

BOOK ONE

NATU

1. Hello, my name is Natu. I live in a meadow. There are many of us. There are the gatherers and the tunnel-workers. The gatherers travel the meadow daily in search of food for all of us. The tunnel-workers keep our under-ground tunnels free from debris and smooth so that none of us trips over anything. I am still too young to work as a gatherer or a tunnel-worker. I think I want to be a gatherer when I grow up. A tunnel-worker has to stay under-ground all day and works very hard. A gatherer also works very hard, probably harder than a tunnel-worker, but they get to go up top into the sunshine and fresh air. In our meadow, we have all kinds of grasses, wildflowers and clover. It's very pretty and colorful. Of course, there are dangers, too. Once, a wild storm came upon us. Oh my there was lightning and rain and even some hard round things falling from the sky. Everyone stayed in the tunnels, but even they started filling with water! The tunnel-workers had a very bad time getting all of that cleaned up! It took them a very long time. Also, from time to time, deer will enter our little meadow to eat the sweet clover and wildflowers. Oh, deer aren't mean, and if they realized we were there, they would never try to hurt us. But their eyes aren't very good and we are so small, they can't see us. It's a good thing that

they are so big, because we can see them a long way off and get out of their way. Our biggest danger is the birds. All kinds of birds visit our meadow, and they seem to think that we taste good. They are hard to see because they are so fast, so it's difficult to get away from them if they want you. All in all, life in the meadow is good.

2. My best friend is Rinak. Funny name, I know. But in our meadow, children are named with parts of their parents' names. For example, my name Natu, is part of my mother Narini and my father Tuboro. Rinak's parents' names are Rinar and Nakiti. I'm sure they could have come up with a better name than Rinak, but there you go. Rinak gets teased a lot about his silly name by the other children. It makes him sad to hear them laughing at him. One day, he wouldn't turn around when I called to him, so I followed him. He went far away from the tunnel hole and sat down under a beautiful purple clover. When I caught up with him, he was crying. He was very ashamed that I saw that, but I just sat down and put my arm around him and asked what was wrong. He told me he's so tired of the children laughing at him because of his name. Didn't they see that he was real like them? An ant just like them? Ate, slept, played just like them? I didn't know what to say to him, so I just started singing low to hopefully calm him down. It was a favorite song of his, so he started singing along with me. I suddenly realized that he had a wonderful voice, a special voice! We ran back to the tunnels to show our parents his beautiful voice. They were amazed and started telling their friends all about how special Rinak is. Oh, everyone got into such a tiff. The other ants kept saying that there was nothing special

about Rinak, and that our parents were only trying to make us feel good. It got so loud in the tunnel that you could barely think! I told him to sing, sing as loud and as beautiful as he could, and don't stop. Just keep going. He was scared and shy, but everyone was so angry, and he was the only one that could stop the arguing! So he sang. Shyly at first, but as people around us stopped yelling to listen, he grew brave and sang louder. Ants farther and farther away stopped yelling to listen to this brave little ant with the funny name. Until all that was heard throughout the tunnels was the sound of Rinak singing. Suddenly, a loud cheer went up all around us, and the other children gathered round us. They praised Rinak and apologized for all of the hurt they had caused him. From now on, Rinak would be known all through the tunnels as the ant with the voice of an angel!

3. My favorite ant in all the tunnels is Uncle Rotano. He is very old, and everyone calls him Uncle. Uncle Rotano was born without one of his legs. He has to use small twigs to help him walk. So sad, I know, but Uncle Rotano doesn't care at all, and he always makes a game of finding new twigs when old ones break. He'll send the children out to bring them back to the tunnels, and the one with the best twigs gets a story made up about him. Of course, the tunnel-workers don't like having to take the bad ones away, but they grin about it because they all love Uncle Rotano. He doesn't have to be a tunnel-worker, and is too slow to be a gatherer, so he sits around all day, sometimes in the tunnels, sometimes up top, making up stories for the children. He claims that most are real and happened a long,

