

# *The Greenies*

Hans Christian Andersen

Danishnordicscandinavian

---

*Easy*  
*8 min read*

A rose tree stood in the window. But a little while ago it had been green and fresh, and now it looked sickly—it was in poor health, no doubt. A whole regiment was quartered on it and was eating it up; yet, notwithstanding this seeming greediness, the regiment was a very decent and respectable one. It wore bright-green uniforms. I spoke to one of the “Greenies.” He was but three days old, and yet he was already a grandfather. What do you think he said? It is all true—he spoke of himself and of the rest of the regiment. Listen!

“We are the most wonderful creatures in the world. At a very early age we are engaged, and immediately we have the wedding. When the cold weather comes we lay our eggs, but the little ones lie sunny and warm. The wisest of the creatures, the ant,—we have the greatest respect for him!—understands us well. He appreciates us, you may be sure. He does not eat us up at once; he takes our eggs, lays them in the family ant hill on the ground floor—lays them, labeled and numbered, side by side, layer on layer, so that each day a new one may creep out of the egg. Then he puts us in a stable, pinches our hind legs, and milks us till we die. He has given us the prettiest of names—‘little milch cow.’

“All creatures who, like the ant, are gifted with common sense call us by this pretty name. It is only human beings who do not. They give us another name, one that we feel to be a great affront—great enough to embitter our whole life. Could you not write a protest against it for us? Could you not rouse these human beings to a

sense of the wrong they do us? They look at us so stupidly or, at times, with such envious eyes, just because we eat a rose leaf, while they themselves eat every created thing—whatever grows and is green. And oh, they give us the most humiliating of names! I will not even mention it. Ugh! I feel it to my very stomach. I cannot even pronounce it—at least not when I have my uniform on, and that I always wear.

“I was born on a rose leaf. I and all the regiment live on the rose tree. We live off it, in fact. But then it lives again in us, who belong to the higher order of created beings.

“The human beings do not like us. They pursue and murder us with soapsuds. Oh, it is a horrid drink! I seem to smell it even now. You cannot think how dreadful it is to be washed when one was not made to be washed. Men! you who look at us with your severe, soapsud eyes, think a moment what our place in nature is: we are born upon the roses, we die in roses—our whole life is a rose poem. Do not, I beg you, give us a name which you yourselves think so despicable—the name I cannot bear to pronounce. If you wish to speak of us, call us ‘the ants’ milch cows—the rose-tree regiment—the little green things.’”

“And I, the man, stood looking at the tree and at the little Greenies (whose name I shall not mention, for I should not like to wound the feelings of the citizens of the rose tree), a large family with eggs and young ones; and I looked at the soapsuds I was going to wash them in, for I too had come with soap and water and murderous intentions. But now I will use it for soap bubbles. Look, how beautiful! Perhaps there lies in each a fairy tale, and the bubble grows large and radiant and looks as if there were a pearl lying inside it.

The bubble swayed and swung. It flew to the door and then burst, but the door opened wide, and there stood Dame Fairytale herself! And now she will tell you better than I can about (I will not say the name) the little green things of the rosebush.

“Plant lice!” said Dame Fairytale. One must call things by their right names. And if one may not do so always, one must at least have the privilege of doing so in a fairy tale.

Read more fairy tales on [Fairytalez.com](http://Fairytalez.com)