

Valerio Larcheni

Little Ants Adventures

Stories for kids



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http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=71758120

ISBN 9785006565241

Аннотация

On the edge of the forest, there stands an anthill. This is the home of Irra and Frra, two little ant siblings with curious eyes and hearts brimming with mischief. Irra, the ant-girl with her long red pigtails and her face sprinkled with freckles, is the dreamer of the duo. Her imagination can conjure entire kingdoms hidden beneath dandelions. Frra, ant-boy her steadfast companion the ant-boy, on the other hand, is a thinker, always calculating, always planning. Together, they are unstoppable...

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ISBN 978-5-0065-6524-1

Created with Ridero smart publishing system



The Adventures Begin

On the edge of the forest, nestled beneath a towering oak tree, there stood a bustling anthill, its chambers winding like a labyrinth deep into the earth. This was not just any anthill – it was the home of Irra and Frra, two little ant siblings with curious eyes and hearts brimming with mischief.

Irra, the ant-girl with her long red pigtails and her face sprinkled with freckles, was the dreamer of the duo. Her imagination could conjure entire kingdoms hidden beneath dandelions. Frra, the ant-boy on the other hand, was her steadfast companion, his short haircut constantly ruffled from their adventures. He was the thinker, always calculating, always planning. Together, they were unstoppable...

The days in the anthill followed an unchanging rhythm. The adult ants – countless and relentless – scurried off at sunrise, their antennae twitching as they dragged food or repaired tunnels. The young ants, like Irra and Frra, were left to attend school in the heart of the anthill and then play.

One morning, as the first golden rays of the sun filtered through the mossy canopy above, Irra and Frra were finishing their breakfast of sweet aphid nectar. Their parents had already left for the day, their farewell hugs quick and practiced, leaving

the siblings seated in their cozy leaf-woven dining corner.

«I'm bored of school,» Irra declared, resting her pointy elbow on the table and propping her chin in her hand.

Frra looked up, his antennae twitching thoughtfully. «It's the same every day. Spelling drills, digging practice, how to carry crumbs properly... It's important, I guess, but couldn't we have just one day to... explore?»

Irra's freckles crinkled as a grin spread across her face. «Exactly what I was thinking. Let's have an adventure! A real one. There's an old story about the Great Strawberry Field just beyond the meadow. The older ants say it's filled with berries bigger than our entire anthill!»

Frra arched a tiny eyebrow. «You mean the one we're *not* supposed to go to because it's too dangerous?»

«Exactly!» Irra cried, her pigtailed bouncing. «What could be more exciting?»

Frra hesitated, but the spark of curiosity in his sister's eyes was contagious. After all, they were a team – and there was no way he'd let her go alone.

The siblings made their way past the anthill's outer tunnels and

emerged into the sunlight. Their antennae quivered as the warm breeze carried the scent of wildflowers and distant strawberries. The meadow they'd always played in seemed vast and open, stretching endlessly toward the horizon. Somewhere out there was the Great Strawberry Field.

Irra and Frra scampered through the grass, their tiny feet moving quickly beneath the massive blades towering above them like trees. Irra led the way, and Frra kept track of their route by marking a trail with tiny droplets of sap, ensuring they could find their way back.

Everything felt exhilarating – different from their usual routine. They climbed over twigs and tunneled under fallen leaves, hopping over dewdrops that glistened like jewels in the grass.

«Do you smell that?» Irra asked excitedly, pausing to sniff the air. A sweet, fruity scent wafted toward them, stronger with each step. «We're close! But just as their excitement reached its peak, they encountered their first obstacle. Blocking their path was a colossal creature – a caterpillar, plump and striped with green and yellow. It munched lazily on a leaf the size of a boat, its round eyes flicking toward the two ant siblings.

«Who dares to cross my leaf?» rumbled the caterpillar. Its

voice was slow and syrupy, as if it had all the time in the world.

Irra stepped forward, undeterred. «We're on a quest to find the Great Strawberry Field. Can we pass through?»

The caterpillar blinked at them, then let out a deep chuckle. «The Strawberry Field? Brave little ants, but you'll need to solve my riddle first.»

Frra groaned. He was good at puzzles, but they always made him nervous under pressure. Still, he nodded. «Alright. What's your riddle?»



The caterpillar's antennae wiggled as it recited:

«I'm home to treasure, bright and sweet,
But I'm no friend to little feet.
Once I'm found, I'm hard to lose,
And I'll stain the ground with reds and blues. What am I?»

