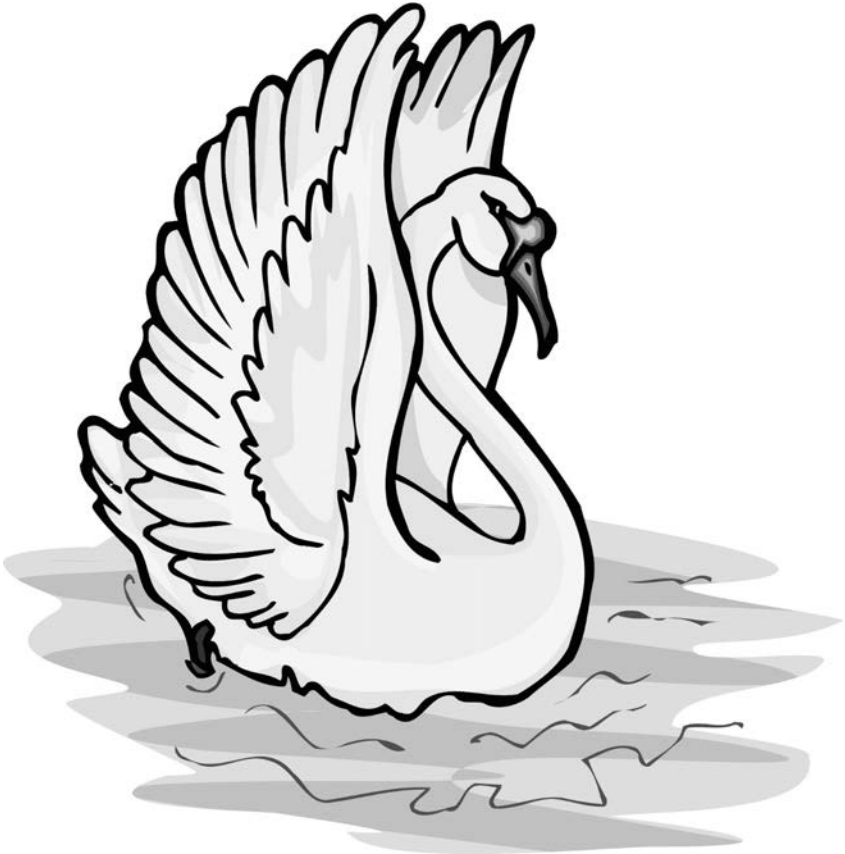
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Family Plays

THE UGLY DUCKLING

by
Bren Dubay



THE UGLY DUCKLING

Fairy Tale. By Bren Dubay. Cast: 3m., 6w. In the royal gardens of Castle Glenmore, Mother Duck is impatiently waiting for her eggs to hatch. When the long-awaited moment finally arrives, a beautiful young duckling and a handsome drake emerge, followed shortly by their less than eye-pleasing younger brother. He takes on the name Ugly because that is what his siblings call him. He is ridiculed for his inability to do the most trivial of duck activities. Even waddling seems beyond his capability. He finds his one friend in the form of the princess of the castle, a child who has not yet grown so old that she cannot hear the voices of the animals. Much like the duckling, she is unable to do many of the things required of a princess, and her tutor complains that she shows no interest in any of her lessons. The two are in the process of forming a fast friendship when the princess verbally lashes out at the duckling in a moment of anger. Deeply hurt, he decides to leave Castle Glenmore for life in the wild. Despairing over her thoughtless words, the princess goes after him, but she must hurry, for winter is coming fast and soon she will be leaving childhood behind to become a young adult no longer able to hear the voices of the animals or even remember the days when she did. *One act. Set: castle garden and an old cottage. Time: long ago. Approximate running time: 50 minutes. Code: U35.*

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308
Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170
Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

