

La prima neve: A Tale of Two Souls

Sometimes, when you run from a tragedy, you find yourself confronted by another, and in such circumstances, hope can be illusive. *La prima neve* tells the story of two seemingly different people, and the strong bond which unexpectedly forms between them. No matter how hard we try to avoid them, the psychological effects of a tragedy are inevitable, and even time, unfortunately, instead of repairing these damages, fails in its mission. At times, however, it happens that two people surmount the ethnic and cultural barriers that divide them and identify with one another, so that then, after the loss of a fundamental part of their beings, they are able to rediscover themselves.

Dani is a Togolese immigrant fleeing conflict in Libya whose wife, Layla, tragically died in childbirth following their perilous Mediterranean crossing. Dani lives in a refugee home near Trento with his infant daughter, Fatou. This rural and insular area in which Bavarian German and the Italian dialect are still spoken provides a breathtaking yet contrasted backdrop, which emphasizes Dani and the other refugees' otherness compared with the local villagers. Dani feels despondent and lost, blaming himself for the death of his wife, who he continues to see in the looks of his daughter. For this reason, he leaves his daughter under the care of a neighbor, a fellow refugee, while he trudges through the monotony of daily life. Possessed by this sense of guilt, as well as to guarantee Fatou a good future, Dani believes that the best choice is to run away to Paris on his own. This conviction demonstrates that all too often for immigrants, the search for a better life for one's family only leads to more suffering, and that the simple act of escaping is not always enough to heal the psychological wounds war inflicts on the human soul.

Michele is an 11-year-old boy struggling to cope with the tragic loss of his father, who years earlier was trapped under a landslide. Skipping school and playing in the forest with his friends initially seems like an effective remedy, but this turns out to be merely a pastime which does little to help his situation. Michele in fact suffers from nightmares—in which he sees his father with an amputated leg—and is unable to relate with his mother, Elisa. For a family, the loss of a loved one is, in a certain sense, an *amputation*, metaphorically but also literally. An individual perceives this sudden loss as a true amputation of the soul. Michele's and Dani's suffering are, in a certain aspect, two sides of the same coin—they are both *amputees*—but the differing circumstances in which they find themselves lend to each a bitter and undeniably unique essence.

Their lives interweave thanks to Michele's mother, who volunteers at the refugee home, and his grandfather, Pietro, a carpenter who gives work to Dani. The fact that Elisa is able to help at the refugee home despite her own family's struggles in a certain sense reflects the nature of the refugee crisis and speaks to the spirit of sacrifice and charity embodied by many. When Michele and Dani begin working alongside one another in the grandfather's shop, a special bond forms between them. While they pass the time together, collecting wood among the mountains and losing themselves in innumerable conversations, Michele finds in Dani the fatherly figure he had been missing. Likewise, Dani gains a new perspective on the world and on life thanks to Michele.

It is not just *snow* that Dani sees for *the first* time. Seated alongside Michele and his father's memorial plaque, surrounded by the natural splendor of the Italian Alps, Dani realizes that he can make peace with his tragic past and find happiness with his daughter right where they

are. *La Prima Neve* artfully shows how, in a world that can seem so full of differences and sadness, the healing powers of nature and empathy can fill these gaps and help people face life and move forward together.