Irre and Frra exchanged knowing smiles. «A berry!» they shouted together.

The caterpillar grinned and inched aside, allowing them to pass. «Good luck, little ones. But beware – finding the Strawberry Field is only the beginning.»



When they finally reached the Great Strawberry Field, Irra and Frra gasped. The strawberries were magnificent – plump, red, and glittering with morning dew. They were so large that one berry alone could feed their entire anthill for a week. The ground beneath the plants was soft and fragrant, and the towering leaves above cast dappled shadows.

«It's even better than the stories,» Irra whispered in awe.

Frra was already analyzing the situation. «We should take a piece back to show everyone. It's too far to bring the whole anthill here, but we can prove it's real.»



Irre nodded and began climbing the nearest strawberry stem, her nimble legs moving quickly. But as she reached the base of a berry, the ground below them trembled.

«Frra... did you feel that?»

The tremor grew stronger, and out from the shadows emerged a long-legged, spindly figure – a spider. Its many eyes glinted as it hissed, «Thieves in my field! You'll pay with your lives!»

Frra instantly grabbed a fallen leaf and raised it like a shield. «Stay back!» he shouted, his voice shaking.

Irre scurried down the stem, her heart pounding. «What do we do?!»

Frra's mind raced. The sap trail they'd left – it was their lifeline. «We run! Follow the trail!»

And so, hand in hand, the siblings dashed through the field, the spider chasing close behind. Its legs moved like lightning, but Irre and Frra's small size allowed them to weave through tight spaces and under roots where the predator couldn't follow.

Finally, they reached the meadow, their legs aching and their tiny lungs burning. Only when the anthill came into view did they

allow themselves to stop and catch their breath.

That evening, as their parents returned home and the family gathered for dinner, Irra and Frra couldn't stop grinning. They didn't tell the adults about their adventure – at least, not yet – but the siblings shared victorious glances, knowing they had broken the monotony of their routine.

And tucked away in a secret corner of the anthill, hidden inside a tiny hollowed-out seed, was a single ruby-red fragment of strawberry – a treasure from the Great Strawberry Field, proof of their courage and curiosity.

As they drifted off to sleep that night, Irra whispered to her brother, «What do you think we'll explore next?»

Frra smiled in the darkness. «We'll figure it out, Irra. Together.»

A Dangerous Encounter with a Viper

Once upon a time, in a sprawling green forest, there lived a colony of ants under a vast anthill that peaked like a small mountain. Among these small but spirited creatures were two red ants, siblings named Irra and Frra. They spent their days in the warm summer sun, free from the responsibilities of the hive, and the world around them was their playground.

Irra was the audacious one, her vibrant spirit igniting the dull afternoon. She dreamed of great adventures, always tied to the scent of wildflowers and the echo of gentle breezes. Frra, on the other hand, was level-headed and cautious. He valued safety over reckless exploration, often behind the scenes, strategizing their fun.

«C'mon, Frra! Let's explore beyond the thicket today. There's a whole world out there waiting for us!» Irra exclaimed one sunny morning, her antennae twitching with excitement.

«If we go into the deeper forest, we need to be careful,» Frra replied, his voice laced with concern. «There are predators, and you know how unpredictable the world can be.»

«Don't be such a worrywart! We'll be fine!» she insisted,

dragging her brother with her towards the delightful unknown.

With reluctance, Frra allowed himself to be led by his adventurous sister, and off they scurried. The forest was buzzing with life; the sunlight filtered through the leaves, painting the ground with golden patches. Irra darted around, peeking under rocks and climbing up blades of grass, but Frra stayed close, ever watchful.

After a while, they disembarked on a clearing that seemed enchanted. Irra was captivated by a patch of shimmering dew-drops clinging to a spider's web like tiny jewels. «Look at this, Frra! It's beautiful!» she said, her eyes starry with wonder.

But while she admired her find, they unknowingly wandered into the territory of a menacing creature – a sleek, slithering viper. The snake had been basking in the sun, its eyes half-closed, when the glimmer of the ants caught its attention. With a flick of its tongue and a terrifying hiss, it signaled that lunch had arrived.

Irra instinctively turned and screamed, «Frra! Run!» They dashed through the grass, a blur of red, their tiny legs moving as fast as they could. The viper lunged, its forked tongue tasting the air, and soon enough, it gave chase, its sinuous body gliding smoothly over the forest floor.

