

The Small Greenies

In the window there stood a rosebush, only recently it had been in the bloom of youth, now it looked poorly, it was suffering from something.

It had got lodgers that were eating it up; a highly respectable billeting, though, in green uniform.

I spoke to one of those billeted, he was only three days old and yet already a great-grandfather. Do you know what he said? What he said was true – he spoke of himself and the entire billeting.

‘We are the strangest regiment of earth’s creatures. In the warm season we give birth to live young ones; the weather is then fine; we get engaged immediately and hold a wedding. As the cold season approaches, we lay eggs; the tiny ones lie snugly. The wisest of the animals, ants – we have a great respect for them – study us, evaluate us. They do not eat us straight away, they take our eggs, place them in the hill they share with their family, bottom floor, place us identified and numbered, side by side, layer upon layer, so that every day a fresh one can come out of the egg; then they place us in stables, pinch our hind legs, milk us, so we die; it is most agreeable! They give us the most delightful name: ‘sweet little dairy cow!’ All creatures with antlike common sense call us this except for human beings, and that we feel is an outrage, it’s enough to make us lose all our sweetness – can’t you perhaps write something about that, put them right about it, these human beings! – they look so stupidly at us, view us with tainted eyes because we eat rose leaves, while they themselves devour every kind of living creature, everything that grows and turns green. They give us the most frightful name, the most horrible name; I won’t mention it, ugh! it turns my stomach! I cannot say what they call us, not while I’m in uniform, and I’m always in uniform.

I was born on a leaf of a rosebush; I and the entire regiment live off the rosebush, but it lives on in us, we who belong to creatures of a higher standing. Humans cannot stand the sight of us; they come and kill us with soapy water; that is a horrid beverage! I think I can smell it. It is terrible to be washed when one is born not to be washed!

Humans! You who look on us with your stern soapy-water eyes; consider our place in nature, our ingenious equipment for laying eggs and supplying young ones! We were blessed and told: ‘to go forth and multiply!’ We were born in roses, we die in roses; our entire life is poetry. Do not label us with the name you find most revolting and nasty, the name – I refuse to say it, to mention it! Call us the ants’ dairy cow, the rosebush regiment, *the Greenies!*’

And I, the fellow human being who was looking at the bush and at the small Greenies, whose name I will not mention, I refuse to insult a rose-citizen, a large family with eggs and living young ones. The soapy water I was going to wash them with, for I had come with soapy water and evil intent, I will now whisk it until it foams and blow bubbles with it, look at all the radiant colours, perhaps a fairy tale lies in each and every one of them.

And the bubble became so big and brilliant, and it was as if a silver pearl lay at the bottom of it. The bubble soared, floated, flew against the door and burst, but the door sprang open and there stood *Mother Fairy Tale* herself.

‘Well, now *she* can tell a better story than I could about – I refuse to say the name! – the small Greenies.’

'Plant louse!' *Mother Fairy Tale* said. 'Everything must be named by its proper name, and if one does not dare do so in ordinary life, one must be able to do so in fairy tales.'