



WIND ACROSS THE PLAYGROUND

Copyright ©2002 by Ross Richdale

Cover art by Ross Richdale

Electronically published in arrangement with the author

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Except for brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews, the reproduction of this work in whole or in part in any form by electronic or mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including printing, faxing, E-mail, or copying electronically, is forbidden without the permission of the author.

<http://www.ebookfiction.biz>

E-mail novels@ebookfiction.biz

Published by RJ's EBooks

http://www.rjs-ebooks.com/Authors/ross_richdale.htm

This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogues in this book are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Excerpt of three chapters

CHAPTER ONE

Clouds of dust bellowed behind the tiny red Department of Education bus as it rumbled along a top plateau in New Zealand's backcountry. Inside, the driver, a clean- man with a short haircut almost out of style at the time, glanced in the rear vision at the school's probationary assistant. Lisa Woolstone lived on a farm further out and drove her car to the bus terminus bus route. From there she caught the bus into town.

As it often happened on a Friday afternoon she was the only passenger. At the end of the week many of the parents would pick their children up at school and the twenty-four children on the Junction Bus Route would end up as a handful.

After they let the Taylor children off at the start of the plateau, she came forward from near the back and sat behind him to chat. He grinned again. With her blue cardigan and tight skirt she was an attractive young woman with clothes that accentuated rather than hid her figure.

'Are you going back to Palmerston North for the weekend, Neil?' she asked as she plunked herself down in the seat behind him and her blue eyes found his for a brief second in the rear vision mirror.

'Yes,' Neil Johnston replied. 'There's nothing to do in Taihape.'

'Lisa glanced at him and he could see a doubtful look on her face' You've got a wife or girlfriend, there, I suppose?'

Neil frowned and thought of Lesley. They had been going together for two years now and it was assumed by both their families that they would get married and have children. But it was 1976, the decade of the liberal ideas and long hair; not that this impregnated the rural New Zealand society. The idea of just setting down and perpetuating the species didn't appeal to Neil one little bit.

He grinned and thought about his bus companion. It was mid September and the girl, she looked little older than someone from high school, had only been at the school since the May holidays. This was unusual because probationary assistants usually started in February. He'd heard something about family circumstances necessitated the move from another school.

'Well have you?' The soft female voice interrupted his thoughts.

Neil took his eyes off the road and glanced at the intense eyes gazing at his mirror image.

'No,' he lied. 'Only my parents and younger brother are at home.'

'I see,' Lisa replied and bit on her lip. 'Do you get lonely?'

Her voice became a whisper and Neil felt fingers brush his shoulders. Every Friday over the last three weeks when he'd been alone with the young teacher, she'd come and sat behind him to chat. And, though it tried to stop it, the sound of her voice and close proximity of her body made his body react.

'What do you mean?' he choked and avoided the eyes in the mirror.

'I mean,' she continued with uncertainty in her voice. 'You seem so alone out here and at school, too. Oh I know you kid around with the other guys on the staff but ignore the woman. There are five single girls on the staff, including myself. I would have thought a husky man like you would be fighting them off.'

'Well, I have a sort of girlfriend,' Neil confessed and hoped the half-truth would be a sufficient information, 'but we're sort of drifting.'

'That happens,' the girl said. 'Are you going to marry her?'

'No,' Neil replied before he even thought about the answer.

'That's good,' Lisa replied, 'so you're a free agent?'

'I guess,' Neil replied and frowned. 'Why?'

Lisa flushed and glanced away. 'I just thought...' she whispered. 'I find it hard to get used to this school ' she said. 'It's so big. I was at a little five-teacher school before my transfer. You are the only one who has made me welcome.' She stared at him and gulped. 'I'm lonely, Neil and I thought we might hit it off,' Her eyes found his. 'If you know what I mean.'

'Sure...' he replied but didn't really comprehend what she was trying to suggest. Luckily, the straight road at the end of the plateau became a narrow windy section and he had to change down and concentrate on the narrow windy hairpin bends. He pretended to concentrate on his driving so there could be a halt in their conversation.

After the last bend they drove along another short straight to where the schoolhouse stood in front of an abandoned sole-charge school. A decade earlier the school had closed and the bus route established to transport the children into Taihape. Neil rented the house for a ridiculously low amount and drove the bus into the town every morning, taught his ten-year-olds class during the day and drove back at night. He lived in two rooms of the house. The cheap rent and extra pay for driving the bus made the position well worth while. It was lonely at times and, after almost three years, he was ready to move on, perhaps back to the city somewhere now his country service was completed.

He pulled the bus in beside the massive corrugated iron bus shed and glanced at Lisa.

My God! She'd undone three buttons of her cardigan and the cleavage of her breasts could be seen beneath.

'I'll put the bus away,' he gulped and half hoped Lisa would take the hint, back out her Morris Minor from the side garage where it stayed, give her usual cherry wave and head off to her home, eight kilometers down the road.

But she didn't. When the bus was inside the shed, she grabbed her satchel and stood waiting just inside the building while he slide the heavy wooden door around on its rollers.

'Do you want to go out?' he said just before he closed the last section.

'Don't you want me to say?' she whispered and stood straight in front of him with a strange smile on her face. He could smell her closeness and gazed at the long blonde hair and attempted to avoid lowering his eyes at the heaving breasts.

'Lisa, you meant,' he gulped.

'Why not! If you don't tell anyone, I won't,' she whispered and stepped forward.

My God! The young woman wanted to go all the way! He stepped back and, without thinking pushed the last section of the door shut. They were now in the gloomy interior with the only light coming from a far end; spider web covered skylight.

While he held his hand down to hide his expanded penis beneath his trousers, she very quietly undid the last four buttons of her cardigan. There was no blouse underneath, only peach colored bras with a frilly pattern across the top. She smiled faintly and stood back facing him with wide blue eyes, a smile and, now without a trace of embarrassment, she kicked off her shoes, undid one of the nylon stockings and rolled it off.

'Lisa, stop!' he choked before she started on the second stocking. He couldn't help but stare at the beautiful woman standing before him.

'Tell me you really want to stop and I will, Neil' she said and purposely dropped her eyes to his erection.

Oh hell! Why not? Bugger all the morality he'd been preached all his life.

'Okay,' he croaked and reached back to hold the wooden door behind. Somehow, it gave him security. My God, this was as far as he'd ever got with Lesley.

'Well!' Lisa said. 'Do you want to kiss me?'

Neil's mind was in frenzy as warm soft arms encircled his neck and Lisa kissed him in a way that promised more things to come.

'Can I unclamp your bra?' Neil asked timidly.

Lisa stepped back and he waited for the angry retort or even a Lesley type slap on the cheek but the blue eyes never left his.

