

FORBIDDEN EMBRACE

By Rachel Loveday

**This short story was inspired by an Illawarra high school's ban on hugging in 2011.*

My jaw dropping reaction was mirrored by the other 800 students at my school when the tall and wide principal, Mr Blakely announced that not only we were not allowed to wear casual clothing under our uniform, or nail polish or chunky jewellery or have bright coloured hair, but that hugging was officially banned on school grounds.

"What will they ban next? Smiling?" I angrily whispered behind gritted teeth into my best mate, Kelly's ear. I hug her every time I see her.

Kelly laughed at this as the teachers were prancing around the assembly hall, in belief that they were guards in a prison as Mr Blakely went on and on that a school is much like a workplace and that everyone should behave appropriately, no doubt he hasn't been hugged recently.

"Workplace my arse, they don't pay us, why the fuck should we play by their rules!" Kelly complained loud enough so the teachers could hear-she loved nothing more than poking the bears.

"It's not as if they can stop us!"

I nodded in passive agreement as we walked arm-in-arm to our first class.

The assembly three days later was much worse because a few parents-Kelly's included, went to the local newspaper and told them all about the hugging ban.

Mr Blakely droned on and on about the ban again and that we must listen to him properly so we can "understand" him.

"He can go on and on as many times as he likes, it's all the same shit, nothing's changed and it never will." Kelly said as we left assembly.

"What are they going to do if we do hug? Expel us? I can just see my rents sitting in Blakely's office now, 'Mr and Mrs Hunter, it doesn't matter that Kelly is a smart, straight-A student and the school captain, she was caught hugging and the rules say we MUST expel her!' The teachers have way too much time on their hands!"

I knew that Kelly was up to something when *she* was at school as *I* walked through the gates, she takes great joy in the teachers' reactions when she strolls through the gates literally a minute before the bell rings.

"What have you done now?" I ask as she links her arm with mine.

"We haven't done anything yet" she says with a smirk.

"We? What do you mean we?"

Instead of telling me the answer she took me to the assembly hall, our whole year was standing in there, waiting for her.

"What's going on?"

"We're going to have a cuddle-huddle!"

"A *cuddle-huddle*? Are you serious?"

"Yes, I got everyone our year to go along with it. I told Mr Blakely that we were going to talk to the school about the slave auction, but we're just going have a cuddle-huddle to see what they're going to do about it."

"Kelly can't you just complain to me and your parents and not actually do anything about it like a normal person?"

"That's your definition of '*normal*' and no!"

"Well you can count me out."

"Penny *come on!*"

"You can get expelled if you want to, but I won't!"

"Fine, do what you want!"

Mr Blakely once again drilled into us that we "misunderstood" the hug ban, I tuned out the moment he said "just on the 'hug ban'..."

I looked up, at the stage to see Kelly smiling from ear to ear, showing her joy that Mr Blakely had no idea what was going to happen next.

I was pulled out of my zone when I heard Mr Blakely start talking about the slave auction.

“Kelly Hunter will explain all the details about the auction now. The floor’s yours now Kelly...”