

Dreams

Antonia Ant lay curled in a tight ball, on the hot sharp gravel. trying to pretend that the taunts and jeers from her fellow ants were directed at some other poor ant who had been kicked out of the worker's line.

‘Get up you lazy bludger.’

‘Stop putting on an act and come and do a decent day's work like the rest of us.’

‘Work or go hungry!’ The taunts were relentless; they had been ever since she had limped up to the line and pleaded to become one of them. They had crowded around her, jostling to get a good look at this newcomer, the one who looked different, all because of her gammy leg.

As a young ant she would wait all day in the nursery to hear the stories of the exhausted worker ants as they prepared the winter store. Day in, day out they dragged themselves in single file carrying weight far exceeding their own body mass. The colony numbered thousands and they all played their part, they did it for the collective, working as one for the sake of the whole. They were part of the whole, they belonged. And it's all she dreamt about. She wanted to belong. The time came when it was her turn to join the colony as a working ant. A functioning useful member of the force, an ant with purpose, whose contribution helped make a difference.

But she hadn't taken account of her leg. Well, it was only half a leg, she was missing a whole joint in her right rear leg, which made balancing a load on her back impossible. Older wiser ants had tried to warn her, they could see impending disaster if she insisted on being part of the working army but Antonia was stubborn, she wanted to be just like one of the crew and had turned up at the line to take her place. The boss of the line shook her antennae dismally knowing Antonia just didn't have what it takes. She was kind, and prepared to give her a go, but after an initial trial run where the load kept slipping off which then tripped up all the ants behind her creating absolute chaos the other workers turned. Together they came at her, a seething mass of anger and kicked her to the curb. They abandoned her to the hot sun, bruised and battered. Antonia's heart was breaking, her dreams shattered.

She lay there for the longest of times but finally started to uncurl.

Squinting through blood crusted eyes she noticed something quite strange. The workers line went on for as far as she could see, but it wasn't a straight line. It bent and curved and in some spots deviated wildly off the path adding hundreds and hundreds of metres to the whole column's journey. She dragged herself along ignoring her jeering fellow ants and saw that each deviation was caused by a boulder or branch or lots of plastic bibs and bobs. Why don't they simply move them out of the way she wondered.

Antonia dragged herself up onto a nearby ridge and now seeing the whole picture saw that if the obstacles were pushed to the side, it could save the colony thousands of back breaking steps.

She pondered on this, as she dragged her aching body home. But she felt a twinge of something, excitement, hope maybe. She had noticed something so obvious but not seen by anyone else. Just because she was different didn't mean she had nothing to contribute. She didn't have the brawn, but she had a mighty fine brain. She did have a purpose, she could see the big picture, and that could mean an easier life for the colony. She lay down that night, her mind a whirl, dreaming of the possibilities.

642 words

U3a 25/6/2026