long time ago, but we have to wonder. Some of them are very exciting, with dragons and horses, and ladies in golden carriages crossing our meadow. Some are scary, about dark moonless nights when something strange would wander into the meadow and all of the ants would huddle together, shaking, in the tunnels. It's sometimes hard to sleep after one of his scary stories. Another story was about ghosts!!! Oh my. That one had all the parents mad because no one got sleep that night. Uncle Rotano doesn't do stories about ghosts anymore. Every time he tries, the children scream and run to their tunnel and the parents have to remind him about the Sleepless Night. He kind of laughs about it to himself, but he understands that maybe the children were too young for that kind of story. My favorite story is about The Great War. Oh, Uncle Rotano says that happened so long ago, it was before he was even born! Some deer wandered into the meadow to enjoy our sweet clover. Some were short with white spots on them. Others were medium sized and had such soft lovely eyes. But there were a few that were very large, and had huge trees growing out of their heads! The ants were keeping an eye on the deer, so that they could get out of the way if the deer got too close. Suddenly there were strange noises off to one side, and two of the huge animals with trees on their heads started snorting, and jumping and ramming their trees into each other!!!! It was terrifying, I'm sure. They tore up the ground so much that all the ants had to run to tunnel-holes. Only a few of the braver ants stayed by the tunnel-holes to watch this ferocious war and tell the story. Uncle Rotano says they never did figure out which deer won, or what it was about.

4. Rinak and Natu decided one day to go out and play gatherer. They were young, but had learned that in mid-day with a cloudy sky, the deer wouldn't come to eat the sweet clover yet. They also knew that the morning's rain would leave small puddles for them to drink from. They figured being gatherers, there would be food for them along the way. They started walking. They thought that it didn't matter which direction because the meadow was large and their tunnel-hole was near the very middle, so they could walk for a long time in any direction they decided to go. Oh, how they ended up wishing they had learned a bit more before they left, as they went on a wild adventure! The two little ants walked for quite a ways, chatting and running and jumping and playing all over the clover. My, what fun they were having! Then they came upon a tunnel-hole. But what a huge tunnel-hole it was! It was way WAY WAY bigger than any tunnel-hole they had seen before. They looked around and around it. It was just one hole, not many put together. They argued about whether they should venture down the hole. Rinak refused to go. Of course, he was shy and afraid of his own shadow. And that's what Natu told him! Natu decided that he was going down, with or without Rinak. Well, Rinak was too afraid to stay up top by himself, so he followed Natu. Down, down, down they went. It was still large, and they noticed there weren't countless tunnels going off in all directions, like in their ant-tunnels. Finally, the large tunnel opened up into a HUGE cave. They couldn't believe it. What could live down here, they wondered. It's too big for ants, but not big enough for deer. They realized that the monster whatever it was might come home and

they better get out of there! They ran, and ran, and ran right into a big, furry whozits with really big ears. The whozit didn't even notice them and went on by. As it passed them, they saw that it had the funniest tail they had ever seen. It was furry, looked like a deer tail, but was just a ball of fur. They had no idea what this creature was, so they kept running until they ran out of the huge tunnel-hole. But they found that they had been exploring too long. The earth-roof was getting darker and they could barely see. Not only that, they didn't know which way to go to get home! They were so scared, they didn't know what to do. They started calling for their parents, and were crying too. They were yelling and crying so loudly, they didn't hear the creature come up from the cave and peep out of the tunnel-hole. But when it spoke, its voice was soft, kind and gentle. It had such a lovely voice that the two little ant friends weren't even scared of the large creature. They told it that they were lost and couldn't get home, and it was dark, and they didn't know which way to go, and.... The creature looked at them with gentle brown eyes and told them that it couldn't leave its warren – that's what it called the tunnel-hole and cave – in the dark, but it knew what to do to help them. It looked up at the earth-roof, closed its eyes, and hummed. From nowhere a medium deer came over and asked if there was a problem it could help with. The creature told the deer that the two little ants were lost and couldn't find their way home in the dark. The deer smiled and put her nose to the ground, and told the two lost friends to climb upon its head, and she would carry them back to their tunnel-hole. They were very tired, and curled up on the deer's head while she walked them to their home. After a little while, they heard hundreds of voices

calling their names! Their parents, their friends, Uncle Rotano even! They were so glad to be home and thanked the deer soooooo much. Then they remembered that they hadn't ever thanked the strange creature for her help. The deer told them that she would tell the rabbit that they made it home safe. The rabbit would understand that the little ants and all of the ant-world would be happy, and that's all the thanks that the rabbit needs.

