


The Drop of Water

by

Hans Christian Andersen

(1848)

 Of course you know what is meant by a magnifying glass—one of those round spectacle-glasses that make everything look a hundred times bigger than it is? When any one takes one of these and holds it to his eye, and looks at a drop of water from the pond yonder, he sees above a thousand wonderful creatures that are otherwise never discerned in the water. But there they are, and it is no delusion. It almost looks like a great plateful of spiders jumping about in a crowd. And how fierce they are! They tear off each other's legs, and arms and bodies, before and behind; and yet they are merry and joyful in their way.

Now, there once was an old man whom all the people called Kribble-Krabble, for that was his name. He always wanted the best of everything, and when he could not manage it otherwise, he did it by magic.

There he sat one day, and held his magnifying-glass to his eye, and looked at a drop of water that had been taken out of a puddle by the ditch. But what a kribbling and krabbling was there! All the thousands of little creatures hopped and sprang and tugged at one another, and ate each other up.



“That is horrible!” said old Kribble-Krabble. “Can one not persuade them to live in peace and quietness, so that each one may mind his own business?”

And he thought it over and over, but it would not do, and so he had recourse to magic.

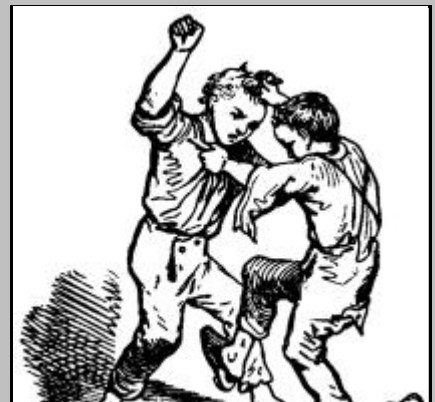
“I must give them color, that they may be seen more plainly,” said he; and he poured something like a little drop of red wine into the drop of water, but it was witches' blood from the lobes of the ear, the finest kind, at ninepence a drop. And now the wonderful little creatures were pink all over. It looked like a whole town of naked wild men.

“What have you there?” asked another old magician, who had no name—and that was the best thing about him.

“Yes, if you can guess what it is,” said Kribble-Krabble, “I'll make you a present of it.”

But it is not so easy to find out if one does not know.

And the magician who had no name looked through the magnifying-glass.



It looked really like a great town reflected there, in which all the people were running about without clothes. It was terrible! But it was still more terrible to see how one beat and pushed the other, and bit and hacked, and tugged and mauled him. Those at the top were being pulled down, and those at the bottom were struggling upwards.



“Look! look! his leg is longer than mine! Bah! Away with it! There is one who has a little bruise. It hurts him, but it shall hurt him still more.”

And they hacked away at him, and they pulled at him, and ate him up, because of the little bruise. And there was one sitting as still as any little maiden, and wishing only for peace and quietness. But now she had to come out, and they tugged at her, and pulled her about, and ate her up.

“That’s funny!” said the magician.

“Yes; but what do you think it is?” said Kribble-Krabble. “Can you find that out?”

“Why, one can see that easily enough,” said the other. “That’s Paris, or some other great city, for they’re all alike. It’s a great city!”

“It’s a drop of puddle water!” said Kribble-Krabble.