'Okay,' she said and slipped her cardigan off, turned around, and stood waiting in only the briefest brassiere that only covered the flesh to slightly above her nipples. Above was the full cleavage of her enormous breasts.

My God! And she was allowing him to go further. With shaky fingers he moved his

hand up but stopped and held her shoulders. He bent forward, lifted her hair and placed a kiss on an ear.

'Keep going, Neil,' the girl whispered. 'I want you too. I want...' The girl swung around, grabbed his cheeks and kissed him in a frantic open-mouthed kiss. He could smell the sweet breath of fresh toothpaste, a slight whiff of perfume and taste the salty lips against his.

Almost as if she was too impatient to wait, the girl reached back, undid her clip and let the flimsy garment drop to the dusty floor. She stood there smiling while Neil goggled, without shame, at her very firm breasts. Shit, she made Lesley look like a boy.

'You're beautiful,' he whispered.

'If you want to touch me,' Lisa whispered. 'You can. I won't break.'

Neil reached forward and guided Lisa onto the ground where all pretence was thrown aside.

They moved in together, Lisa yanked down the zip of Neil's fly while he gave a low moan. She reached down and within seconds his own trousers and undies were gone.

'Let's go in the bus,' Neil gasped and watched as the girl nodded, stood and gathered up her clothes.

He turned and latched the shed door. Luckily, it was designed to be locked from the interior. The tiny exit door built at the side was also shut so nobody could walk in on them.

Inside, Lisa lay on the back seat with and reached up for him. 'There's not much room,' she giggled, 'but I'm sure you'll manage.'

'Oh Lisa,' Neil groaned.

'I know,' Lisa said with almost a smirk on her face, 'You've been wanting to screw me for weeks now. Every time I step in the bus you stare at my boobs.'

She reached out, took one of his hands and placed it between her moist legs while he kissed her with a passion he never knew he owned and lay down over her.

Lisa moaned, grabbed his hair, while her fingernails dug into his bare back as she passionately kissed him. The girl received him quietly for a moment with soft moans until she erupted into a gigantic orgasm. With a low moan, he pulled her body ever closer while sperm surged up and ejaculated into her. Finally, he lay back exhausted on the bus seat with his arms around the soft warm body.

Lisa smiled and looked at her watch. 'Hell, it's almost five o'clock,' she gasped. 'If I'm not home soon, Mum will come looking for me. She is terrified I'm going to crash the Minor on the road but I told her it is safer driving here than in the city.'

She almost skipped outside and into her little car. It started with a roar; she backed around and wound down the window. 'Why don't you stay here next weekend and we can do it in comfort,' she called.

'You want to?' Neil stuttered.

'Of course.' The girl grinned before she drove away. 'Don't be so self-conscious. If that girlfriend of yours is too prudish to sleep with you, she's the loser, not you.'

Neil shook his head in wonder. It was as if Lisa could read his mind. He walked slowly over to his house to gather his weekend gear but somehow, going back to Palmerston North and the movies with Lesley didn't appeal one little bit.

As it turned out, that was his last weekend with Lesley. After the movie, he drove to a lonely spot and parked. Usually they'd cuddle, he'd fondle her breasts and, if he was lucky, she'd allow him to remove her bras. She had firm little busts but any attempts to kiss her nipples were stopped. Afterwards, in frustration he would drive her home. Damn it! This time he'd go further. After two bloody years he hadn't even felt her up. With grim determination he held her down across the front seat of the FJ.

'Neil,' the woman protested, 'Stop it!' She tugged at his hand and wriggled away but he held her close.

'No!' screamed Lesley. 'I told you last week. I don't want you to...' She couldn't even say the words.

'I'm sorry,' he muttered.

He drove her home in grim silence while his mind whirled. He'd done more in an hour with Lisa than two years with the woman he had almost become engaged to. When they arrived at her place Lesley glowered at him.

'That's it, Neil,' she said with a voice like granite. 'Don't bother to ever call again or I'll report you for attempted rape.'

Neil grimaced and was about to apologise a second time when he thought of Lisa. Why should he? My God, if he married this woman would she be any better afterwards? She was a prude.

'Bugger you, too,' he snapped and grinned at the look of fury on her face. 'You should be a bloody nun.'

However, by Sunday evening back at his house at The Junction, Neil regretted everything that had happened over the previous three days. By God, he'd tell Lisa it was just a one night stand, phone Lesley and apologise.

On Monday morning the little blue Morris Minor arrived at quarter to seven instead of the usual half past. Lisa walked in the back door and caught Neil shaving. She smiled warmly.

'What do you want,' she said with a provocative grin. 'Sex or breakfast. I've brought you some home cured bacon and farm eggs.'

'Have we time?' Neil gulped.

Lisa grinned and walked through to the bedroom. 'Hell, what a mess,' she said and glanced at the unmade bed and clothes on the floor. 'You need a woman's hand.' She turned. 'Well?'

'What?' Neil spluttered as he wiped the shaving cream off his face with a towel.

'Oh hell,' the girl said and began to undo her cardigan. 'Not your bloody conscience pricking again. Girl friend trouble?'

'I broke it off,' Neil replied.

'Good!' she replied. 'But hurry up. The kids will be turning up to catch the bus in half an hour.'

Without saying any more Neil pulled Lisa in and deposited a rough kiss on her lips.

'On second thoughts, Neil!' Lisa teased and wiggled away from him. 'Wouldn't you rather have breakfast?'

Neil's eyes never left hers. He reached forward and wrapped his arms around her, placed a finger under her chin and gave it a slight push so her face tipped up. Soft lips briefly touched again and his body reacted.

'My God, Neil,' Lisa gasped as she wiggled out from beneath him after their passionate lovemaking. 'I said breakfast or sex. Now we've got time for both.'

'I'm sorry,' Neil apologised. 'You're so beautiful I couldn't hold back.'

Lisa grinned and kissed him. 'You did have trouble with the other woman, didn't you?' she said as her expression turned serious.

'So you're a clairvoyant, are you?' Neil replied with a grin.

'No, you just acted so lonely and desperate,' Lisa added with her voice still serious. 'Do you want to talk about it while I whip up breakfast?' She tucked her arms around his neck and gazed in his eyes. 'Tell me to mind my own business if you wish.'

Neil kissed her and grimaced. 'It's just a pathetic little story really,' he began and told her everything about the weekend.

Lisa didn't joke or laugh but listened intently as they both cooked breakfast together. In the end she turned and said. 'She's more than a prude. She's just a bitch and you're better off without her. I've had experience with male versions of her, you know these chauvinistic males who think they own a woman...' Her voice trailed off before she added in a soft voice. 'That's why I like you, Neil. I see how you treat the children on the bus and at school. It took me all this time to pluck up the courage to make a pass at you.' She glanced down. 'I hope you don't think of me just as an easy lay.'