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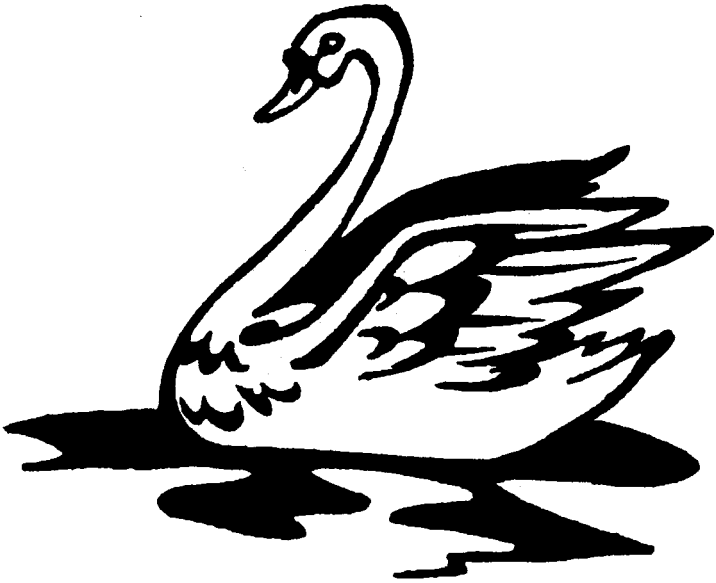


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BREN DUBAY

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*A special thanks to Judy Matetzschk
and Zachary Scott Theatre Company where
this work was originally developed.*

For Sidney Berger

ABOUT THE PLAY

In the royal gardens of Castle Glenmore, Mother Duck is impatiently waiting for her eggs to hatch. When the long awaited moment finally arrives, a beautiful young duckling and a handsome drake emerge, followed shortly by their less than eye-pleasing younger brother. He takes on the name Ugly, because that is what his siblings call him. He is ridiculed for his inability to do the most trivial of duck activities. Even waddling seems beyond his capability. He finds his one friend in the form of the princess of the castle, a child who has not yet grown so old that she cannot hear the voices of the animals. Much like the duckling, she is unable to do many of the things required of a princess, and her tutor complains that she shows no interest in any of her lessons. The two are in the process of forming a fast friendship when the princess verbally lashes out at the duckling in a moment of anger. Deeply hurt, he decides to leave Castle Glenmore for life in the wild. Despairing over her thoughtless words, the princess goes after him, but she must hurry, for winter is coming fast and soon she will be leaving childhood behind to become a young adult no longer able to hear the voices of the animals or even remember the days when she did.

CAST

Princess

a young girl who becomes a young woman
over the course of the play

Ugly Duckling

a swan who starts life thinking he is a duck

*The remainder of the roles can be played
by as few as five additional cast members.*

Mother Duck

overwhelmed by motherhood

She-Duckling

amazed at the vastness of the world

He-Duckling

not a particularly bright drake, but very handsome

Old Duck

queen of the royal garden

Cat

a bully

Wild Duck

she minds her own business

Man

he wanted to be a poet

Cluck Lowlegs

certain that he is the emperor of the universe

Time: a long time ago when castles and princesses really meant something

Place: the royal gardens of Castle Glenmore, in the wild on the very edge of the earth, and in a rickety old cottage farther away than that

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

three eggs—Mother Duck
stick—She-Duckling
firewood—man
cup—man
small chest of poems—princess

Costumes & Makeup

Costumes may be as elaborate or as simple as you choose to make them. For those actors portraying animals, simplistic devices such as a strap on bill or painted whiskers may be used to convey basic traits that would identify the actor as a duck, cat, etc. However, there is no reason that fully developed body costumes should be avoided if that is your desire.

The Set

ACT I

Scene 1—the royal gardens of Castle Glenmore
Scene 2—the royal gardens, the following day
Scene 3—a marsh land far from Castle Glenmore
Scene 4—a man's hut, simple and rickety, but comfortable
Scene 5—the marshlands in a blizzard
Scene 6—the royal gardens

THE UGLY DUCKLING

ACT I, Scene One

[The section of the royal gardens of Castle Glenmore, which serves as a sanctuary for many different types of birds, especially ducks. The landscaping is natural, not forcefully manicured. A portion of the wall of the castle is visible Stage Left. The edge of the lake is visible Stage Right.]

AT RISE: Soon to be MOTHER DUCK is sitting on the nest she has built under a bush near the castle wall. There are TWO STORKS standing by the lake paying no attention to her whatsoever. In fact, the birds can be spotted in various places throughout, some sitting on tree branches, some on the ground, etc. The SOUNDS OF BIRDS fill the air. MOTHER DUCK gets up off her nest and looks at three eggs; two are smaller, one is very large; there is no sign that birth is imminent. THE PRINCESS enters. Her clothes don't quite fit, her hair isn't quite right; in fact, she doesn't look the way most people think a princess should look.]

THE PRINCESS. Are your ducklings here yet?

MOTHER DUCK. Not yet.

THE PRINCESS. Can't you hurry?