5, Natu and Rinak slept all night and part of the next day after their adventure at the rabbit warren, and being carried home on the head of a deer. Uncle Rotano gathered all the young ants around, and then allowed Natu and Rinak tell of their wondrous and brave adventure. When they told of the huge tunnel-hole and the large cave, the littlest ants were scared. But Natu and Rinak acted like they hadn't been scared at all, even when the strange creature made its way down the tunnel to the cave. Uncle Rotano declared that this story would go into the history books. It was a true first encounter with a rabbit! Not to mention how nice the deer was to give them a ride home. You see, even though the ants knew of these creatures in the meadow, they stayed away from them. And they had NEVER talked to a rabbit before. They didn't really know very much about rabbits. Natu and Rinak declared that this rabbit was very sweet and kind, gentle and concerned. If the rabbit didn't live so far away, they would like to go visit, and get to know it better, but they didn't even know where the warren was. It seems that only the deer could tell them that, and ants didn't much socialize with creatures larger than they are. They didn't even know how to find the deer in order to ask

her. Natu and Rinak were sad about this, as they really wanted to make friends with the deer and rabbit that had saved them.

6. Now that Rinak and Natu had a taste of adventure, they decided to stay close to the tunnel-holes if they went up top. They told their story to whoever would listen, and they were looked upon as brave young lads, but they both knew in their heart of hearts how scared they had been. They knew the rabbit would not have heard them if they hadn't been crying so loudly. They both secretly agreed that they would not travel far from the tunnel-holes until they were a bit older, and had learned more about the ways of the meadow. They wondered how many more creatures lived there. What kind of strange homes did they have? Oh, what mighty adventures they could have! But not until they were old enough to understand a bit more, like how to find your way home, and how to take care of yourself if you find yourself far from home in the dark time.

Their parents understood that the boys had been afraid, and were just pretending when the other ants thought them to be brave. The boys would sleep in their family tunnel-room with their parents, and burrow way down, and have bad dreams. So Natu and Rinak's fathers decided to have a talk with the boys. They took Natu and Rinak up top one day when it was sunny and warm. The gatherers were out getting food for everyone. The bees buzzed around the clover, collecting the delicate nectar which would help build their hives and feed their families. Ant children were playing hide and seek around the stems of the grass. It was a grand day. The boys

and their fathers walked a little way from the tunnel-holes, just far enough so that the playing, the buzzing and the gathering didn't bother them. The fathers started their talk by commenting on the boys' adventure, and asked them some questions about it. When they got to the part about the boys finding themselves outside of the warren in the dark, the boys didn't want to talk about it. The dads understood why, without even being told. Parents are like that sometimes! So the dads told their little adventurers this: You don't have to pretend with us, we understand. If we had just encountered a huge tunnel-hole with a cave at the end, scrambled past a creature we've never seen before and couldn't find our way home, we'd have been scared, too. What you boys did was foolish, and we're sure you learned a lesson from it, but how it all happened is just amazing and you have a right to be very proud of your adventure. Not many ants get their stories into the history books, and actually speaking with a deer and a rabbit, and having them save your lives that night is just unheard of! No ant has EVER done anything like that before. You have a right to tell your story with pride. Then the fathers both gave the boys a hug, and started walking back to the tunnel-holes, letting the boys think in silence about what the dads had said. When Natu asked his father if he was sure about what he had said, his father assured him that it was true. Natu and Rinak didn't have any bad dreams after that, and even when telling their story, they would admit they were scared. It seemed to make the other ants appreciate more what these young lads had gone through. And they still called the boys heroes!

7. Natu and Rinak learned a lot from their fathers that day. They learned that you don't have to be big and brave to do something special. They learned that it's alright to admit when you're scared. They also learned that sometimes, parents actually do know what you're going through without being told. And that your parents care about you. Natu and Rinak wanted to do something special for their parents, for helping the boys understand what had happened to them. They thought and thought, and finally decided to just have a little party, to thank them. All morning long, they cleaned their tunnel-rooms when their moms weren't looking. They kind of picked up stuff and put it away when the moms were out of the room. They offered to sweep the tunnel-floors to their tunnel-rooms. The moms, of course, knew something was going on, but didn't know what. They were just happy to have some help with their everyday chores! After lunch, the boys went up top. They were especially going to look for clover that the bees hadn't gotten the nectar from yet. The bees didn't mind if the ants ate some of it once in a while, so the boys weren't afraid to search. But they were afraid to search too far from the tunnel-holes, and they always made sure that they had at least one of the gatherers in sight in case they needed help. They looked and looked, but all of the nectar had been taken! They finally decided to ask a gatherer for his advice, and maybe some help from someone who knew where to look. The first gatherer sadly shook his head and said that he hadn't seen any nectar for a while. The next gatherer they encountered said the same thing. What was going on? Why were the bees taking all of the nectar and not leaving any for the ants? What would they use for party drinks and to make

