

Priyanka Gupta

Dipper

8th Grade

1,945 words

It was raining outside.

April sat in the corner of a small library, the one that sat just a few blocks from her house. It was a Sunday afternoon, and clusters of purple clouds drizzled the neighborhood with hot rain. April sighed to herself, leaning her head against an adjacent window. She picked up a book that was sitting on the table in front of her and pried it open, trying to force herself to read the lines.

Her mind wandered anyway, and she eyed the droplets of rain splattering the window. Each one seemed to be a different shade of purple. Plum, royal, bruised. A trickle of lightning streaked through the sky, and April heard thunder break the steady patter of water.

Dipper *hated* rain.

“Dipper, I don’t think we should be out this far.” April’s stringy brown hair was tied in pigtails and her fists clenched as she followed her brother deeper into the woods. His eyebrows were scrunched together, and he blew a dark lock of hair out of his face as the pair climbed over a fallen tree trunk. “It’ll be dark soon,” she reminded him.

“Don’t worry,” he responded. “I think we’re almost there.” He grabbed her hand and quickened his pace before she could protest and drag him back. He had been eager to show his sister a certain clearing in the forest, but he hadn’t told her what lied in the space. She would never admit it to him, but she was actually intrigued by this little adventure.

A few minutes later, however, Dipper had made no progress whatsoever. April bit her lip and planted her feet into the ground, refusing to take another step. “Dipper. We’re lost.”

“We are not lost—“

“We’re lost.”

Dipper groaned in frustration. “I’m sorry. I just wanted to show you...the...show you the...” he trailed off as a loud growl cut through the forest. The siblings stood frozen, not daring to breathe. Moments later, a brown and black lump dragged itself in front of them. Its eyes were dark and fierce, and its yellowed teeth

were razor sharp. The only things keeping the two kids from running and screaming were the collar around the dog's neck and the rusted nail in its leg.

"It's not feral," Dipper said slowly. He let go of April's hand and slowly advanced towards the creature. Its growls only got louder.

"Dipper..." April warned. He paid no attention, instead letting his trembling hand rest on the dog's head. The growls turned to pained whimpers. The dog toppled to the ground.

Thunder rattled in the sky, and the lights of the library flickered. There were few others in the building besides April herself. She put the book she was holding back on the table, instead deciding to fold her hands together, tightly.

"I hate rain." Dipper was older. His hair was thicker, his jawline sharper, his voice scratchier. He was perched on the kitchen windowsill and was eyeing the rain with what looked like reverence. "All it does is wash things away."

"It lets things get a fresh start," Older April reminded him, hand drying a dish in the sink. "It gives things a new place to grow."

He turned towards her, and lightning flashed as he opened his mouth. "The only good thing about rain is that it eventually ends. The stars will always come back out, and even brighter than they were before."

Dipper's obsession with the heavens was what earned him his nickname. After school each day, he would ditch his friends, ditch his books, and drag April with him into the forest, in pursuit of his perfect clearing. He could never seem to find it with her around, though he swore he had found it by himself in the past. Luckily, he had been able to share his dream with her one fateful night, when the two were in their teens.

April closed her eyes. Thunder boomed in the distance.

"I told you, you tortoise!" Dipper's grin lit up his whole face as he collapsed on top of a hill. It was located at the edge of the forest; in front of them, bright green grass stretched on for miles, illuminated by the slowly setting sun. The sky stretched on for miles, the horizon a colorful blur.

When the stars revealed themselves, so did the real Dipper. Not the Dipper that tried to impress his friends with flashy clothes, or even the Dipper that cried after hearing his parents' lectures. No. When the stars came out, Dipper was mesmerized, and he spent the night telling April the stories of constellations. When the two finally sneaked back home, their parents reprimanded Dipper like never before, blaming him for putting April in danger at night. Dipper had deflated after that—April never saw him go back to the clearing.

He said it wasn't her fault. Sometimes it felt like it.

Thunder rattled the library.

The lights blinked out.

When Dipper died, April thought the whole universe felt it. Their town had begun to flood from what felt like a never-ending thunderstorm. Water and mud rushed through the streets, and April's family had been stranded on top of their car.

Before Dipper was swept away from them, when the rain had been just a drizzle, he had smiled. Laughed. Told April how his fear of rain was childish. How it always ended, how he would always see the stars again.

At his funeral, April could barely look at his face. She was shaking uncontrollably. Sweat poured down her body, and it felt like rain. His dead face was solemn; his eyes would never gaze at the heavens.

She prayed that his spirit could be free in the night sky.

"Sorry, everyone!" A voice rang through the library, and with a whir from the backup generator, the lights came back on. April grimaced. She braced herself against the table and pushed herself to her feet. What a waste of time. She forced herself to put one foot in front of the other past rows of bookshelves, towards the exit, head pointed down. This locomotive system was working out quite well, at least until she bumped into someone else, hard. With a yelp, she fell to the ground.

"Watch it!" She warned the figure. Looking up, she saw a boy, probably a few years younger than her, staring down with large brown eyes. His skin was dark and his head sprouted no hair, his teeth crooked as the books on the adjacent shelves. He offered a hand to help her up.

“Sorry, miss.” With a glare, she accepted his hand and he pulled her up. Then he frowned. “Miss, are you crying?”

“No.”

“Your face is wet.”

“The rain.”

“You didn’t fall that hard.” He followed her as she attempted to walk away from him. “May I ask, why are you crying?”

“I…” she debated over what to tell him. She realized she appreciated the fact that he asked what was wrong rather than whether she was okay, and decided to answer truthfully. “I was thinking of someone. Also, I hate rain.”

“What?! I love rain!” The boy looked bewildered. “Why do you hate it?”

“I like stars better, that’s all. They…remind me of someone. What’s it to you?”

“Miss…you shouldn’t hate anything. And especially not the rain. It’ll end eventually. You’ll see your stars again, and they’ll be even brighter than before.”

April stared at him.

He stared back. Then, “Miss? What stars are you so afraid of not seeing?”

She sighed, leading him to a table near the bookshelves. After placing herself across from him, she took a deep breath. “You heard the story of the Big and Little Dippers?”

“No, miss.”

April closed her eyes. “Zeus, King of Gods, fell in love with beautiful Princess Callisto of Arcadia. Callisto ended up giving birth to their son, Arcas. One problem, though. Zeus was already married to Hera, Queen of Gods, and in a fit of jealousy, she turned Callisto into a bear.”

“Arcas grew up without a mother, and one day when he was grown, he ran into Callisto.” Dipper’s eyes were glued to the stars, and April’s eyelids were fluttering shut.

“Callisto was a bear at this point. This was an intense moment for the two, as this was the time they had finally met. Arcas was set to kill the bear, though—“

“Miss, his own mother?”

“Yes,” April felt a tear slip down her cheek. “His own mother. To avoid a tragedy, Zeus turned the two of them into constellations. Callisto was the Big Dipper, and Arcas was the Little Dipper. They finally...” she choked, staring into the young boy’s eyes. “They were finally reunited.”

“You’re, like, the only person that even likes stars.” April yawned.

Dipper laughed. “That’s not true. There are so many others.” He gazed at the star-speckled sky. “So many others. Just like me.”

“Miss.”

“Yeah?”

“Tell me more.”