

Story Title: Dizzybees' honey

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Age: 14 years

“No, Ari.” Auntie Nara’s voice was firm as she pushed her chair back from the table and stood.

“All it takes is you getting dizzy and hitting your head for you to get seriously hurt. I’ll go get the dizzybees’ honey from Garth. Dwane, you stay with her.”

Ari’s cousin gave a clipped nod.

“But Auntie—“ Ari stood. She swayed. “This is my chance at ...” Her head spun, and she clutched the back of her chair. Auntie Nara guided her back down. Ari looked back up defiantly. “... at an adventure.” She’d read all about them: kids who’d saved their friends, gotten magic keys, even some who’d found their long-lost parents.

“Absolutely not. Garth isn’t exactly friendly with strangers, but he knows me. And you won’t be able to make it three steps past the door.” Auntie Nara pulled on her sturdy leather boots. “Keep that bandage on your dizzybee sting, Ari. Dwane, make sure she doesn’t do anything rash. If all goes well, I should be back in half an hour.”

Ari checked the clock and sighed. She glanced at Dwane.

He stared back. “No.”

Shaking her head, Ari fiddled with the sky blue tablecloth. “Don’t you think Auntie Nara might have gotten lost or hurt? I mean, I don’t see how she could get lost on that dirt path leading straight to the big house with the dizzybee hive, but it’s been a full hour.”

Dwane’s head shake was barely distinguishable. “My mum knows what she’s doing.”

Muttering, Dwane stumped down the dirt pathway. Ari glanced down at him. “I don’t see why you’re so grumpy, Dwane. We’re going on an adventure! Who knows, maybe we’ll meet my—“ she halted. The large white house in the distance blurred as she swayed and planted her feet more firmly.

Dwane grabbed her arm. “Don’t fall.”

After a moment, Ari nodded and started walking again. “My parents or something— although I don’t even know their names. I wonder if Mother is like Auntie Nara. I mean, I sort of remember, but not that much. I think I’m actually kind of glad that the dizzybee stung me.” She gingerly touched her bandaged ring finger. “Although it does hurt.” She looked down at Dwane, whose hand on her forearm was level with his head. “You don’t have to do that, you know. I’m okay now.”

Dwane set his jaw resolutely.

Ari shook her head and smiled.

When they finally got to the large white house, Ari walked right around to the left side. Dwane pulled her back when she reached for the lock on the tall, metal-barred gate. “What are ye doin’?”

Ari looked through the black metal bars at the small stands of trees and butterflies flitting dreamily over bushes with colorful blooms. “I don’t know.” She narrowed her eyes. “I just feel like it’s in here. It’s odd, this place looks sort of familiar...” Her vision dimmed and she clutched a bar on the gate. Dwane’s grip on her arm tightened. The wave of dizziness passed, but instead of releasing her hold on the gate, Ari leaned in closer. “Oh no.”

“What?” Then Dwane’s face paled. “Mum?”

Two sturdy leather boots peeked past the corner of the house, toes up. The rest of whoever wore them was out of their sight.

Ari grabbed the silver combination lock and spun the four numbered rings. 5694. The gate swung open and she sprinted around the corner of the house, dragging Dwane with her. Ari had a strange sense of déjà vu as she caught sight of Auntie Nara, lying facedown in the grass.

She put a hand to the side of her head and glanced around. Her eyes landed on a dark wooden bench nearby. Her forehead wrinkled. Her vision blurred, and she seemed to see two people sitting there.

A grunt from below brought her back to the present. She knelt to help Dwane roll Auntie Nara onto her back, trying to ignore another swell of vertigo. Auntie Nara groaned and squinted in the sunlight.

“Mum, what happened?” Dwane whispered hoarsely.

“The dizzybees ...” Auntie Nara winced.

Ari inhaled sharply. Four purple bumps dotted her aunt’s upper arm. “Can you stand?”

Dwane’s mother shook her head and grimaced. “I’ll be too dizzy. The honey ...” Her eyelids fluttered and slid slowly shut.

Panicked, Ari grabbed Auntie Nara’s wrist. Her shoulders sagged in relief. “She’s alive.”

“Still breathing,” Dwane pointed out.

“Oh, of course.... Dwane, we need to find that honey. I’ll look over on that side.” She pointed to the right, where more flowers and vines grew. Ari thought she spotted several tomatoes peeking through the stems. “You can look around here.”

Dwane nodded briskly, and Ari hurried off around a row of pavonia bushes. For a couple minutes, she peered up into tree branches and around bushes, not sure where a dizzybees’ nest might be. Then suddenly, rounding a large cluster of oaks, she saw a gate in the fence. It was half open. Inside, the garden looked much the same. Planters of flowers bordered peach trees, and bees buzzed in between—

Bees? Ari flung the gate wider and slipped inside. It closed behind her with a loud clang. “Dwane, come see! I think these are the dizzybees.” Ari saw a larger swarm past the branches of

the tree in front of her and hastened toward it. The bees were surrounding a golden orb the size of her head in a tree beyond the wooden bench in front of her.

There was a man sitting on the bench.

He stood and turned, his green eyes locking on her as he skirted the bench. Ari tried to place where she'd seen him before. Had she seen him before? Carved into the wooden seat were the names "Garth + Keri," with a smaller word underneath that she couldn't read. In his left hand was a curious flattened globe.