MOTHER DUCK. Some things can't be hurried, Princess.

THE PRINCESS. *[turning cartwheels]* I want to turn cartwheels, roll around in the grass, imagine with them what's on the other side of the moon.

MOTHER DUCK. You're getting your clothes all dirty!

THE PRINCESS. Oh, not you, too.

MOTHER DUCK. What?

THE PRINCESS. You sound like a parent.

MOTHER DUCK. Soon to be.

THE PRINCESS. I'm never going to be a parent. Never, ever, ever, ever.

MOTHER DUCK. Perhaps not. But over time, you grow up, then, well...

THE PRINCESS. How long did it take you? To grow up?

MOTHER DUCK. Oh, growing up is gradual.

THE PRINCESS. You're lucky. Everyone wants to rush me. I shan't be rushed. The Princess shall now go for a swim. Despite the fact that it is the

middle of the day and she should be furrowing her brow over her studies, she shall go for a swim. *[The PRINCESS runs off.]*

MOTHER DUCK. Wish I could go for a swim. Can't even go for a waddle. Sit, sit, sit. Wait, wait, wait. *[gets off nest and looks at eggs]* All right, baby ducks, hatch! Crack open. Be born. Please. *[climbs back on nest]* Why didn't someone tell me motherhood would be so difficult?

[OLD DUCK comes racing across the stage being chased by the CAT who is being chased by the PRINCESS; OLD DUCK seeks shelter behind the nest.]

THE PRINCESS. Leave Old Duck alone, Cat.

MOTHER DUCK. *[overlapping]* You shouldn't treat our queen like that.

CAT. She likes it. It keeps her thin.

OLD DUCK. *[trying to catch her breath]* Don't like it, no, no, no.

CAT. *[to the princess]* The king's looking for you. You promised to be on time for your dance lesson.

THE PRINCESS. I don't like dance lessons.

CAT. You don't like any lessons. I've heard your tutor.

[The PRINCESS turns a cartwheel.]

OLD DUCK. *[cautiously peeking from her place of safety carefully watching the CAT]* Princess, my dear, dear, dear, how will you ever lead our country if you aren't more serious about your studies? You must be more responsible.

[CAT moves ever so slightly]

OLD DUCK *[continued]* Stay away from me, Cat.

CAT. *[feigning innocence]* Would I harm you?

MOTHER DUCK. *[to the princess]* It is part of being a good leader, Princess.

THE PRINCESS. *[turning another cartwheel]* I don't want to lead.

OLD DUCK. You have no choice but to lead, lead, lead. It is your birthright.

THE PRINCESS. My choice is to have fun, fun, fun. *[The PRINCESS tags Cat, then exits.]*

THE PRINCESS. *[continued]* Tag, you're it.

CAT. [*calling to her*] I certainly can run faster than you any day any time [*CAT runs off after her.*]

OLDDUCK. Oh, my, my, my. Truly, I am older than an old man. I am old.

MOTHER DUCK. Forgive me, my lady, for I must stand in your presence—

OLDDUCK. Now, sit, sit. Stay on your seat. There is no need to stand up under the circumstances.

MOTHER DUCK. I'd really stand.

OLDDUCK. My goodness, why?

MOTHER DUCK. I must sit in respect.

OLDDUCK. Be grateful for the opportunity to sit. Once those ducklings are hatched, they will be enormous. You'll be a mother. Mother, sit.

MOTHER DUCK. I am very uncomfortable.

OLDDUCK. Well, my dear—

MOTHER DUCK. No, you see, it's this egg. It's bigger than the other two.

OLDDUCK. Bigger?

MOTHER DUCK. It makes it difficult to make something a backward.

OLDDUCK. Stand up. Let me see it. Off, off, off. Off the nest.

[*MOTHER DUCK gets off nest*]

OLDDUCK. It's a turkey.

MOTHER DUCK. Pardon me?

OLDDUCK. It's a turkey. I had seen it once. Turkey is very rare. One must have a proper egg in your nest to mistake.

MOTHER DUCK. No, I'm certain—

OLDDUCK. [*interrupting*] When it hatched, we all wouldn't wish it on any one. Turkey can't swim. They're afraid of the water. I quack and quack. Even a waterfowl or two, but she wouldn't go into the water. I thought I had lost my mind. Thought I'd give birth to a duck that could not swim. I was most relieved to find out it was a turkey. My advantage is to toss that egg out of your nest.

