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The Tenth Witness

Leonard Rosen
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Made vivid by Rosen's careful crafting, inquisitive Henri and the variety of countries in which he investigates dig up intriguing realities from the past.

Leonard Rosen's *The Tenth Witness* reintroduces handsome Henri Poincare, who readers met as a mature man in *All Cry Chaos*. In this prequel, we find a youthful Henri navigating the waters of both romance and a sunken-ship salvage that could change the trajectory of his career forever. Yet nothing comes easy for Henri: his beautiful girlfriend's family of steel magnates might just turn out to be Nazi war criminals. In his investigations, Henri meets the sobering, sickening realities of not only Germany's terrible past but of the all-too real present.

The reader follows the ambitious twenty-something as he narrates his journey through his childhood and his present. Rosen portrays our hero's motivations as honorable in restrained, clear prose. Henri is a character whose emotions and observations are rich with fledgling wisdom. He is haunted by the ghosts of his honorary uncle to whom he feels a sense of responsibility. This sense pitches him head first into a search that could cost him either his girlfriend or his life. Yet Henri is a man who cannot help but wake the giant; he cannot help but wonder at the true value of "bloodstained gold."

He forces the reader to ask whether there are any "necessary evils" that can or should be buried, as Henri's girlfriend, Liesel, claims. Is a murderer who later contributes to the recovery of a nation any less of a murderer? Perhaps. But perhaps not. As Henri says of the lack of a statute of limitations on murder: "It's the law's way of saying that memory matters and that we must stand for who we are and what we've done."

The characters the author draws for us, including a handful of ancient Holocaust survivors, suspected war criminals, and even a set of diabolical dogs, are so vivid that they make every scene more chilling. Rosen is a gifted writer of dialogue and scenery, working comfortably to take us with Henri to Germany, Hong Kong, Belgium, and elsewhere.

The novel has its slow points in its first quarter but soon picks up as Henri's investigations intensify. In addition to the excitement of its latter pages, *The Tenth Witness* offers a thoughtful treatise on what it is to forget, to forgive, and to take responsibility for the past. Through Henri Poincare, readers of all ages can appreciate the terrible beauty of a life lived with love for others.
LEIA MENLOVE (Fall 2013)

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