

I'm Not Scared

Niccolò Ammaniti

There were divided opinions in the group about the book *I'm Not Scared* by Niccolò Ammaniti. No-one said that they really loved the story, though that was rather difficult considering the subject. This was about an Italian village named Acqua Traverse, whose inhabitants were involved in a kidnapping. It is told from the point of view of Michele Amitrano, the nine-year old son of one of the villagers, as written when he was an adult. The writing has an almost breathless air to it, with mostly short sentences, perhaps imitating the speech of a young child. Acqua Traverse was set in wheat-growing country and the height of the growing wheat is often referred to in the story, which may be an allusion to how the events appear to Michele.

The story is set in the summer of 1978, which was particularly hot and stifling. Adults spent most of each day indoors with the blinds drawn which left the children, who seemed immune to the heat, to play around unsupervised. The narrator was part of this group, neither the leader nor the youngest. As is often the case with children, his five-year old sister Maria was always wanting to become involved. The eldest of the gang, at age 12, was a boy known as Skull, who was strong for his age but none too bright and with a nasty streak. He had an older brother named Felice, who was well on his way to a life of crime.

At the start of the book, the children decide to venture beyond the confines of the village. They have a race up a hill in a wheatfield and come across a dilapidated building at the top. Maria tries to follow and causes Michele to come last, for which he is expected to pay a forfeit. In so doing, he discovers a child in a covered hole whom he assumes to be dead. He doesn't tell anyone about his discovery, but goes there alone the next day and finds that the child, whose name is Filippo, is alive but in a very bad way. It soon becomes clear to the reader that Filippo has been kidnapped and the villagers are involved.

Michele begins to feel himself responsible for Filippo's welfare who is being watched over from time to time by the sadistic Felice. When Felice discovers Michele with Filippo, the villagers realise that they are in danger of discovery. They meet in Michele's father's house and the meetings, which involve a lot of shouting, include an unpleasant old man whom Michele later discovers is a crook from Rome named Sergio Materia. Also attending was Avvocato Emilio Scardaccione, a local landowner and lawyer in Rome. Michele's father tells him not to see Filippo again on danger of being shot, but Michele had made a promise to help Filippo. He then discovers that Materia wants Filippo killed so he sets off to rescue him.

This latter part of the book is written in a very exciting way, but the ending is confusing. This may be because the author wished to highlight how events would have appeared to a 9-year old, but the narrator was still the adult Michele. The group felt that the lack of reasons behind the kidnapping of Filippo and why the villagers and others were involved, not to mention the consequences of the events, was rather unsatisfactory.