

Years 5 & 6

1st Place: Andrea Elizabeth Renju

Year 6, Aspiri Primary School

### Mourning Ripple

The pouring rain obscured her vision as people to her left and right were evacuating the now flooded town. She felt the urgency to leave with them, yet she couldn't bring herself to do so. She had something far more important to take care of. Her drenched, brown hair clung to her face as she tirelessly searched for her sister amid the chaos.

"Dakota!" she cried, feeling utterly helpless. "Dakota!"

The blur of a small girl struggling aimlessly in the strong current came to her sight . . . her sister.

An older woman yanked her arm.

"Nadika, we have to go!" she ordered.

"But Mum, Dakota!"

"It's too late!"

The older woman's face was full of regret as she dragged her last daughter away. Dakota seemed to wash down the river like a paper boat, her ebony hair was submerged under the water, but this time, she didn't come back up.

Chest heaving, Nadika woke up in a cold sweat. She had been having the same nightmare about that forbidden day ever since it had happened. Wincing as golden rays of sunlight hit her face, she noticed how the house was eerily quiet, not a normal thing as it was like a zoo, even with only two people. Taking careful steps down, she made her way to the kitchen, where her mother was waiting for her.

"Nadika, I need to tell you something," her mother spoke in a slow voice.

"Hm? And what is that?"

Curiosity piqued her interest. As if on cue, a small girl, maybe 7-8, came in and stood next to her mother, clutching the purple dress with both hands.

"Who's that?" Nadika questioned, with her dark gaze on the girl.

"She's your new sister, Dahlia, I adopted her."

The realization set in, that dark hair, amber eyes, round cheeks, everything. Nadika's body felt as if it were on fire. She clenched her fists tightly and gritted her teeth.

"You're trying to replace her. YOU'RE TRYING TO REPLACE DAKOTA!"

Fire seemed to light her eyes. Her mother, out of all people, was the one to do this?

"Honey, no, I'm not trying to..." her mother looked at her with pleading eyes.

Nadika's eyes blazed with unbridled anger as she cut her mother off mid-sentence.

"YOU OUT OF ALL PEOPLE!" Her voice shook with emotion.

"No matter what happens, I will never, EVER, think of that – that . . ."

Her words trailed off, overwhelmed by the turmoil of emotions.

"REPLACEMENT AS MY SISTER!" With that, she spun on her heel and stormed out of the kitchen, leaving her mother and a terrified girl in her wake.

With heavy footsteps, Nadika fled to her room with tears flooding her eyes. Slamming the door, she winced down to the ground while clutching her necklace . . . Dakota's necklace. Her eyes laid on a photo frame...

"Dakota," her eyes welled up again when she looked at it. Pushing herself off the ground, Nadika stared at the picture.

"Why, why did you have to leave me?" she shook her head as she spoke. "Y-you said we would be together forever."

Choking those words out, she arranged the photo face down.

“Ah!” Dahlia stumbled across the path, with Nadika looking at her with disdain in her gaze. “Idiot,” the brown-haired girl mumbled under her breath, picking up her pace and practically leaving Dahlia behind.

“Hey! Wait up!” Dahlia yelled out, while waving her arms. If Nadika had heard her, she did a very good job at hiding it; frustration seeped through Dahlia. It had been a week, and things still hadn't gotten any better. She kicked a stray rock and marched towards Nadika.

“Why do you hate me?” she demanded.

“Because my mum is trying to replace you with Dakota.”

“Who's that?”

Sighing, Nadika slowed her pace. “She was my little sister. That big storm that happened two years ago took her away from me.”

Dahlia stayed quiet. “But what does that have to do with me?” she finally asked.

“Because you look exactly like her,” Nadika turned to face her. “The same black hair, same cheeks, same eyes...” she trailed off as she got lost in thought. “My mum may have adopted you, but you aren't my sister.” Nadika shook her head at Dahlia before walking off. Dahlia stared at the ground, fiddling with her hands as she got lost in thought, that was an explanation but no excuse for Nadika's demeanor towards her.

That dinner was quiet; the only sound heard was the metal utensils scraping against the plates. Nadika looked up at Dahlia, only to see that she was looking at her. Quickly, Dahlia looked down at her food in embarrassment.

“Nadika, why don't you sit next to Dahlia?” her mother asked.

“I sit next to Dakota, not Dahlia.” She dragged the name out like a thorn in her throat as her mother looked on with an unsatisfied expression.

“I didn't mean it like that –”

“Of course you didn't,” Nadika scowled.

“Young lady!” Her mother's fists clenched.

Flinching, Nadika stood up. “I bet you wouldn't have any problem replacing me too, huh?” She stomped off.

The river was calm. Nadika hated that. How dare it act as if it did nothing at all? Kicking a stone away, she crouched at the edge. It wasn't like this on the day; why couldn't it have been? Something touched her shoulder. At first, she thought it must have been the wind, but then yet again, something tapped her shoulder. Irritated, she shuffled to the side, this time it tapped her head. Whipping her head around, her eyes widened.

“Dakota?” Her lip quivered as her hands shook. There, right in front of her, was Dakota, her ebony hair still as sleek as she liked it, and her eye kept that same sparkle she was born with.

“Nadika,” Dakota returned the gaze.

“Hello.”

Nadika hesitatingly reached out her hand, only to withdraw it back. “You're as gorgeous as the day I lost you.” Happiness flashed in her eyes.

Dakota moved next to her, staring at the still water, the grass that she touched seemingly went through her.

“Dahlia's a nice girl,” she commented.

“She would be, if Mother wasn't trying to replace you,” Nadika retorted.

“That's where you're wrong.” The girl turned to face her older sister. “Mum's not trying to replace me, she also has a hole in her heart,” she continued, not letting Nadika speak.

“Move on, I know you want me to be happy, but I can't be happy if you're not.”

Nadika stayed silent, she could feel the presence of her sister slowly fade away, she stood up, staring defiantly at the water.

“You may have taken away the pearl to my oyster, but you know what?” She turned to leave. “An oyster can always make another one.” She departed from the riverside; she knew what she had to do, what she needed to do.

Hand on the polished handle, Nadika took a deep breath, she tugged the door open, before opening it and leaning against the frame.

“Hey Dahlia,” she caught the younger one’s attention.

“Yes?” Dahlia responded.

With a grin on her face, Nadika repeated what she would always say to Dakota.

“Let’s go swimming, sister.”