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 off 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.

Nervous, Nita walked over and approached slowly as if Sister Agnes 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 girls' 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 the throbbing.

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' mouths 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 books 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 as Nita knelled down, 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 were 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. Sister Katherine walked steadily between the desks and handed out the worksheet they would be working on. Nita stared down at the white paper in front of her. It reminded her of how everything here was: bland, 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.

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