MOTHER DUCK. I've seen it for so long.

OLDDUCK. It's a turkey.

MOTHER DUCK. [*EGGS begin to crack.*] Oh.

OLDDUCK. What?

MOTHER DUCK. The eggs. Oh. [*Two of the EGGS hatch; this is quite a spectacular event; once the event is complete, MOTHER DUCK speaks quietly and simply.*] A daughter.

SHE-DUCKLING. [*surveying the sky and her surroundings*] How big the world is, Mother.

MOTHER DUCK. [*to Old Duck*] She's beautiful.

HE-DUCKLING. Mother?

[*MOTHER DUCK stares in amazement at her son.*]

OLD DUCK. Well, don't just stand there staring, say something to him.

MOTHER DUCK. You are the most handsome drake I have ever seen.

SHE-DUCKLING. What's a drake, Mother?

MOTHER DUCK. Well, a drake is a boy duck.

HE-DUCKLING. I'm a boy.

[*MOTHER DUCK laughs.*]

OLD DUCK. Goodness, of course you are.

SHE-DUCKLING. [*points to castle wall*] What's that, Mother?

MOTHER DUCK. That's part of the wall of Castle Glenmore. [*pointing off left*] See how far off the castle stretches? It's a very large place.

SHE-DUCKLING. Like the world.

MOTHER DUCK. [*laughs*] Yes. [*to Old Duck*] She's very bright. See how curious she is?

OLD DUCK. I see that.

HE-DUCKLING. I'm hungry.

SHE-DUCKLING. [*points to plants*] What's that?

MOTHER DUCK. Those are cattails. In a moment He-duckling.

SHE-DUCKLING. [*pointing to storks*] What are those things?

HE-DUCKLING. I'm hungry.

MOTHER-DUCKLING. [*to He-duckling*] We'll have lunch soon. [*to She-duckling*] Those are storks.

HE-DUCKLING. I want to go for a swim.

SHE-DUCKLING. Their legs are skinny.

HE-DUCKLING. I'm hungry.

SHE-DUCKLING. How can they stand up on such skinny legs?

HE-DUCKLING. I'm hungry.

MOTHER DUCK. [*to He-duckling*] Yes, I know He-duckling— [*to She-duckling*] The storks—

HE-DUCKLING. [*point to Old Duck*] What's that? Is that something to eat?

OLD DUCK. [*overlapping MOTHER DUCK'S following line*] I beg your pardon.

MOTHER. [*overlapping*] No, He-duckling. She isn't food. This is our queen and a mother duck just like I am. Bow to our queen, my son.

HE-DUCKLING. She's a mother? She doesn't look like you.

SHE-DUCKLING. How do you bow?

HE-DUCKLING. She's old. Like about a million years old.

OLD DUCK. Old?

MOTHER DUCK. [*to Old Duck*] Oh, I do apologize. He-duckling—

OLD DUCK. Rude, rude, rude.

MOTHER DUCK. I'm so sorry, my lady.

OLD DUCK. Ill-mannered children are nothing but trouble.

MOTHER DUCK. My lady, you know I will teach them manners.

[*OLD DUCK waddles over to the pond.*]

MOTHER DUCK. Now children, it is impolite—

SHE-DUCKLING. [*pointing to one remaining egg in the nest*] What's this?

HE-DUCKLING. [*pointing to Old Duck*] I think that old thing is mad at us, Mother.

MOTHER DUCK. He-duckling!

SHE-DUCKLING. [*still looking at egg*] Mother, what's this?

MOTHER DUCK. Well, it is an egg. But inside it—

SHE-DUCKLING. Can we break it open and see?

MOTHER DUCK. No, we can't break it open to see.

HE-DUCKLING. I want to go for a swim.

MOTHER DUCK. We will as soon as your sibling is born.

SHE-DUCKLING. What's a sibling?

MOTHER DUCK. A brother or a sister.

HE-DUCKLING. Why can't we go for a swim now?

SHE-DUCKLING. I don't see why we just can't break it open.

HE-DUCKLING. I'm hungry.

MOTHER DUCK. It's very difficult being a parent.

SHE-DUCKLING. It's already cracked.

MOTHER DUCK. [*crossing to nest*] Cracked! Oh.

SHE-DUCKLING. What, Mother?

MOTHER DUCK. Sssshhhh. Watch and you'll see your new sister or brother being born.