

## After Auschwitz: A Love Story

**Brenda Webster**

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*An intimate and real portrayal of memory loss tells the story of an imperfect love maintained through mutual caretaking.*

Brenda Webster's novel *After Auschwitz* is subtitled "A Love Story," and it is often a melancholy one. Written in the style of a first-person memoir by an elderly film director beginning to lose his memory, it details his long and complicated marriage to a Holocaust survivor, and how the pair come to support one another through their difficulties.

Hannah, the book's female lead and survivor of a Nazi camp, becomes a successful writer focusing on Holocaust stories. In truth, however, *After Auschwitz* has far less to do with the horrors she experienced in her younger years than the horror her husband feels about what's happening to his mind. Hannah's backstory clearly informs her life, from her decision not to bring children into a world with such evils to her appreciation for the love of a deeply flawed man, and in the way her strength allows her to become a caretaker to someone who once took care of her. Renzo, a very successful Italian filmmaker, is the narrator of this story. He is approaching ninety as the story begins, and he is very aware that his memory is now going.

Webster does an expert job at working Renzo's deteriorating condition into the narration of his life. Though the subject is broached early, the actual memory loss is written subtly at first. Renzo often asks the reader if he's already talked about a particular piece of information, or he repeats a few details verbatim. Later in the novel, Renzo focuses more on what is happening to him, expressing fears about the future and anxiety over his dependence on Hannah, while he later leaves key players or details out of anecdotes he admits to misremembering. His love for Hannah is weaker than it should be, as he admits to leaving her and returning only when he felt she was in need, but the writing portrays this as a difficult character choice and not a contrivance.

While Renzo and Hannah's love story is far from perfect, Webster makes it feel real. As Renzo says when describing his first glimpse of Hannah, "I say I'll never forget, but it's more accurate to say that it will be one of the last things to go when my memory is ultimately lost."

JEFF FLEISCHER (Summer 2014)

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