'I don't,' Neil replied, 'but you are an enigma. I think you've had some tough times in

your life, too.'

'You could say that,' Lisa replied in a whisper. Her eyes turned to Neil's. 'I'll tell you about it one day.' She broke into a smile, 'But now breakfast before the kids arrive.'

At seven thirty five, they walked out to find three children waiting for them and the shed door already rolled back.

'You're late, Mr. Johnston,' ten year old Belinda chided with her hands on her hips like a little old woman. 'Did Miss Woolstone have to go and get you?'

'Sort of,' Neil laughed and winked at Lisa.

CHAPTER TWO

When the Junction bus pulled into the curb in front of Taihape School at twenty to nine, the children tumbled out and Neil noticed Claire, the office assistant, waiting for them.

'Mr. Stapleton wants to see you both,' she and switched her eyes between Neil and Lisa.

'Oh hell,' Neil muttered and his heart raced. Old Wayne never wanted to see them before school. The headmaster was a grim old sod at the best of times and, only last week, had given a lecture about staff fraternizing after hours. Apparently Simon and Jennifer, two other teachers on the staff, were seen at the Gretna Hotel one night at nine. 'Getting rid of six o'clock closing is all very well,' Old Wayne had grumbled, 'but I am not going to have my staff abusing the system, especially when the young lady is not even twenty one.' His bushy eyebrows raised and Jennifer turned a bright scarlet.

Now, Neil had visions of a policeman standing in the boss's office with a warrant out for his arrest for carnal knowledge. He glanced at Lisa who also looked apprehensive and was biting on her bottom lip.

'Aye, Lisa and Neil,' Wayne Stapleton said when they knocked on the office door. 'Come on in and take a seat.'

This sounded bad.

'You applied to be graded this year?' Wayne started.

Neil mentally sighed in relief. 'Yes,' he said.

'And you, Lisa,' the headmaster continued, 'the other PAs here were graded in April before you came and I believe you asked for your visit to be postponed when you had those...err...problems in Taranaki Education Board?'

'That's right, Mr. Stapleton,' she replied, flushed a bright red and avoided Neil's eyes.

Every three years, teachers were graded by school inspectors and ranked in comparison with their colleagues. Neil was on the most basic report, a so called white one but if he received a good grading, he could apply to be a first assistant, sole charge teacher or even a headmaster of a two teacher school. The white report had a scale from one to nine, only two percent of teachers ever received a top nine, five percent an eight and so on down. Half the teachers received a four or five. Neil had a two at the moment, a good average grading of a new teacher. If he could get a four, there was a chance of picking up a sole charge school somewhere.

Wayne smiled, if the thin twist of his lips could be called a smile. 'They're coming to inspect you both on Wednesday and Thursday of next week,' he said. 'Frank Mulligan will grade you both.'

'Oh hell?' Neil whispered to himself.

Frank Mulligan was known as a tyrant of the old school. Of the five inspectors they could have had, this man was his last choice.

Wayne managed another smile. 'If you're doing a good job, Mr. Mulligan will give you credit for it,' he said. 'He has considerable sway on the inspectorate.'

'Yeah, sure,' Neil replied but was unconvinced. His visions of ever winning a small country school disappeared out the window.

The headmaster turned to the young woman. 'Any questions, Lisa?' he asked.

'No, Mr. Stapleton,' she replied. 'I've been expecting it.'

'Good,' Wayne Stapleton replied. 'So if you don't mind, I'd like to speak to Neil alone.'

'Sure,' Lisa replied. She flashed Neil a smile and left.

The headmaster watched her go before he reached for a thick gray exercise book and turned to Neil, 'Take my advise and go back and rewrite your work plan for the last month,' he said as he handed the workbook to him. 'It's a little slim, you know. Also, you're in charge of the art program. Have you done this term's long term plan, yet?'

'No,' Neil stuttered. Actually, he hadn't done last term's one either. He loved teaching the kids but reckoned all this bookwork a waste of time.

'Well, that's what they'll be looking at,' said the headmaster. 'If you expect to get anywhere, you must have everything right up to date. What about your music?'

'I've had a few songs,' Neil muttered. 'He loved art but didn't care much for music.'

'Well see Lisa,' Wayne said. 'She's only a PA but her music program is spot on.'

He gave a slow grin. 'Her art is patchy, though. Perhaps you could help her with that in return.' He continued on with suggestions for several moments until the bell rang and Neil had to head back to his class.

The screams from Room Seven could be heard from the corridor but as soon as he walked in, a hush settled over the forty children.

'You know what we do at bell time!' the teacher said with his voice low but like steel. 'If one person speaks for in the next ten minutes they'll have a hundred lines. Get out your arithmetic books.'

Not a sound was heard as, in unison, the pupils lifted their desktops, took out a gray covered textbook and an exercise book. They placed them on the desks and sat up with their arms folded.

'Decimals,' Neil said. 'With our new money system of dollars and cents, these are very important. Turn to page one hundred and sixty two.'

'Sir!' a voice called out. 'I lost my pencil.'

Neil glared and the boy near the rear of the room withered. 'Sorry Sir,' he muttered and put his hand up.

At lunchtime, Neil found Lisa in her room. She taught the other standard two class of eight-year-olds so her room was in the other old wooden block.

'I saw your face when old Wayne wanted to see us?' she said with a grin. 'You worry too much. What we do is none of his business,' she flung her hair back.

'I know,' Neil laughed. 'I had a very strict upbringing, you know.'

'Me too but the fifties have long gone, Neil,' Lisa chuckled. 'What did Wayne say after I left?'

'Not a lot,' Neil retorted. 'He didn't like my workbook and said I had to come to you with help for my music. It's a bit bloody late now, though, isn't it?'

'Oh Neil,' Lisa replied. 'Your room is so attractive with all that art on display and those puppets your kids made are marvelous. I reckon you'll do well.' She frowned and glanced up. 'There is one suggestion, though. Why don't we swap for an hour a week?'

'What do you mean?' Neil asked.

'Well, you take my class for art and I'll take yours for music.'

'Will the boss agree?' Neil replied.

'He suggested it,' Lisa said. 'Apparently in the city schools they swap classes around a lot.'

'Okay,' Neil said with a grin. 'I don't mind taking art twice. I can just make my lesson a little easier and repeat it with your kids.'

'Me too, with the music,' Lisa replied and smiled at Neil.

He studied her intense face and body. My God, in that cardigan, it was a red one today and tight skirt he could very well.... He flushed at his erotic thoughts.

'Neil!' the young woman responded. 'Stop undressing me with your eyes.'

'Sorry,' Neil whispered. God, she was perceptive.' What were we talking about?'

