

The Flamingo's Missing Pink



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On a quiet lake at sunrise, a flamingo named Flora woke up on her nest. She stretched her long, curved neck and blinked her round dark eyes. The water was calm and the sky was soft. But when Flora looked down at her reflection, she gasped. Her feathers were not pink anymore. They were gray, all gray!



Flora stared at the water. Her feathers had always been soft pink, like the inside of a seashell. Now they looked like rain clouds. She felt a lump in her throat. "Oh no," she whispered. "What happened to my pink?" She hid her face under her wing. She did not want anyone to see her.



Just then, Flora's best friend, a spoonbill named Sam, waddled over. Sam had white and gray feathers and a flat, spoon-shaped bill. He wore a little woven grass bracelet on one leg. "Good morning, Flora!" he said cheerfully. But Flora only sighed and turned away. Sam tilted his head. "What's wrong?" he asked gently.



Flora slowly uncovered her face. "Look at me, Sam," she said. "My pink is gone. I'm all gray. I look so dull and plain." She stretched out a slender leg and hung her head. "I don't want to be seen like this. Everyone will think I'm not beautiful anymore." Sam stepped closer. "You're still you, Flora," he said softly.



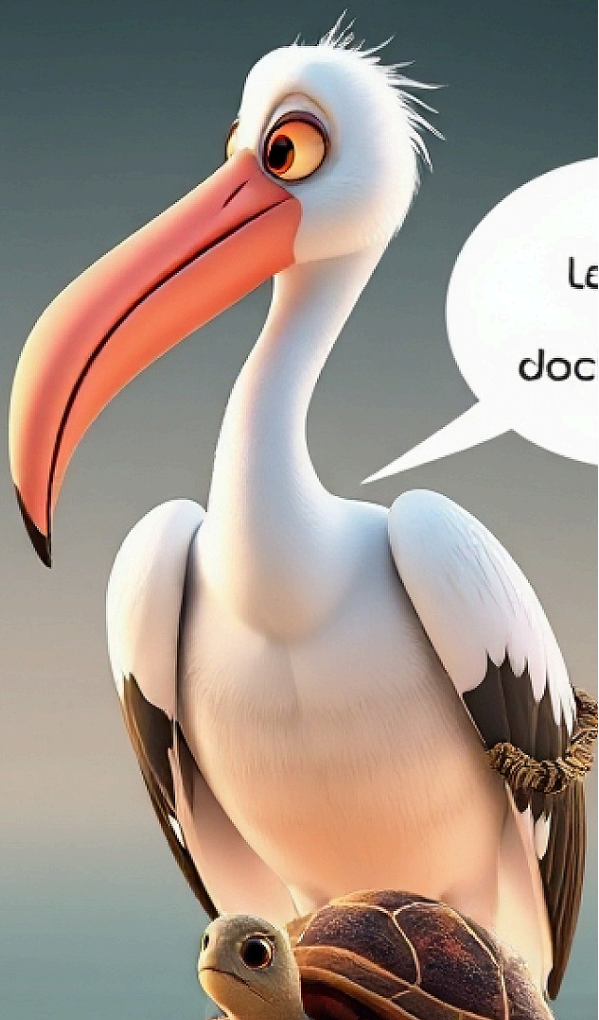
Sam sat beside her on the muddy bank. "Remember last summer when we raced across the water?" he asked. Flora nodded. "You laughed so hard you almost fell over. Your color didn't matter then. We were just happy." Flora looked at Sam. "But this is different," she said. "Now I'm gray. What if my friends don't like me?"



Sam shook his head. "True friends don't care about colors," he said. "They care about kindness and fun and being together." Flora wanted to believe him. But she still felt sad. She looked at her gray feathers and sighed. "Maybe you're right," she said. "But I don't feel like myself." Sam gave her a gentle nudge. "Let's take a walk," he said.



Flora and Sam walked along the shore. Flora kept her head low. They passed a group of ducks. "Hello, Flora!" quacked a duck. "You look different today." Flora's cheeks would have turned red if they could. She wanted to hide. But Sam stood tall and said, "Flora is still Flora. And she's my friend." The ducks smiled and swam on.



Next, they met a turtle sunbathing on a rock. "Flora, your feathers are gray!" said the turtle. "Did you get dirty?" Flora felt a tear roll down her cheek. Sam spoke up. "Colors change," he said. "But hearts don't. Flora has a kind heart. That's what matters." The turtle nodded. "You're right," she said. "Sorry, Flora."



Flora looked at Sam. "You always know what to say," she said. Sam smiled. "That's what friends are for," he said. They walked to a quiet spot by the reeds. Flora looked at her reflection again. The gray feathers shimmered in the sunlight. "Maybe gray isn't so bad," she said slowly. "It's just different." Sam nodded. "Different can be beautiful too."



Flora thought about all the things she loved to do. She loved to dance in the shallow water. She loved to hunt for little shrimp. She loved to watch the sunset with Sam. None of those things needed pink feathers. "You know," she said, "I still feel like me inside." Sam smiled. "That's because you are still you," he said.



Flora stood up tall. She stretched her long neck and fluffed her gray feathers. "I'm ready to go back," she said. "I don't need to hide." Sam clapped his wings. "That's the Flora I know!" he cheered. They walked back to the flock together. Flora held her head high. She felt a little nervous, but also brave.



When they reached the flock, the other flamingos stared. "Flora, what happened?" asked one. Flora took a deep breath. "My feathers turned gray," she said. "But I'm still me. I still like to dance and laugh. And I still care about all of you." The flamingos looked at each other. Then one stepped forward. "We don't care about your color," she said. "We care about you."



Flora felt a warm feeling in her chest. It was better than any pink feather. "Thank you," she said. "I learned that my worth comes from kindness, not from my color." All the flamingos nodded. Sam gave her a high-five with his wing. "See?" he said. "I told you." Flora laughed. It was the first real laugh she had all day.



That evening, Flora and Sam sat on the shore and watched the sunset. Flora looked at her gray feathers in the orange light. They looked silvery and soft. "I used to think pink was the best color," she said. "But now I think any color is fine, as long as I'm with friends." Sam nodded. "Friendship doesn't change when colors do," he said.



Flora smiled. "I'm glad you're my friend, Sam," she said. "You helped me see that I'm still me." Sam smiled back. "And I'm glad you're my friend, Flora," he said. "Gray or pink, you're wonderful." They sat together as the stars came out. Flora felt happy and peaceful. She knew she was loved just the way she was.



The next morning, Flora woke up and looked at her feathers. They were still gray. But she didn't mind. She stretched and yawned and went to find Sam. "Good morning, Sam!" she called. "Let's go dancing!" And they did. Because Flora had learned that true beauty comes from being kind and being yourself, no matter what color you are.