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Erased

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A warm breeze touched Nita's face as she looked up to gaze at the warm sun that hung high in the sky like a ripe orange waiting to be picked. Nita smiled, the smell of Mama's cooking drifted through the air. Nita inhaled, breathing deeply. Suddenly a strong chemical smell filled her nose. The sun disappeared, the sky turned black, thick dark rain clouds covered the beautiful orange sun. Nita ran towards the cabin and pushed open the door. "Mama, Mama, the sun is gone! Mama?" Nita cried turning round and round searching for her mother. Then, cold pale hands grabbed her; they began scrubbing, and scrubbing. Soap, slid down her face and into her eyes. Her eyes burned, tears streamed down her face. Nita screamed.

Nita sat up straight in bed and gasped for air. Nightmares had haunted her sleep since coming to the school. Nita rocked slowly, and rubbed her hands up and down her arms. She looked sideways and saw the sleeping forms of her roommates. Nita sighed a sigh of longing. She wished that the hard cot she was sitting on was her wooden bed and quilt at home. She pushed away the longing feeling, and rolled over and pulled her grey blanket to her chin and closed her eyes.

The pale sun streamed through the tiny windows and landed on Nita's face. She stretched her arms high over her head, and let out a loud yawn. She looked over to the other side of the room and saw her roommates making their beds frantically. Nita blinked and then remembered. She shot out of bed as if she had sat on a bed of thorns. She quickly brought the edges of the thin grey blanket together, and folded them neatly at the edge of the cot.

A loud knock startled the girls. Sister Agnes stepped into the room and smelled the air. She frowned and crinkled her nose. She strolled over to Nita's bed and examined the messily folded bed sheets. She crinkled her nose again.

"Pupil 23, your bed is not in order, come over here" she ordered. Nita walked over nervously, and approached Sister Agnes slowly as if she was an aggravated black bear. Sister pulled the strap from her back dress pocket, "Lay out your hand." She barked. Nita held out her hand cautiously and held it close to her body. Sister raised the strap and brought it down quickly on top of Nita's hand. A sharp pain, weaned through Nita's hand, quickly spreading from her palm to her fingertips. The nun looked down at her, her thin blonde eyebrows raised in question. Nita frowned, but she refused to cry. Sister Agnes scowled and then moved on to inspect the other girl's beds. Nita looked at her right hand. Her palm was bright red and a massive welt formed its way across her palm. Nita blew on her hand, to try to cool the heat of her throbbing right hand.



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Memories of the first day filled her head. She remembered feeling alone even though the halls had been full of girls struggling to get to class on time. Some of the girls chatted to their friends in English quietly. Nita recalled not being able to then speak the fish language, or "English" as the sisters called it. Nita called it the fish language, the way the Sisters mouth's opened and closed reminded Nita of fishing with Papa, and pulling the fish onto land where all it could do was open and close its wide mouth. Somebody bumped Nita's shoulder causing her to drop her books. The banging of the book on the floor pulled Nita out of her thoughts and back into the clinical hallways of the school. The halls were still somewhat full of girls, Nita kneeled down and grabbed her books and walked briskly to class. She entered the classroom and sat in the back in her usual seat. She hated English class and wished it was Mathematics as this was Nita's favourite subject. English bored her to the point of insanity. Nita put her books into a prim pile and lined up her pencil alongside it. Si Katherine walked steadily between the desks and handed out the worksheet they would do today. Nita stared down at the white paper in front of her. It reminded her of how everything here was, blend, boring, and pale. Nita brought her pencil to the page and wrote her name at the top of the page. She paused and looked at the paper. She had written Nita at the top of her paper. She then began to erase her name. As the eraser rubbed away her name she felt a part of herself being rubbed away with it. Nita wrote the number 23 at the top of her paper. Now there was no Nita, there was only a number; her name had been reduced to a number. Nita glared at the paper now, it seemed to challenge her entire being. She wanted to shred that white paper to bits, and scream as she did it. Nita had been so occupied with her paper that she hadn't even realized someone new had entered the room. Nita looked up from her paper; Sister Katherine was frowning at a paper an older pupil had given to her.

"Pupil 23 Listen next time you are called. You are excused from class and are to go see Sister Diane," barked Sister Agnes.

Nita rose slowly, gathered her books and her pencil, and walked slowly between the desks. The girls peered at her, they whispered quietly and were quickly shushed by Sister Katherine.

Nita exited the classroom and walked quickly to Sister Diane's office. Sister Diane was the strictest nun in the entire school and would not tolerate slowness. She opened the door of the office and sat down in the chair by the desk. Sister Diane surveyed her through thick glasses.

"Pupil 23, you have been here for one year this spring correct?" Sister asked rhetorically.

"Yes Sister Diane." mumbled Nita.

"Speak up girl!" commanded Sister Diane.

"Yes Sister Diane" said Nita a great deal louder than before.



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"Well, after a year we allow our pupils to go home for 5 weeks. You are going home for 5 weeks!" said Sister Diane.

Nita's heart fluttered and a smile found its way to her face for the first time since she had arrived at the school.

"Do you understand?" Sister asked slowly.
Nita nodded vigorously.

"There is a car waiting for you outside," said Sister Diane.

The engine rumbled as the car started. Nita was too excited to sleep but soon sheer boredom got a hold of her and caused her to finally close her eyes. Nita opened her eyes and saw the familiar dirt road lined with the strong thick pine trees that resembled fearless proud warriors. Nita smiled. Images of warm embraces, bannock, and running through the field with her little brother, Anoki danced in Nita's head. The car pulled into the driveway. Nita jumped out of the car and sprinted to the cabin. Nita pushed open the door of the cabin.

"Mama! Papa! I'm home," cried Nita

"Nita? Nita!" her Papa cried pulling her into a tight hug.

"Nita? My Nita?" screamed her mother as she ran full speed and grabbed Nita.

Nita hugged her parents tightly, breathing in their woodsy smell. Nita poked her head out of her parents entangled arms.

"Is Anoki in bed?" asked Nita excitedly.

Her parents glanced at each other worriedly. Her Mother's smile disappeared and a mask of sadness and fury replaced it.

"What?" Nita asked.

"We don't know where he is; we thought he would be placed with you." sobbed her Mother quietly.

"What? Why? ... did you let them take him away? Anoki is gone forever because of you!" accused Nita, sobbing hysterically.

"Nita, Nita, dear sweet Nita there was nothing we could do. They told us we weren't teaching our children properly. They promised us they would take better care of you and Anoki than me and your Mother ever could." sighed Papa

"Our way of teaching was wrong," said her Mother.

"What was wrong with our way?" asked Nita.

This time nobody had an answer.