'My art and your music.'

'Oh yeah. I just wish our grading visit was over, that's all. When do you want to do this week's swap?'

'How about two and back date it in our workbooks,' Lisa said with a grin across her face.

'Why not?' Neil said. He had never heard of swapping children between classes before but could see this new arrangement working well.

For the rest of the week, the two young teachers worked frantically to have everything in place. Lisa's workbook was a dream with each double spread page filled with her neat curved handwriting. In contrast Neil's had too many blank spaces. In the end he copied huge amounts of Lisa's planning into his workbook and even changed his pen every so often to make it look as if the entries were made at different times. Two terms of long term art planning were produced and run off on the methylated spirits banda for distribution to other senior school class teachers. In return for her help, Neil gave Lisa some of his quite arty charts from an earlier year for her walls. They were slightly faded but this was good as, again, they gave the appearance of being up for a few months.

Children's books were laboriously marked and Neil even threw Jimmy's storybook away and bought a new one. The boy with terrible writing habits had splashed ink everywhere and had bombers and jet planes drawn all over his covers.

'Little bugger,' Neil grunted

On Friday afternoon, Lisa was again the only one in the bus. She came forward and kissed Neil on the neck as he drove. 'I told Mum I was staying with a friend for the weekend,' she said. 'My suitcase is in the Morris Minor.'

Neil's heart dropped. They hadn't had sex since that Monday morning. Now she was going to stay with a friend, probably Diane, the school dental nurse and her best friend.

'I bought new shortie pajamas,' Lisa continued provocatively and caught his eye in the mirror.

They were at the windy section of road again.

'A bit cold at this time of the year,' Neil replied with his disappointment barely hidden.

Lisa suddenly burst out laughing. 'You're the friend I'm staying with,' she said. 'Unless you'd rather go back and try to make it with Lesley again.'

'With me the school house?' Excitement crept into the man's voice

'If you want me, that is.'

'Of course,' Neil replied as blood rushed through his body.

'But you really should control yourself, young man,' Lisa teased in a perfect imitation of Old Wayne and gazed at his expanded fly.

'Lisa!' Neil yelled as the bus swerved on some loose gravel. 'I'm driving.'

'Okay,' the young woman chuckled and sat back in the seat with her long legs beside the driver's seat. 'Like my new nylons?'

Neil gulped and almost lost control again as he glanced at the fishnet style stockings.

'You wait,' he said in a quiet voice. He avoided her eyes but a few moments later and while his eyes still gazed out the windscreen, he moved his left hand sideways and squeezed to her leg.

'Neil!' Lisa screamed, the legs disappeared and she pretended to be furious.

Their sex over the following hour was begun on the back seat of the bus and consummated in Neil's bed before the gasping pair had a shower together.

'My God!' Neil confessed as they redressed in the steamy room. 'I bought a whole package of condoms but forgot to put any on. You'll get pregnant at this rate.'

'No I won't,' Lisa replied. 'I'm on the pill. Started them three weeks back after my last period.' She grinned. 'Just in case, you see.'

'But how?' Neil said. He thought the new form of birth control was strictly controlled and only issued on prescription to married women.

'Well, back in Hawera I went to a doctor, called myself Mrs. Woolstone and said I was a new teacher in town.' She chuckled. 'That part was true. I got six months supply and there's still some left as I haven't needed them since coming to Taihape. Until now, that is.'

'Devious,' Neil said.

'No practical,' Lisa replied. 'I'm not about to repeat my mother's mistake.'

She said no more but Neil was sure the story would come out sometime.

On Saturday a southerly squall came over the valley and, with it, a continuous torrential downpour and slips on the country road. Neil and Lisa, though, moved into the empty lounge of the house, lit the open fire, spread out their school work and spent hours, writing, chatting, marking children's work and filling in their brown covered Progress and Achievement Registers. As with the workbooks, Neil's was almost empty and Lisa's bloated.

'How about a few more arithmetic test marks?' she suggested as she gazed at Neil's half empty page.

'I left the tests in the cupboard at school,' Neil moaned, 'and I don't feel like driving back to town in this weather.'

'Make them up,' Lisa chuckled. 'I do.'

'What!' Neil sounded horrified.

Lisa grabbed her own register and opened it to a very full arithmetic page. 'I have a code,' she said with a smirk. 'That little dot at the bottom of the column means it's a fake mark. The rest are genuine. When I write reports I only take notice of the real ones.'

'Let me see,' Neil replied and studied her marks. As the year progressed the dotted columns grew so, for this term, she had two dotted columns for every legitimate entry. However, without this code, he would never have guessed.

'Well children's marks rarely change,' Lisa explained. 'Look at Cynthia here. She's hopeless at arithmetic and her marks range from twenty percent to forty, if she's lucky. Elizabeth, on the other hand, never gets less than eighty.'

Neil looked up and shook his head. 'So the quiet, petite young lady with the curvy legs who has graced out staffroom since May is really a scheming...'

'Watch it!' Lisa warned.

'I meant to say a conscientious...'

'That's better,' Lisa replied. 'We do have a reputation to maintain, don't we?'

Half an hour later, Neil's brown book was almost as complete as Lisa's was. They smiled at each other achievements and decided to have a break from the work. Hand in hand, they walked out to the laundry, put on rain wear and, for the next two hours, went walking over the back paddocks in the downpour. It was cold and water slid down his neck but Neil had never, ever felt so proud and happy as he was on that rainy Saturday. Again sensations he never knew he had rose inside. He couldn't place the emotion at the time but then realised he was falling desperately in love with the dynamic young woman sloshing along beside him in his oversized oilskin raincoat and gumboots.

He wrapped an arm around her and she tucked rain sodden hair into his neck. Blue eyes glanced up at him.

'Thoughts?' she asked.

'You,' he said and bent down to kiss her cold, wet lips.

Somehow, even that rain soaked kiss was the best he'd ever had. He didn't think he was falling in love; he knew it!

Just as they returned to the house, a van pulled in by the gate. It was the rural mail contractor who dropped off the mail, newspaper and anything else people on the route wanted to have delivered.

'Go inside and I'll get the mail,' Neil said but Lisa walked with him out to the mailbox.

He tucked the *Dominion* newspaper inside his oilskin and thumbed through the usual bills and junk mail until he came to a pink envelope.

'Oh shit,' he muttered when he recognized the handwriting. He went to poke it in his pocket when Lisa grabbed it and ran towards the house.

"That's mine!" he yelled when he caught up to her on the back porch. 'Give it to me.'

A small fight followed with Lisa attempting to keep it out of his reach but he was too strong. He grabbed her wrist and pried her fingers back to retrieve the letter.