"Who are you?" The man demanded, running a hand through his shaggy gray hair. "What are you doing in my garden?"

"Ari!" Dwane croaked, running up to the fence. "Ye'll get stung!"

"Oh, of course." She backed away from the hive. "Thank you. How silly of me."

Dwane rattled the gate. "How'd ye open this?"

"It—it was open when I went in. I don't know how to unlock it!"

Dwane cracked his knuckles. "Okay. Don't worry."

Ari turned back to the man. "Mister, my aunt and I got stung by some of your dizzybees. We were wondering if you could give us some honey."

The man glared at her. "No." His face softened at her startled look, and he repeated, more gently, "No. No, no ... it's all for Keri. For *her* stings."

Before Ari could reply, a soft thump sounded behind her, and she turned to see Dwane rise from a crouch on her side of the fence. Her mouth dropped open. "Did you just climb that?"

Dwane dodged around trees and bushes toward them, ducked under the man's outstretched arm and shimmied up the tree behind him. As he peered into the honeybees' hive, the bees buzzed angrily around him.

"But Dwane," protested Ari, "they'll sting you!"

Dwane released the tree branch and dropped lightly to the ground. He looked at Ari, wringing his hands. “There’s no honey left.”

Ari stepped forward. “Please—Mister Garth, right? Where’s the honey?” She staggered a little as another swell of dizziness swept over her. “Please.”

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Dwane dart towards the bench where Garth had been sitting and swipe a small glass bottle from it. He threw it at her, and she caught it. A thick, golden liquid filled it halfway.

“Hand that back.” Garth’s gaze was fixed on the bottle in her hands. He took a couple steps toward Ari, and she backed away. “There are only seven drops left!”

Dwane started towards Ari but staggered, and stumbled to his knees beside the bench. Ari hurried forward and crouched by her friend, bottle clutched in one hand. A round purple bump had appeared on his forehead. She saw another swell before her eyes on his cheek. “Oh, I told you you’d get stung!”

“The dizzybees never stung me,” Garth said, staring at Dwane’s stings. “But they made Keri very dizzy. Someone told her sister ...” he paused. “her sister, Nara.”

Ari’s mind whirled. “Keri ... Nara?”

“She wanted me to give Keri the honey, but there was only just enough to keep the dizzybees alive.” He spread his hands. “If I gave it all to Keri, they would die, and with them, the last of their sweet-smelling wax.”

Ari stared at Garth with sudden comprehension. “That was my mother. You killed her!”

Garth shook his head, eyes wide. “I was going to take the honey in a few months, when the dizzybees had extra! But ... Keri collapsed one time in the garden.” He gestured vaguely in the direction of Auntie Nara. “She hit her head.” His face twisted. “Then Nara took our young daughter away, away from the bees—and from me.”

Ari exchanged a stunned look with Dwane.

Garth held up the squat sphere in his hands. “I just got this time travel clock. I’ll save Keri this time.” He stepped forward, breathless. “I just need the honey.”

Dwane choked out, “Can’t ye get the honey from back then?”

Ari’s father shook his head. “It doesn’t work like that. Give me the bottle.”

If she gave the honey to him, Ari would have a family. She would eat with them and walk with them and talk with them....

But she already did those things. With Auntie Nara and Dwane.

Her cousin was curled up on the ground. Her father was mad with guilt and grief. Her aunt was unconscious in the garden beyond. “Father—“ The word sounded so foreign on her tongue. “I bet Mother was wonderful.” She wavered, not only from the dizzybee sting. “But she’s already gone. And—and I already have a family.” She unscrewed the cap on the glass bottle and knelt next to Dwane. He took the bottle and tilted his head back, swallowing two thick drops of dizzybee honey. He stood unsteadily.

Ari’s father roared. He dropped the clock and made to attack Dwane, but Ari jumped between them.

“Stop! Hurry, Dwane!”

Garth threw her aside, and Ari turned to see Dwane scamper across the yard and scale up the fence, bottle still in one hand. Her father raced to the gate with impressive speed, fiddling with the lock for a second before flinging it wide and disappearing into the garden beyond.

Ari followed him. She staggered around a stand of trees towards Garth’s yells, fighting waves of dizziness. Her friend and her father grappled near a flower bush. It made Ari sicker than she already was.

Seeing her, Dwane threw the bottle at her feet. “I got ‘im!”

Ari hurriedly gulped a drop of honey, then ran to Auntie Nara's side. When her aunt could stand, Ari glanced back at Dwane and gasped. Garth had him in a headlock, and Dwane's face was turning red.

Auntie Nara plucked the empty bottle from her niece's hand and hurled it. It spun four times and struck Garth two inches above his ear. Dwane twisted out of his grasp immediately, and Ari's father fell backwards with a thump, unconscious.

Back at the kitchen table, Ari stared at her lap.

Auntie Nara scooted her chair closer. "I wish you didn't have to discover your parents' story like that. I meant to tell you when you were older."

Dwane grabbed Ari's hand. "Sorry ye can't be with yer real family."

Ari's smile was wobbly as she fingered the sky blue cloth on the table she'd eaten at since she was five. "But Dwane, *you*—you and Auntie Nara—you two are my family."