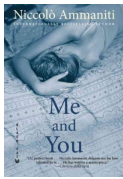


Me and You



This short novel describes a teen's experience not fitting in at school. What makes Me and You different is that it's set in Rome, so you get a feel for the modern Italian family. Lorenzo has trouble making friends. Observing other kids at school closely, he sees what they do to fit in-- what clothes they wear, how they talk, where they hang out, etc. and he tries to blend in but pretending to be someone he's not goes against his basic being. Nobody hangs out with him at school; he has no friends. But it's driving his overly-doting Mom crazy.

So one day he informs her that he has been invited on a ski week with several of his most popular classmates. It's a bold-faced lie to make her happy and to get her to leave him alone. But then he must improvise a place to stay as well as provide chirruping conversation on his cell to convince his mom that he has gone to Cortina and is having a grand time. He sneaks back into the basement of their house where the former owner's furniture is stored. Apparently, his father bought the house on a reverse mortgage plan, and even though the woman has died, they have never gotten rid of her belongings. Lorenzo has set up a cot and stored enough food and sodas for the week. Also, carefully gathered are piles of books.

The very first day his mother phones and asks how the trip was. He fakes being at the ski lodge, but his mom keeps ordering to put his friend's mother on the line. After making up a weak excuse, he hangs up; a couple of minutes later the phone rings again. It's his older half-sister who seldom contacts him. Lorenzo decides it's a plot to make him confess that he has no friends and was invited nowhere. But instead his sister needs to get something from their father. That night, she bangs on the basement window. She's in trouble and begs to stay. Leonardo rebuffs her and only agrees to give her shelter after she threatens to out his fake-tan and fake-ski-vacation.

The siblings spend a week together. It's a tense, scary time and Leonardo forces himself to take care of someone else for the first time. In the process, he discovers how much he loves his sister. She has addiction issues and needs someone to help her through a difficult period.

It's a beautiful coming-of-age story in which a young man discovers who he really is and how important it is to just be yourself. Another psychological study of siblings that you might enjoy is Ivan Doig's Whistling Season.

Posted by Dory L. on March 1, 2012

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