sweet treats if they didn't find any nectar? If the gatherers couldn't find it, then how could the young ones? When the boys went down to the tunnels, they were so sad. They really wanted to thank their parents, but now they couldn't have a party. What could they do? It was too late to plan anything else. It was starting to get dark, and their moms were putting their meals together. The boys moped about, and sighed, so upset that they couldn't thank their parents. At the meal table, the fathers got tired of the boys moping around and whining and made them tell what was wrong. By the time the boys finished their story about the ruined thank you party, they had tears in their eyes. The parents knew that the boys felt bad, so they told the boys that they had already been thanked. Natu and Rinak wondered what their parents were talking about. They had never said thank you to them for understanding about their adventure. Then the fathers told them: We have been thanked by every ant, child and adult, along with the elders! We have been told that only by raising our sons right did they have the nerve to even try their adventure. Our hearts have swelled with pride for you. Then the mothers told them: Do you remember what you did all morning? You made it so that I didn't have to work so hard today. You did that in preparation for a thank you party. What you don't realize is that by helping us, you gave us a little time for ourselves this afternoon, time that we normally do not have. That is the best thank you that we can imagine! They all hugged and patted the boys on the back, while they all wished they had some nectar to toast with!

8. So, why wasn't there any nectar? The ants would try to get the bees to tell them, but the bees were too busy collecting what they could find, that they didn't have time to talk to the ants. After a while, the bees were going to the farthest areas of the meadow to collect nectar, and didn't even fly close to the ant colony. The elders of the ants finally called a meeting. They asked for two volunteers to visit the beehive and find out what was going on with the nectar. Emboldened by their sons' adventure, both Tuboro and Nakiti volunteered. The boys wanted to go with them so badly, but the fathers said it could be dangerous, and they would be gone overnight, and that the boys would have to stay in the tunnels with their mothers. Soon came the day that the fathers had to leave. They each carried food and water with them, along with tents made from clover flower petals. All that they knew of the beehive is that it was in a certain direction, they really did not know how far they would have to travel or how long they would be gone, or what they would find. They traveled for a long time, never running into any bees all day! They pitched their tents that night, wondering what they would find tomorrow. Then, when the earth-roof was as dark as could be, and the wind was still and no soul was awake, came a crashing, a thrashing, a roar and trembling ground. Suddenly, it was over, as if nothing had happened. The fathers were terrified!!! They decided it might be safer for them to build a little tunnel-hole and sleep in there. But they didn't sleep a wink the rest of the night.

9. As soon as the earth-light started rising in the sky, Tuboro and Nakiti started out again, but they didn't have far to go. They came

upon a tree, with bees flying all around, and a mess of something on the ground that almost smelled like nectar. The bees were moaning and crying and trying to figure out what to do. The mess on the ground was their hive! Their home! The third one they had built this summer because of the roaring thing. They told the ants that they were simply running out of nectar in the meadow and might have to move to another meadow soon. The ants didn't like that at all. The bees were good neighbors that they didn't want to see leave because of a bully. They asked the bees what the roaring thing was and why it destroyed their homes. It destroys their homes because it loves honey, they said. They don't think that the roaring thing, they called it a bear, understands that it is actually a home it destroys, it just wants the honey. Well then, said the ant fathers, all we have to do is explain it to the bear. Would you be willing to share some of your honey with him? The bees said of course, as long as he left their home alone! The bees pointed to the direction the bear comes from, and the ants started out again. The bees really hadn't needed to show them the direction, because the size of the bear had made a path in the meadow. They realized after a while that they were getting close to a lot of trees all around. Large leafy trees and bushes and sticks and rocks, and.... They had never seen anything like it! It was starting to get dark, so they built a tunnel-hole, climbed in and covered themselves with their sweet scented clover flower petal tents. They slept all night, with no scary sounds, or shaking of the ground. The bees told them it would be ok tonight, because the bear only comes when the hive has been repaired and is getting full of honey.