«Quick, Irra, to the hill!» Frra urged, his mind racing to find a way to shake off the predator. But the snake was gaining on them, its eyes gleaming with hunger.

Panting and pushing ahead, they darted under a clump of ferns. The siblings squeezed through the dense foliage as the viper circled, searching. Irra's heart pounded in her tiny chest, but the thrill of the chase only ignited her adventurous spirit further.

«Think, Frra! We need a plan!» cried Irra. At that moment, she caught a glimpse of a fallen log nearby, its bark stripping away, revealing a dark hollow inside. «Let's hide there!»

With no time to waste, they scurried towards the log and squeezed into the darkened space just moments before the viper swooped in. The snake peered into the hollow, its breath hot and menacing. Should it probe, the siblings knew that they might not escape.

«This way!» Frra whispered, spotting a narrow exit on the other side of the log. Quietly and cautiously, they crawled toward it. Frra nudged Irra before they made a break for it through the exit just as the viper lost interest and slithered away.



Once they were safely away, Irra turned to Frra and said, «That was the most exciting thing ever! Did you see how close it was?»

«Exciting? I think you mean terrifying!» Frra countered, his voice steady amidst the rising anxiety. «We could have been – »

«I know, I know,» Irra interrupted, «but we outsmarted it! We worked together!»

Frra sighed, still nervous but proud of his sister's spirited approach. «Let's just keep moving. We can't afford to have another close call.»

As they traversed deeper into the forest, they stumbled upon a shimmering pond alive with colorful insects dancing above its surface. Irra's curiosity was piqued, and she marched forward. «Frra! Look! I want to see what's on that lily pad!»

«Wait!» Frra warned, but Irra was already scampering toward the water. Suddenly, a shadow passed over them. They looked up to see a giant dragonfly hovering just above, it locked its eyes on them as it descended.

The siblings froze! This was yet another test of their ingenuity and unity. With a swift and clever glance, Irra shouted, «Frra! We need to distract it!»

In a flash of inspiration, they began to kick tiny pebbles from the pond's edge toward a thicket nearby, causing splashes and sounds that drew the dragonfly's attention. Just as planned, the dragonfly diverged sharply, darting towards the noise.

Meanwhile, the siblings slipped away, their hearts racing with adrenalin yet again.

«This was not how I imagined our summer vacation would go,» Frra panted, shaking off the thrill of that encounter.

«Why? It's more exciting than sitting inside all day!» Irra grinned, her overt enthusiasm infectious.

«And I have to admit,» Frra relented, «that was quite clever.» He couldn't hide a smile now.

The sun began to dip lower in the sky, casting long shadows across the forest. As they wandered homeward, they found the familiar path leading back to their anthill.

«I guess we should stick to safer paths from now on,» Frra suggested, though they both knew that Irra's adventurous spirit could not easily be contained.

That night, as they crawled into their cozy little corner in the anthill, Irra turned to Frra. «So, did you have fun?»

«No more close encounters with snakes, please,» he laughed, his eyes gleaming with shared courage and excitement.

And with that, the siblings drifted off to sleep, dreaming of lands yet to be explored and adventures waiting to unfold. For in the union of caution and courage, every adventure, even the dangerous ones, brought them even closer together.

The Wild Wood Adventure

The golden glow of morning peeked through the dense canopy of the Wild Wood, casting dappled patterns on the forest floor. Irra and Frra, two young ants from the Hilltop Colony, had wandered far from their home in search of adventure. Irra, a clever and curious girl-ant, carried a tiny pouch of nectar crumbs for sustenance, while Frra, a brave but slightly clumsy boy-ant, wielded a slender twig he had fashioned into a makeshift spear.

«See, Irra?» Frra grinned, tapping his twig against a mossy rock. «A spear! It'll keep us safe if we run into trouble.»

«I'd rather we don't *find* trouble,» Irra replied, adjusting her pouch. She glanced around nervously. The Wild Wood was as enchanting as it was dangerous, filled with shadows that seemed to dart and flicker with unseen predators. «Besides, we've gone too far. I think we need to go back.»

But as the words left her mouth, a sharp breeze rustled the

giant fern leaves above, and the two ants realized with a jolt – they had no idea which way 'back' was.

The Wild Wood was vast and confusing, each leaf and branch looking the same. And so their adventure truly began.

The Strike of the Deadly Beetles

Their first challenge arose when they came upon a hollow log bridging a murky puddle. The log seemed like the safest path forward, but as they carefully crawled across, they didn't notice the gleaming eyes lurking in the shadows.

