

A dog named Blue

School came out about three fifteen. When Yuri Kirakov came down the steps he saw the roadside was like a chaotic parking lot. Parents were parked as if road rules didn't exist and no one seemed to mind.

Yuri wandered through the gates and past groups of parents who were gossiping or calling their children. Some smiled at him. Others hardly noticed he existed.

He made his way down the dusty road from the school to the small country post office to check for his father's mail. It was only slowly that he became aware that he was being followed. He became aware of a coughing sound. Immediately regretting his action, he turned around. It was the three boys he had seen in the Towambin Post Office earlier. After one day at the new school, he knew their names.

Sam Butler was the big one with the whingeing voice. One was Lindsay Miller, who followed Sam around all day and laughed at his rather idiotic gibes. The other one was Tom Buckley. He seemed to be a bit smarter than the other two.

A blue heeler followed close to Sam's heels. He was softly snarling.

"Ker-ruff-cough," Tom coughed, as if his throat was full of phlegm he couldn't remove.

"Bad cough you got, lad," Sam said sternly, in a mock adult's voice.

Lindsay laughed.

"What do you reckon, Yuri?" asked Sam in a superior manner. "You look as if yer a smart one."

"Yuri! Yuri! Sounds like fertiliser Dad spreads around the fruit trees." Tom pretended to double up laughing.

Lindsay's face was blank for a moment and then he joined in.

"Well," demanded Sam, "what do you think? Is it a cold?"

Yuri had stopped walking and was facing the oncoming boys. His bottom lip trembled. He wished they would just leave him alone.

Sam looked to his dog. "What do you reckon, Blue? Can you loosen his tongue? Go on, Blue. Skitch him."

Lindsay looked at Sam, not sure if he were serious.

The dog moved forward, down low, watching Yuri.

Sam snarled some words of encouragement to the dog.

The dog crept forward, baring its teeth.

Alan Horsfield

