

Wolf on the Fold

Judith Clarke

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The year is 1935, it is mid-winter, the country is in a deep economic depression, and fourteen-year-old Kenny's father has died, leaving him responsible for his mother and four siblings. Getting a job seems nearly impossible for a boy when so many men are without work. Kenny is scared, but puts on a brave face for his mum.

She had warned him, "Don't stop for anyone" while riding his bike through the desolate flatlands on the way to the factories, but the fire crackling at the side of the road is so very inviting. Mum's words flash through his brain when the old man, almost unseen behind the fire, grabs the boy's legs. A line of poetry—"The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold"—learned grudgingly at school, runs through his head, keeping Kenny strangely calm until the right moment comes when he can escape the old man's deadly grip.

This story is one of five in the book that are snippets from Kenny's life and involve his daughters, immigrant neighbors, and his great-grandsons. Each of the stories deals with young people coping in the often insensitive adult world.

The author, an Australian, is well known in the United States for her young adult award-winning novels, including her Al Capsella series. Her characters learn and grow from their interactions with others and her message comes through unobtrusively. "We were only kids... as if when something bad or terrible happens to a child instead of an adult, it's never as painful, or real." Some of the language may seem a bit foreign—mum, g'day, cuppa—but it's sparsely sprinkled and hardly noticeable.

Growing up is serious business and those adolescents who read to gain insight into the adult world will certainly enjoy this story and its captivating characters. Adults will, too.

LINDA COOLEY (September / October 2002)

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