A group of jewel beetles, their iridescent shells gleaming menacingly, emerged from cracks in the log. The beetles clicked their mandibles in unison, their leader rasping, «Trespassers! This is *our* log. You'll have to pay a toll.»

«We have nothing to pay with,» Irra said, her antennae trembling. «Please, we just want to pass.»

The beetles closed in, surrounding the little ants. Irra raised his twig-spear with a determined look. «Stay behind me, Irra,» he whispered.

Before the beetles could pounce, Irra suddenly had an idea.

«Wait!» she shouted, holding up her pouch. «We have nectar crumbs. Enough for everyone to share!»

The lure of the sweet treat distracted the beetles momentarily, giving Irra and Frra just enough time to spring into action. While the beetles scrambled for the crumbs, the two ants leaped off the log and landed safely on a clump of moss below, tumbling into one another but alive.



Frra grinned. «Nice thinking, Irra. See? I told you we make a good team.»

The Web of Shadows

Their escape didn't last long. As they resumed their search for home, they unknowingly wandered straight into another spider's domain.



Sticky threads clung to their legs, slowing them down as the shadowy figure of the spider descended from above, its many eyes glinting with hunger.

«Uh-oh,» Frra muttered, gripping his twig-spear tightly.
«What do we do now?»

Irre's quick mind worked furiously. «Spiders don't like vibration!» she whispered. «Frra, use your spear to shake the web!»

Frra nodded and, with all his strength, began tapping and jabbing at the strands around them. The web quivered violently, and the spider hesitated, its legs recoiling at the disturbance. Seeing their chance, Irre and Frra worked together to tear through the weakened silk and scrambled free just as the spider lunged at the empty space they had occupied.

«My spear works!» Frra cheered, though his twig was now bent and frayed. Irre rolled her eyes but smiled. «Let's keep moving before it comes back.»

The Warrior Ant Ambush

As they ventured deeper, the forest darkened, and noises grew louder. Chittering and rustling filled the air, and soon they saw the source: a battalion of warrior ants from the neighboring Shadowvine Colony.

«Intruders!» barked the leader, his massive jaws gleaming under the dim light. «Seize them!»

Irra and Frra darted in different directions, narrowly avoiding the soldiers' grasp. These were no ordinary ants; they were twice the size of Irra and Frra and equipped with sharp mandibles and spiked armor. Escape seemed impossible.

«You'll serve as our slaves!» growled one of the warriors, snapping his jaws dangerously close to Frra's antennae.

But Irra, ever the strategist, noticed something: The Shadowvine warriors moved in perfect formation, relying on their leader's commands. She quickly whispered her plan to Frra.

«Follow my lead,» Irra said, and Frra nodded, trusting her completely.

Together, they lured the warriors into a narrow crevice between two rocks. The Shadowvine ants scrambled to follow, but their size worked against them, and they became wedged in the tight space. Using bits of bark and Frra's battered twig-spear, Irra and Frra sealed the opening, trapping the soldiers inside.



«Teamwork,» Irra panted, grinning at Frra. He smiled back, though he was clearly exhausted. «Let's just hope we don't run into anything bigger.»

The Journey Home

As the sun dipped below the horizon and the forest grew even darker, Irra and Frra finally spotted a familiar landmark: the Great Mushroom Grove. They had passed it earlier that morning when they first wandered into the Wild Wood.



«We're close!» Irra exclaimed, her heart swelling with relief.

But just as they thought they were safe, a sharp croak echoed in the distance. A frog, its slimy green skin glistening, appeared from beneath a leaf. Its wide eyes locked onto the two tiny ants, and its long, sticky tongue lashed out.

Frra yanked Irra to the side just in time. They dodged and weaved, the frog's tongue slapping the ground behind them like a whip. «Run, Irra!» Frra shouted.

Irra, however, saw an opportunity. Near the edge of the Mushroom Grove was a patch of fire ants, known for their fiery tempers and stinging bites. «This way!» she called, leading Frra toward the fire ants.

The frog followed, unaware of the danger. As soon as its tongue flicked near the fire ants, chaos erupted. The fire ants swarmed the frog, who croaked in dismay and hopped away, leaving Irra and Frra unharmed.

By the time they reached the Hilltop Colony, the stars were twinkling in the night sky. Exhausted but victorious, Irra and Frra collapsed at the entrance, their fellow ants rushing to greet them.