In the bright, warm morning, Tuboro and Nakiti, seeing all of the large trees around them and over their heads, hesitatingly started off on the bear's path. This path was taking them deeper and deeper into the trees and bushes and they just plain didn't like this. It was unfamiliar territory, not as flat and pretty as their meadow. It was actually kind of dark and scary. But they bravely made their way along the bear path until they came to a huge tree. This tree was bigger than anything they had ever seen! It was even bigger than the large deer with the trees on their heads, MUCH bigger. They decided to walk around it to see what they could see. It was going to be dark soon, so they thought they would find a place to build their tunnel-hole near this tree. As big as it was, it made them feel safe. As they walked around the large tree, they saw many plants they'd never ever seen before, even some flowers that were not in their meadow. At the ground, the tree was so big, they thought it might take a whole day to walk around it, but wait! There was a big hole in the tree on this side. It was a deep hole, and very dark, and smelled really bad. Maybe this tree wasn't so safe after all. They looked around to find a place to build their tunnel-hole, walking back to the other side of the tree with the flowers, when they heard the snorting and the crashing and the roaring! The bear was here! There was no time to build a tunnel-hole! Where could they hide???

10. They looked around and around them, then looked up at the tree. There, on the sides of the tree, they thought they saw bark. They didn't know for sure because they had only heard about it, and had

never met it before. But they remembered that they could crawl under bark and the bark would shield them. So they scampered up the side of the tree and slid in under a large piece of bark that could fit both of them. The crashing and snorting had continued, and gotten louder! Suddenly the crashing stopped, there was no roaring anymore, and they just heard the heavy breathing of the beast. Then the tree trembled and quivered. Some leaves floated down from over top of the ants. They had to hold on to each other to keep from slipping out from behind the bark. Fortunately it didn't last long, and when it seemed to be over, they heard a heavy sigh from inside the tree! Oh, Tuboro and Nakiti were scared. Had they really come upon a tree that breathed??? Could they talk to it? They tried, but when the tree didn't answer, they thought that perhaps it was so big and they were so small that the tree couldn't hear them. Then they reasoned that perhaps the large hole they found on the other side of the tree was its mouth, if it were alive. So, even in the dark, staying close to the tree, they walked to the other side. What do you think they found in the tree's mouth??? The bear!!!!!!! All curled up and snoring away. They realized it was asleep and they couldn't possibly make enough noise to wake it up, so they wandered into the hole and looked around. They had never seen a bear before, and certainly not in its home, so they were very curious. Anyway, they had a duty to the any colony to report anything unusual that they could. They realized quickly that the bad smell was the bear, so they tied clover flower petals around their noses and mouths so they could breathe better inside the bear-hole. The bear was large and hairy. They didn't call it fur, because it wasn't soft like a rabbit's or a deer's fur is.

When they saw how large the bear's claws were, though, they remembered that they are not supposed to hide behind bark because the bear can easily take it off the tree with those long claws and eat them. Oh, and the teeth! My, my. No wonder the bear wasn't with a family. It seemed to be all alone, and no wonder, the way it smelled. But if this was the bear that destroyed the bees' hives lately, they had to think of a way to stop it.

11. As the bear snored softly in its tree-hole next to the ants, they decided to try an experiment. Uncle Rotano had told them a story once about talking to someone when they are asleep and making them do things they normally wouldn't. So Tuboro and Nakiti each climbed by a stubby ear of the bear, and kept saying over and over, no more honey. No more honey. No more honey. After a while, they both fell asleep where they were! Right there on the bear's head!!! As morning dawned, the bear awoke and left the tree-hole. He was agitated. All night long he had dreamed that there was never going to be anymore honey. Well, he had to stop that right now! He had to show the bees who's boss around here and make them continue to make his honey! Tuboro and Nakiti were still asleep, enjoying the swaying movement of their beds, dreaming of clover and wildflowers, and bright days with not a care in the world. Slowly they awoke, stretched and yawned and opened their eyes and... SCREAMED!!!! They both tried to run to the other ear, and nearly ran into each other on the top of the bear's head. The bear was snorting and roaring and crashing through the trees and brush. He seemed to be very agitated and he also seemed to be headed to

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