

After Auschwitz: A Love Story

Brenda Webster

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"When we're young we tend to think of memory as something belonging to us. There are good memories and bad ones, but aside from forgetting names occasionally, it is hard to imagine what ceasing to rely on your memory means. My mind still functions enough for me to be frightened and feel diminished. Someday, I hope not too soon, I'll cease to be alarmed...."

-- Renzo, from After Auschwitz: A Love Story

Two of the 20th century's terrible A's collide in this powerful novel -- Alzheimer's Disease and the Auschwitz death camp. **Brenda Webster** brings to bear her considerable knowledge of Jewish and Italian history and culture, personal acquaintance with the families of luminaries like Primo Levi, and a lifetime of psychological insight as she observes the intellectual decline of Renzo, a once brilliant writer and filmmaker.

The novel is set entirely in Rome

in 2010, and benefits from the author's comfortable familiarity with the city's haunts, both hidden and famous. Renzo, aware that he is slipping deeper and deeper into the haze of Alzheimer's, keeps a journal in which he grapples with his complicated marriage to Hannah, who survived the death camps as a child and went on to become a chronicler of that experience. Renzo knows how painful it is for Hannah to lose yet another loved one -- himself -- as he chronicles his own failing grip on reality.

This story of enduring love -- a love that makes the pain bearable -- inspires hope where there appears to be despair, and allows humor to leaven the loaf of existence. As Renzo's rich memories of the artistic and intellectual currents of the 20th century begin to fade, highly lyrical passages elucidate his sophisticated anguish and his child-like wonder.



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