«Where have you been?» the elder ants scolded, but their voices were filled with relief. Irra and Frra exchanged a glance and smiled.

«Just... exploring,» Frra said with a chuckle.

That night, as they rested in their cozy chambers, Irra whispered, «You know, Frra, we make a pretty good team.»

«We do,» he agreed, his antennae brushing hers affectionately. «But next time, let's explore *closer* to home.»

And with that, the two little adventurers drifted off to sleep, dreaming of future escapades – though hopefully less dangerous ones.

Adventures on the Pond

Though the holiday spirit buzzed through every corner of the anthill, Irra and Frra were up bright and early, just like the diligent adult ants. But unlike the adults, burdened by their endless work gathering food and maintaining tunnels, Irra and Frra had their own kind of busy day planned. Today was no ordinary holiday. Today, they were embarking on a grand and *forbidden* adventure.

«Pass me the pine needle,» Irra whispered to her brother, holding up her tiny forelegs like a swordsman preparing for a duel.

Frfa grunted, lifting a long, sharp pine needle on his back. «Here. Now let me get mine! We need to look like warriors when we reach the pond.»

The pond. For as long as they could remember, the pond had been the forbidden jewel of their childhood. Stories about its shimmering surface

and the unpredictable, treacherous creatures lurking nearby were told almost like bedtime tales to warn the young ants. The adult ants would shiver with dread even while telling the stories – black water beetles, dragonflies with glinting wings,

a strange slippery thing called 'frogs,» and, most terrifying of all, the pond's vast expanse, a death trap for anything unlucky enough to fall into it.

But Irra and Frra didn't have time for fear. They were small ants, but their dreams were colossal.

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After completing their apartment chores faster than ever – tidying up stray crumbs, fluffing tiny moss beds, and rearranging pebbles into neat borders around their home – they dashed out of the anthill.

«Are you sure we won't get caught?» Frra asked, scurrying behind Irra. His antennae twitched nervously.

«Relax,» said Irra, her voice tinged with excitement. «We'll be back before anyone notices. We just need to handle the predators and...» She paused dramatically, squinting her compound eyes as she spotted something. «...and sail *the boat*!»

The so-called «boat» awaited them on the edge of the pond. It was a dried-up leaf, curled perfectly into the shape of a small dinghy. Though uneven, it looked sturdy enough to float on water, and in the eyes of two adventurous young ants, it was

magical.

The journey to the pond was, as the adults had predicted, dangerous. They avoided the fluttering shadow of a butterfly, narrowly dodged their neighbor – a grouchy grasshopper who nearly stepped on them – and took extra care when they passed the territory where the spider webs stretched like shimmering nets in the sunlight.

When they finally arrived, the pond stretched in front of them like an alien world. The sunlight reflected off its surface, and ripples danced hypnotically. But the most incredible part wasn't the water – it was the sheer abundance of life. Dragonflies zipped by, their wings humming loudly. Water bugs skated effortlessly across the pond's surface. And farther out, a sleek, glistening fish jumped, its silver body flashing briefly before vanishing into an ominous ripple.

«This is it!» Irra said, puffing out her tiny chest. «Time to sail the boat.»

«But... the pond is vast,» muttered Frra. His antennae twitched again, this time in unease. «What if something... eats us?»

Irra rolled her eyes. «That's why we brought the pine needles.

Look!» She jabbed her weapon into the ground. «We're fearless! Anything tries to mess with us, we *sting* it!» She brandished the pine needle with such dramatic flair that Frra couldn't help but grin.

Emboldened by his sister's confidence, Frra picked up his own pine needle and together they pushed the dried leaf toward the water. With careful effort and teamwork, the two managed to climb aboard, balancing themselves as their 'boat' bobbed on the surface. It wasn't a perfect fit – Frra kept slipping to one side and Irra had to anchor him with her legs – but they were finally doing it.

«We're sailing!» Irra cheered, holding her stick up high.

Frra hesitated, looking at the dark water beneath them before letting out a cautious cheer himself. «We're sailing!»

For a glorious few moments, they glided peacefully along the shimmering surface as the gentle current carried them. It was everything they had imagined and more – the exhilarating wind brushed against their exoskeletons, the water sparkled below, and the world seemed infinitely larger than it had before.

But their adventure wouldn't stay peaceful for long.

A sudden shadow loomed overhead, and the humming sound of wings filled the air. A dragonfly – a massive, iridescent predator – circled closer, its goggled eyes locked onto the two ants. To the dragonfly, they were nothing more than a tasty snack.

