



‘Your relatives, friends, pen pals ... even out-of-towners you pass in Main Street, I can’t emphasise strongly enough how important it is that you encourage them to move to Outback Creek and enrol in our school.’ Ms Southern’s eyes watered behind her wire-rimmed glasses as she spoke at school assembly.

In front of her, the tin-walled stadium was two-thirds empty.

Our principal ran her hand through her thick, dark hair. ‘You must promote our school. If enrolments fail to increase, our

school's future cannot be guaranteed.'

'Great,' sighed Pete. 'We've been running out of teachers for ages, now we're running out of students too!'

My best mate was right. Since our last Crazy Relief Teacher, Mr Crikey, headed outback to study the occurrence of double-yolkers in emu eggs, the school hadn't been able to find a replacement. The teacher shortage meant we were sharing the grade two's classroom *and* their teacher. In fairness, it had given Pete a chance to finally learn the alphabet and three times tables before finishing grade six. But for Nathan, the only kid in the school with an IQ higher than some teachers, it had been a battle. He'd taken to begging the yard duty teacher to fire algebra questions at him.

'Stand for the national anthem,' said Ms

Southern.

Brittany hit play on the music system.

With his back straight and hands by his side, Pete sang loudly. ‘Australians all eat ostriches.’

Not for the first time that week, his grade two buddy corrected him, ‘It’s Australians all *let us rejoice.*’

‘No, it’s not!’

Bailey shook his head. I imagine he added the words of the national anthem to the list of things he couldn’t teach his older buddy, along with counting backwards and reading an analogue clock.

Finally, the last chords of the national anthem echoed through the stadium.

‘Thank-you, students,’ said Ms Southern. ‘You may return to your classrooms. That includes you, grade six.’

Holly's eyebrows shot up.

Nathan hurried towards the door. 'They've located a new teacher!'

Pete pointed at the clock. 'It's ten-past three-twelve o'clock on Friday arvo. We're not getting a new teacher. Ms Southern will be teaching us.'

The blinds were closed in our grade six classroom to block the blistering sun. Nathan flicked the light switch.

Pete flipped open his iPad. 'It's stupid getting a new teacher when the school week's nearly over.'

'They could allocate homework for the weekend!' Nathan rubbed his hands together.

'What's the point? The school will probably be shut down by Monday.' Pete flicked his

iPad around to show us a meme he'd created. In the photo, Ms Southern stood at the front of assembly. The angle of the picture made it look as if she were alone in the stadium. At the bottom he'd typed, "Outback Creek Primary School, Class of Next Year".

'Get rid of that!' I blurted.

Pete's head snapped towards me. The colour drained from his face.

'Sorry mate,' I replied. 'I can't think about our school closing down.'

If anyone loved Outback Creek more than me, it was my red-headed mate. 'Me neither, Steele. I'm not finishing grade six anywhere else.'

'You reckon you'll finish grade six here?' called out the knuckle-headed bully, Radley.

'Says the boy who took two years to finish

prep,' replied Pete.

'What'll you do if Outback Creek closes?'

asked Holly.

'I'll go to home school.'

'No one *goes* to home school,' said Nathan.

'That's the idea. The school is located at your home so travel isn't required.'

'Fine. I'll *get* home-schooled.'

'Your parents both work,' I said.

'I'll teach myself.'

'Ha! Pete Peterson running a home-school.'

Radley butted in again. 'School photos will be easy. You can take a selfie.'

His only friend Weasel cracked up. 'You could plan a school camp where you sleep in your own bed instead of your mummy's!'

Pete screwed up his nose at the thought of attending the nearest school if ours closed;

a private school half an hour away. ‘I’m not going to Riverview College. Those kids have to wear a tie every day.’

‘You’d look great in a red tie,’ teased Holly, reaching towards the collar of Pete’s orange polo top.

‘And you’d look pretty in a red Riverview dress.’

‘No way!’ Holly was wearing faded blue school shorts. It seemed as though the rips and stains would have been from a year’s worth of footy matches, but they were fresh. ‘Dresses are for—’

Suddenly, the classroom lights flicked off courtesy of the manicured hand, with red painted fingernails and skin that seemed to glow, reaching in from the corridor.

*Doof-doof-doof!*

Techno music blared.

The line of lights running down the middle of the classroom flashed on.

The classroom door flung open.

A tall lady strode into the room wearing white pants that billowed like clouds. Her legs were so long it wouldn't have surprised anyone if she was wearing stilts. Her sleeveless, navy blue top featured a hood that was draped over her head. The lady stared straight ahead as she took long, deliberate steps underneath the row of lights. Her left hand gripped her hip while her right swung, causing nearby students to duck.

Reaching the front of the classroom, the lady paused then spun back to face the class. With a wave of her right hand she flicked off her hood, revealing shiny blonde hair that fell

over her shoulders.

Brittany squealed. 'You're Jennifer Runway!'

The lady's face remained expressionless.  
Her gaze focussed on the back wall.

'Jennifer run-where?' asked Holly.

The lady spoke. 'Ms Runway, darling. Host of *Australia's Next Top Model* ... and your fab new teacher.'