'Bully,' Lisa yelled and this turned to a scream as Neil sat down on an adjacent bench, flipped her onto his knee and placed a playful slap on the bottom. He held her there; kicking and screaming while he slit the envelope open and read the contents.

'Double shit,' he growled and became serious.

Lisa wriggled off his knee and sat beside him. 'Lesley?' she asked.

'Yeah but it's not the goodbye letter I expected.'

'Go on,' Lisa said.

'She wants to make up and said she'd reconsidered and would go to bed with me if I went home next weekend.'

'Aren't you lucky?' Lisa said in a quiet voice. 'I bet she's even a virgin. Have fun!'

Neil frowned. 'Don't you care?' he asked.

'Why should I?' Lisa replied and gazed out at the rain that had dropped to drizzle. 'You're a free agent. I'm making no demands on you.'

'That's very liberal of you,' Neil replied in a disappointed voice. 'I thought after these last two weeks there was...' he stopped. 'You really don't care?' he added.

Lisa turned and sucked on her lip. Without a word she took off the oilskin, kicked away her gumboots and just stood there gazing outside.

'So if I go back to Palmerston North next weekend and bed Lesley, it won't affect you?' he persisted. 'That's very liberal of you, Lisa,' His words were bitter.

'Damn you!' Lisa whispered and turned to face him.

Neil saw, for the first time her eyes were wet with tears and his emotion changed from uncertainty to affection. Even though he was still in his oilskin he reached out and pulled her into himself.

'I don't want to go back,' he said softly and kissed her lips.

'Oh Neil,' Lisa sobbed. 'I wasn't going to let this happen.'

'What?'

'Me and you. It was going to be a bit of fun with an oversexed male. I'd seduce you, sleep with you for a while and then move on.' Tears rolled down her cheeks. 'I've been hurt once, Neil and told myself I'd never become emotionally involved again. I'd have fun and bugger the consequences,' She smiled as Neil took out a very wet handkerchief and handed it to her. 'Then the new liberated Lisa Woolstone had to start an affair with you.'

'So if I went back home and bedded Lesley, you would care?' Neil whispered.

'Of course I bloody would,' Lisa snorted. 'I'd be as jealous as hell and it's all your bloody fault. Why do you have to be such a warm, considerate loving guy?'

'Because I'm with you,' Neil replied. 'That's why.'

He held her close and they kissed, a warm passionate kiss that went on and on. Neil finally stopped and gazed at the blue eyes.

'I'm not interested in Lesley,' he said. 'That's finished and was probably heading that way for months. You just sped up the inevitable that's all. Do you understand?'

'I think so,' Lisa replied. 'I want to break another promise to myself, if you agree.'

Neil nodded. 'Come inside,' he said quietly. 'I'll stoke up the fire and get us a drink. The embers should still be hot. Do you want coffee as usual?'

Lisa nodded. 'I prefer it to tea,' she said and added without a smile. 'Another protest against society, I guess. My parents drink nothing except tea.'

A few moments later they sat on an old faded blue sofa, the only piece of furniture in the lounge, and Lisa began her story.

'It's a sordid little tale, really,' she said. 'There I was, a PA sent to this lovely little school.'

She smiled slightly. 'It had sweeping lawns, a brand new block and a fabulous view of Mount Egmont. In February we spent hours with the children in the school baths.'

'So it wasn't what it seemed?' Neil added.

'No,' Lisa whispered. 'For one the district was split down the middle with the land owners on one side and the sharemilkers and local Maori on the other.' She glanced up. 'The headmaster was a man in his mid thirties and he was, oh so nice. He lived in a schoolhouse not so different than this.' She gulped, wiped her eyes with the wet handkerchief still in her hand and sipped her coffee.

Neil waited but said nothing.

'Well,' Lisa shrugged. 'We had an affair, my first and only one until now. Sure, I'd gone out with boys at Teachers College but was still a virgin when I went to Wisbech and he came across as a lovely man who swept me off my feet. One of the locals tried to warn me what he was really like but I just thought this district split affected her. Simon, that was his name, sided with the landowners who were more socially acceptable and poured money into the school.'

One night he went all the way. I was frightened but flattered and it went on from there. We slept together quite happily a second time.' She stopped and reached for Neil's hand, 'I wasn't like us, though. I never lost control like when I'm with you.'

Neil nodded.

'It was, oh I don't know, different. He began to make demands and I became scared and tried to pull back but.' She stopped and her hands shook. Tears appeared again and rolled down her cheeks.

'If it's too difficult, I understand,' Neil said with empathy in his voice.

'No. He held it over me and threatened to have me tossed out of teaching if I didn't cooperate. It wasn't rape because I let him do it but...' The last words came out as long stuttering sobs and she could not continue.

For several moments she sat slumped on the couch staring at the blazing fire. Neil clasped her in his arms and reached over and kissed her on the cheek.

'This went on through March and up to Easter when I came back here for the holidays. I was too terrified to tell my parents anything. Also over Easter, Molly O'Sullivan, the parent who originally warned me about him, stepped in. I found out afterwards she rang the Taranaki Education Board and filed a complaint. The secretary of the board and district senior inspector arrived at the school on the Wednesday morning after Easter; almost frog marched Simon into his tiny office and shut the door.'

They were in there an hour. One of the other teachers took the Form 1 and 2 into her room as they were creating merry hell while I just started a normal day. At ten o'clock a very white Simon came in and said the visitors wanted to talk to me in his office.'

'And then?'

'I broke down a bit like now,' Lisa sniffed. 'Worse, in fact. Oh, I was a cot case, all shuddering sobs and tears and everything came out. The two men couldn't have been kinder and asked me, if I had a choice, what would I like to happen. I said the first thing in my mind and that was to go home to Mum and Dad. On Friday I was phoned and told I had a transfer to Taihape School from the beginning of the second term.' She glanced up and smiled in a sad kind of way. 'They transferred Simon to a school in New Plymouth as a first assistant, a backward step. I found out later he had had an affair with another girl on the staff the year before and his wife and three children walked out on him at that time.'

'A real pig,' Neil whispered.

Lisa sipped her coffee and her blue eyes stared into his. 'So would you rather have your pure white Lesley or a sordid used me, Neil?' she whispered.

'You,' Neil replied without hesitation. 'There's no comparison.'

He reached forward and their open mouths met with a passion they were both becoming used to. They hugged and talked about their lives with the conversation moving onto their childhood, teachers' college and their hopes and dreams. It was as if they'd known each other for years until they realized an hour had slipped by, the rain had stopped and it was dark outside.

Neil suddenly grinned, removed his shirt and grabbed her in his arms again. 'We're all sticky from our damp clothes,' he said. 'How about a warm bath?'

'Together?' Lisa added.

Neil nodded.