Irra's instincts kicked in immediately. «Frra! Stay low and hold on tight!» she barked, grabbing her pine needle like a spear.

The dragonfly swooped closer, its wings slicing through the air like blades. Irra stood her ground, brandishing her needle and jabbing at the air with a ferocity that would have made the bravest ant soldier proud. She hissed in defiance, making herself look as big as possible.

The dragonfly hesitated for a split second, just long enough for Frra to jab his own pine needle upward, grazing the insect's delicate leg. The dragonfly buzzed angrily, but the tiny resistance seemed to surprise it. With a loud whir of its wings, it decided the meal wasn't worth the trouble and flew away.



«We did it!» Frra gasped, clinging to the edge of the leaf. His whole body trembled with the thrill and sheer terror of what had just happened. «Irra, we actually did it!»

Irra, still gripping her makeshift weapon, gave him a shaky smile. «I told you we're fearless.»

But their relief was short-lived. A ripple appeared in the water, growing in size and heading straight for them. Something was coming – a fish.

«Row! Row!» Irra yelled, tossing her stick into the water like

an oar. Frra did the same, and together they paddled furiously toward the shore.

The ripple grew larger, the fish's sleek body beginning to emerge from beneath the surface. Its enormous mouth opened wide, ready to snap shut on the tiny, floating ants.



With one final burst of effort, Irra and Frra propelled their boat forward until it scraped against the muddy bank. They leapt to safety just as the fish lunged, its jaws closing around nothing but the dried leaf. The boat disappeared into its mouth with a splash.

Irra and Frra lay panting on the shore, barely believing their narrow escape.

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By the time they returned to the anthill, muddy, scratched, and utterly exhausted, the sun was beginning to dip below the horizon. Irra looked at her brother, their adventure still fresh in their minds.

«That,» said Frra, 'was the scariest and greatest thing we've ever done.»

Irra grinned, her antennae twitching with pride. «I guess the adults were right. The pond **is** dangerous. But... we're Ant Warriors now. Nothing can stop us.»

And with that, they trudged back into the safety of their busy, bustling anthill, already dreaming of their next adventure.

The Endless Gray Ribbon

The soft dirt beneath Irra and Frra's tiny, quick feet kicked up small puffs of dust as they scurried through the tall grass. The blades swayed gently in the afternoon breeze, towering above them like an emerald forest. Though the sun warmed their tiny bodies, excitement made their small hearts beat even faster than usual.

«Do you think the monsters are really as big as the moths say?» Irra asked, her antennae twitching nervously as she dodged around a fallen pine needle.

«Maybe,» Frra replied, his tone carrying an air of bravery. «But what if the moths are just telling stories to scare us? Maybe there's no ribbon at all. Maybe the hill isn't even that tall.»

Irra gave him a skeptical look. «Why would the moths lie? They're always up high, so they can see things we can't.»

«True,» Frra admitted. «But maybe they're exaggerating – like the time Uncle Frrun said he fought off a whole line of soldier ants by himself.»

Irra giggled, recalling how their uncle loved to boast. But

as the anthill disappeared further behind them, her excitement mingled with a tinge of unease. «We have to be careful,» she whispered, her voice suddenly softer. «If the monsters are real...»

«We'll be fine,» Frra interrupted, puffing out his chest. «I'm fast, and you're smart. Together, we can do anything.»

The two dashed through the dense undergrowth, weaving around ferns and mushrooms that towered like great domes. They passed clumps of moss that felt like the soft cushions of a throne and crossed a shallow trickle of water, using a bent leaf as a bridge. Finally, the world seemed to open up just a little – less trees, less grass. The ground began to feel harder under their feet, smoother in a strange way. The air smelled different too: a mix of something sharp and oily.

«We're getting close!» Irra exclaimed, feeling her heartbeat quicken.

They scrambled up a slope with dirt packed so tight it didn't crumble under their feet. Their tiny legs burned with effort as they climbed higher and higher. Suddenly, the grass gave way entirely as the siblings reached the crest of the hill. Both ants stopped in unison, stunned into silence.

Before them stretched the *ribbon* – the endless gray road the moths had spoken of. It was massive, far wider and longer than anything they had imagined. It cut neatly through the landscape, stretching straight to the horizon in both directions. The surface was smooth and strangely shiny in some places, pockmarked in others. Grass and trees seemed to respect its boundaries, growing only at its edges.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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