She took his hand and led him across the corridor. Moments later female screams and male laughter came rolling out through the bathroom door. On the veranda, a crumpled pink letter fluttered, forgotten, onto the floor, was caught in a gust of wind and carried out to land on a puddle. It floated for a second, became saturated and sunk from sight.

CHAPTER THREE

At ten past nine on Wednesday, Mister Mulligan and Wayne Stapleton walked into Room Seven.

The inspector stood back with his thumbs in his belt and gazed at the forty children working quietly at their arithmetic.

'Good morning, Mr. Johnston,' Wayne said. 'I'm sure you know Mr. Mulligan.'

Neil stared at the monstrous man who towered about his own just under six feet. Shaggy eyebrows almost met the middle across a tanned face and red nose, good whiskery nose, it was said. He wore a brown suit, an old fashioned wide tie and had a handshake that made Neil almost wince in pain.

'You can introduce me to the children later,' he said. 'Have you a seat for me?'

'Yes,' Neil assured the inspector. 'There's another teacher's desk at the rear. My records are all there.'

'Good,' Mulligan snorted and turned to the headmaster. 'Thank you, Mr. Stapleton. I'm sure Mr. Johnston can provide me with any other assistance I need.'

With the headmaster dismissed, the inspector strolled around the room, examined four children's exercise books and sat in the rear of the room. For an hour he wrote copious notes in a little black book while Neil took arithmetic changed to spelling and finally reading.

At twenty five past ten, Mulligan stood and walked up to where Neil was taking a reading group for oral reading.

'Nice country children,' he said and left the room.

Immediately the children who thought they were the ones being inspected broke into talk.

'He's scary, Mr. Johnston,' John said. 'He just stares at you.'

'Yeah,' Lynn added. 'He made me read a whole page from the journal but didn't say a word.'

'I'm proud of you all,' Neil said. 'Remember after play, take out your story books and continued the story we talked about yesterday.'

The bell rang and Neil walked along the corridor to find Lisa waiting for him. 'He's coming to me tomorrow,' she said. 'How's it going?'

'I've no idea,' Neil confessed. 'He said about six words all morning.' The kids have been good, though. I think they're scared stiff. Even John has been working hard.'

'You'll do well,' Lisa said and squeezed his hand. 'Just hang in there. By three it'll be all over for you and I'll have one more sleepless night.'

They walked into the staff room together to be greeted with looks of sympathy by the staff. Nobody liked inspectors in the school and even Wayne looked a quivering wreck.

The rest of the morning went quite well but John had to start a fight with the girl next to him and Nancy dropped a bottle of ink on the polished floor. The little girl was almost in tears until Ryan excused himself from a discussion with the inspector and went to help her clean up.

'I'm sorry, Mr. Johnston,' she sputtered. 'It just slipped.'

'That's okay, Nancy,' Neil replied. 'There's not harm done. Look, there's a little splash on your dress. Go out and dab water on it then you can go into my cupboard and get a new bottle.'

'I'll wipe the ink off the floor.'

'Gee, thanks, Mr. Johnston,' the girl said and tears were forgotten.

Neil found a wet rag in the corridor sink and sponged the floor. He had almost finished when he glanced up to see Mulligan standing beside him.

'It was just an accident,' Neil muttered. 'I don't believe in chastising children when something is not their fault.'

The inspector stared at the disappearing Nancy and reached over for the girl's storybook. She was one of Neil's best pupils and her cursive writing was copper plate. The man read her story and then turned back a page. This one had a colored drawing and bright margin around the two-page story.

When Nancy returned the inspector sat in an empty desk beside her and pointed to her last sentence. 'So you're trapped in this room in this old castle tower,' he said. 'What is your topic?'

'We had a choice of a modern fairy tale or an action story,' Nancy replied after she realised the man showed a real interest in her work. 'Most of the boys are writing about cowboys or soldiers but I like fairy tales.'

'I see,' Mulligan replied. 'So what's going to happen in your story.'

'A prince is coming in a helicopter to rescue me,' Nancy replied. 'He'll let a ladder down and I'll climb out on the balcony and...'. Her excited voice continued and Neil smiled. Perhaps fate took a hand to make his top pupil drop her bottle of ink.

At eleven thirty the inspector brought his chair up beside Neil's desk and sat down. 'Can the children do something quiet for half an hour. I'd like to discuss your morning?' he asked.

'Certainly,' Neil replied and set the class onto social studies work where they were all coloring in maps and had plenty to keep them quiet.

'Right,' the inspector started. 'Jimmy over there can't do the arithmetic, can he?'

'No,' Neil admitted. 'Usually I take a small group of weaker pupils up with me and we do work with cuisenaire rods but today...'. His voice trailed off.

'Can you show me after lunch,' the inspector added and Neil nodded. There went his planned art lesson.

Mulligan placed at the open workbook on Neil's desk. 'You have an unusually full plan for a male teacher,' he said in a monotone. 'It's usually the young ladies that do this much. Some of them must work all weekend just writing them up. A bit of a waste really. There's more to life than just school, you know.'

Neil smiled. Perhaps this man was human after all.

That afternoon the inspector sat down and read through every word he wrote. There were criticisms and positive points, a comment about the bright artwork and a comment about Lisa taking Neil's music. Very little had escaped the man's eyes.

He finished at three thirty, as Neil had to head out to his bus. 'We should be able to get you a couple of extra points for your grading,' Frank Mulligan concluded. 'The competition this year is quite tight, though, Neil. I'll see what I can do for you.'

He shook hands and it was over!

'He even called me by my first name at the end,' Neil told Lisa half an hour later. 'He loved Nancy's story and was impressed by the remedial arithmetic I did with Jimmy's group. I might even get a four, he reckoned.'

'Wow,' Lisa replied from the seat behind him. She always sat there, now. 'I knew you'd do well. Now it's my turn tomorrow.'

'Yes, he should have done you first,' Neil commiserated.

'It doesn't matter. You can tell me what he expects,' Lisa replied but the lighthearted tone had gone from her voice.

They reached the schoolhouse and Neil spent the next hour telling his young colleague everything. Afterwards she turned down an invitation to stay for tea, gave him a quick kiss and headed home in her Morris Minor. By morning she arrived back looking more pale and nervous

than Neil had ever seen.

'I like your new suit,' he said and though how attractive she looked in the red suit, frilly white blouse and light colored nylon stockings. 'I'm sure your charm will work for Old Frank.'

'Thanks,' Lisa replied. 'I couldn't sleep a wink last night, I should have stayed with you.' She glanced at him and smiled. 'We'll celebrate in style tonight, shall we?'

'Sure will,' Neil replied.

Lisa never turned up in the staff room at morning break so Neil had no idea of how she was getting on. At lunchtime though, his children had just left the room when Lisa came busting in with her face ashen.

'What is it, Lisa,' Neil asked.

'The bastard,' she replied, her lip quivered and huge tears burst from her eyes.

'What happened,' Neil continued. He glanced around, saw the room was empty and took her into his arms.

'Everything is stuffed up,' Lisa sobbed. 'The kids played up, I bumbled up my physical education lesson and the cynical old bugger just stared at me. I reckon he was more interested in my tits than my teaching.'

'Surely that's an exaggeration.'

'Not when half way through my physical education he just shrugged and walked inside. He took the books of the two worse kids in the room and complained because they didn't rule off neatly,' she sobbed. 'Now I got a bloody run in my nylons.'

'I'll whip don town and buy you a new pair,' Neil said quietly. 'But don't worry. It's half over.'

'I'm not going back,' Lisa snapped. 'He wants me to take your bloody class for music and I've got nothing planned.'

'Repeat last week's lesson,' Neil said. 'The kids loved that song you taught them and they're really good with the actions.'

'But they've only done it twice,' Lisa said in a quiet voice. 'I can't go back, Neil. Not with that lecherous old bugger staring at me every time I move. I swear he looks down my front when I bend over.'

'You can and you will,' Neil snapped in a surprisingly angry voice. 'I am not going to have you throw your career away because of the inspector. You're an excellent teacher, Lisa, damned sight more conscientious than I am. You get back there, forget he's in the room and just do your normal routine. Understand!' He grabbed the young woman's hands and stared at her. 'What size nylons do you wear?'

'Long size,' Lisa whispered. She dabbed her eyes and managed a smile. 'Thanks, Neil. I feel a little more confident now.'

'Good,' Ryan replied. 'Have your lunch and by that time I'll be back with your new nylons.'

'But I've got no money here,' Lisa sniffed.

'I have,' Neil replied. 'So you go back for me, even if it isn't for yourself.'

'Yes, Neil,' Lisa replied, squeezed his arm and walked out.

By the time Neil had returned from the dress shop a block away, the lunch hour was almost over, He thought about Lisa and decided to do something. As usual the inspector wasn't at school over lunch but Neil set his class on project work and intercepted the man as he crossed the playground at ten past one.

'Mr. Mulligan,' he said 'I want a word.' There was no please and his voice was determined.

The inspector stopped mid stride and glanced at him. 'Isn't your class waiting, Mr. Johnston?' he asked.

'I have a complaint,' Neil said. He was angry now and was not going to let this man intimidate him. 'It's about Lisa.'

'I guessed as much,' Mulligan replied and stood with a finger rubbing the bridge of his nose.

'She was very distressed about the way she was treated,' Neil continued. 'She'd a damn good teacher and I don't think it is fair that you...'

'Your girlfriend?' Mulligan interrupted.

Neil was caught unawares and forgot what he was about to say. 'Yes,' he spluttered. 'Why not?'

'No reason,' Frank Mulligan replied. 'My wife was a student teacher when I met her. They closed the teachers colleges in the war and I'd just been called up in the army.' He gave a small smile and the stern eyes softened. 'We were married three months later and, over three decades later, we're still together.'

'But I still think you were too sever with Lisa,' Neil said. The anger was gone but he was still determined to have his say.

'There are three types of young teachers in my estimation,' Mulligan said. 'Those who have potential, those who will probably get there and those who are wasting their time. With the last group I don't bother to push them but the better teachers need to be able to take criticism and advice. You fit into that group.'

'But not ridicule,' Neil snapped.

The inspector's eyes bore into the man confronting him. 'Miss Woolstone has a huge potential, Neil. She is highly nervous, I know but twice this morning she defended her actions when I purposely tried to find fault. I regret that she took my probing to heart.'

'Then tell her,' Neil whispered.

'I'll leave that to you,' the man replied. 'I believe she is taking your music at one thirty. You'd better get back to them, don't you think?'

Neil nodded and walked slowly back to Room Seven to find the room deadly quiet. Every child was doing project work and Nancy; the duty monitor was up the front with a piece of chalk in her hand. 'There were no talkers, Mr. Johnston,' she said with a grin. 'We all saw you talking to Mr. Mulligan on the tennis court and thought he might come back with you.'

'Thank you, Nancy' Neil said and turned to the class. 'Listen everyone.' He waited while pencils were put down and continued. 'Mr. Mulligan is coming in soon.'

A groan went through the room.

'Miss Woolstone will be taking music.'

'Can we do the songs she taught us?' one of the boys called out.

'Ryan!' Neil replied and the boy flushed. 'Yes, you will. I hope you all know the actions Miss Woolstone taught you on Tuesday.'

'We do,' chorused the children and a buzz of excitement filled the air.

When Lisa walked in ten minutes later the class were already sitting up with the drums, clickers and triangles distributed and the piano wheeled in from the storage room ready for use.

Lisa glanced at Neil and smiled nervously. 'I saw you talking to him,' she whispered. 'Whatever you said, it worked. He came in, asked to talk to the class, told them how he enjoyed the morning and said he was looking forward to seeing their art when he came back after little play.'

She stopped when the man in question walked in the door and sat down beside Nancy. 'And what is this new song I've heard you're practicing for the school concert?' he asked.

Neil smiled and walked out. Now all he had to do was to get Lisa's class to make a good job of the pictures they were drawing for the wall chart painted on Monday.

At three thirty five, Lisa walked on the bus and handed Neil a tiny slip of paper. 'A note for you, Mr. Johnston,' she said in a serious voice and sat down in her old place near the rear of the bus.

Neil frowned and held the paper as he started off. He drove around the corner and stopped by the other school entrance. There was a short wait here for the five high school children that transferred from another bus so he had time to peep at the note.

"The afternoon went well..." it read. " I phoned Mum to say I was staying in town with Diane tonight but guess where I'll really be? I brought some new shortie pajamas just in case— very thin material. Interested? Lisa."

Neil caught her smiling blue eyes in the rear vision mirror. 'Your idea has merit, Miss Johnston,' he said in a very formal voice. 'I am interested in your idea.'

The high school children arrived so he couldn't see her reaction because of the bodies blocking his vision as they fought their way in. The tiny Bedford bus swung around and, without thinking Neil began to whistle a little tune from Abba. The children all began singing as they headed back to The Junction. Grading was over and a night of lovemaking was ahead. What else did one need in life?

October was spring, a time for renewal and growth. The lambs through this sheep farming hinterland were growing and the weather turned hot. Neil and Lisa were inseparable and their affection towards each other was now certainly love. It was also a time for meeting parents. One Saturday Neil took Lisa home to Palmerston North to meet his parents and younger brother at the Johnston family home tucked in a cul-de-sac near the hospital. Kelvin was back from Victoria University in Wellington where he was in his final year of a law degree.

The younger brother could hardly keep her eyes off Lisa and dug Neil in the ribs when the girl was out of earshot. 'Hell, big brother,' he teased. 'She's one stunner, isn't she. Better than the old model.'

'Yes,' Neil chuckled. 'Keep your beady little eyes off her. You can have Lesley if you wish.'

'Gee thanks,' Kelvin snorted. 'I'm not that hard up.' He grinned. 'Tell me when you're sick of Lisa, though. I won't mind that hand me down. By the way, I'd head back straight after lunch, if I was you.'

'Why?' Neil asked.

'Lesley and her parents are visiting.'

'Oh hell,' Neil snorted and told Lisa a few moments later. She, though, insisted on staying and meeting the old girlfriend.

The atmosphere when Lesley arrived was strained but cordial with Lisa being very diplomatic. In fact, the two women talked away quite amiably and the only moment of slight embarrassment was when Lesley caught Neil on his own when he was on the back lawn.

'I got your answer to my letter?' she said quietly.

'I guessed that,' Neil muttered. 'It's not your fault, Lesley. We were just drifting, weren't we?'

'I guess,' Lesley said. She was closer to Neil's own age than Lisa and was still an attractive woman. 'I'm sorry about that night. I wouldn't have reported you and, on hindsight, I wish we had gone all the way.' She squeezed Neil's arm, fixed her hazel eyes on his for a second and walked away.

'You know, I like her,' Lisa said as they drove back to Taihape late that evening. She gazed at Neil. 'She still has the hots for you, though, hasn't she?'

'Yes,' Neil shrugged. 'I hate hurting people but I'm glad I saw her again,' He grinned and squeezed Lisa's leg. She was wearing a round-necked top, shorts and ankle socks and, in his opinion made Lesley look forty. 'Now what?'

'Sunday dinner at my place,' Lisa replied. 'It's about time you met Mum and Dad.'

Sarah Woolstone was an older version of her daughter, still slim and attractive with a few strands of grey in her blonde hair. She had Lisa's bubbly personality as she chatted away with Neil and made him welcome. Andy Woolstone, Lisa's father was a decade older than his wife but tanned muscles bulged from under his black singlet and his balding head was constantly covered in a massive wide brimmed hat. For a second time in two days, Neil found himself scrutinised. Andy cornered him in the living room while Lisa and her mother were doing the dishes after an enormous country meal.

'So are you serious about young Lisa?' the man said bluntly.

'Yes,' Neil answered with a direct reply.

'Well be kind to her, Lad,' Woolstone said. 'She had a very bad experience at the beginning of the year and I don't want her hurt again. Understand?'

'I think so,' Neil replied.

'And don't think you can rush her into bed, Neil,' Andy added in a neutral voice. 'She's not that sort of girl. If you like and respect her you'll be patient and can one day get married. Oh, I know you young stallions think you can bed anything in a skirt. If you are that way inclined, don't do it with my daughter. She'll just freeze and you'll spoil your relationship.'

'I'll do nothing to hurt Lisa,' Neil replied and hoped he wouldn't flush.

'Good,' Andy replied. 'Now, if you'd like some extra money over your holidays I could do with some help when we start hay making. It's heavy work but I'll make it worth while. I cut hay and bail for several farmers in the district. It's a bit of a sideline for me.'

'I'd like that,' Neil replied relieved at the change of topic. 'Thanks.'

'The old hypocrite,' Lisa laughed when Neil repeated the conversation to her later that afternoon. 'I know I was born only four months after Mum and him were married. I found their marriage certificate a few years back and saw it was dated a year later than I'd always been told. That's the trouble, I think. Mum has stuck with Dad but I don't think she's happy. Oh, they get on okay but she seems so sad at times.' She turned to Neil. 'That's not going to happen to me,' she said. 'Why should we be forced into something because of what the neighbours will think?'

Neil was about to make a lighthearted jest but noticed Lisa was quite serious. 'Times are changing, Lisa,' he said. 'I'm sure it won't be so bad for our generation.'

Monday, November the first in 1976 was the traditional day the gradings arrived. Claire returned from the post office at nine thirty and knocked on Room Seven's door.

'A letter for you, Neil,' she said and handed him a long brown envelope with OHMS on the top left corner.

In spite of himself, Neil's hand shook as he thanked their office assistant and took the letter. His whole future depended on the contents. If he received a three it meant another three years in Taihape or another assistant's job but a four, as Frank Mulligan had hinted at, meant he could pick up a sole charge school somewhere. These tiny schools with less than twenty-five pupils were well sort after, especially in the better districts.

He told his class who had become noisy to do project work, slit the envelope open and withdrew the one white sheet inside.

He opened it and moved his eyes to the bottom where a row of numbers from one to nine was printed. His eyes bulged. Holy hell! The six was circled.

He got a six! In his wildest dreams he never thought he would get more than a five.

'Keep on with your work. Colin, you're this week's monitor,' Neil directed the class and with a wide grin on his face, slipped the sheet back in the envelope he headed out to find Lisa.

He almost knocked her over at the corner of the corridor. She looked as excited as he felt and was holding her own grading sheet.

'I got a three,' she screamed, ran into his arms and kissed him passionately. 'Neil, I got a three. That's a top grading for PAs. Only ten percent get a three. Oh hell! I thought I'd get a one.'

They kissed again in the empty corridor until Lisa stood back and noticed Neil's envelope. 'Oh Sweetheart,' she said. 'It's so mean of me. How did you do?'

'Not too bad,' Neil shrugged and handed her his copy.

'Oh, I'm sorry, Neil,' Lisa said in sympathy and took his sheet out. She unfolded it, read the contents and looked up. 'You old bugger,' she retorted with her eyes sparkling and everything was again kisses and hugs.

The pair never noticed the headmaster walk around the corner. He coughed and the two young teachers spun around and leapt back from each other. Both had crimson faces.

'Good news?' Wayne said with an unreadable expression on his face.

'Yes,' Lisa replied and, still hot with embarrassment, handed both the grading sheets to the headmaster.

He read them and smiled. 'I thought this would happen,' he said. 'Congratulations. The other two PAs both got a two.' He handed the sheets back and shook both their hands. 'There's sausage rolls for morning tea,' he added. 'My shout for the hard working staff, I have.'

'Oh My God,' Lisa laughed after the headmaster left.' He caught us smooching and didn't say a word.'

'No,' Neil chuckled and kissed her again.

Thank you for downloading this novel .We hope you enjoyed the first three chapters.

Wind Across the Playground can be purchased for \$US5:00 from the publisher RJ's

http://www.rjs-ebooks.com/Authors/ross_richdale.htm

Visit Ross Richdale's site for info on his eighteen novels

<http://www.ebookfiction.biz>