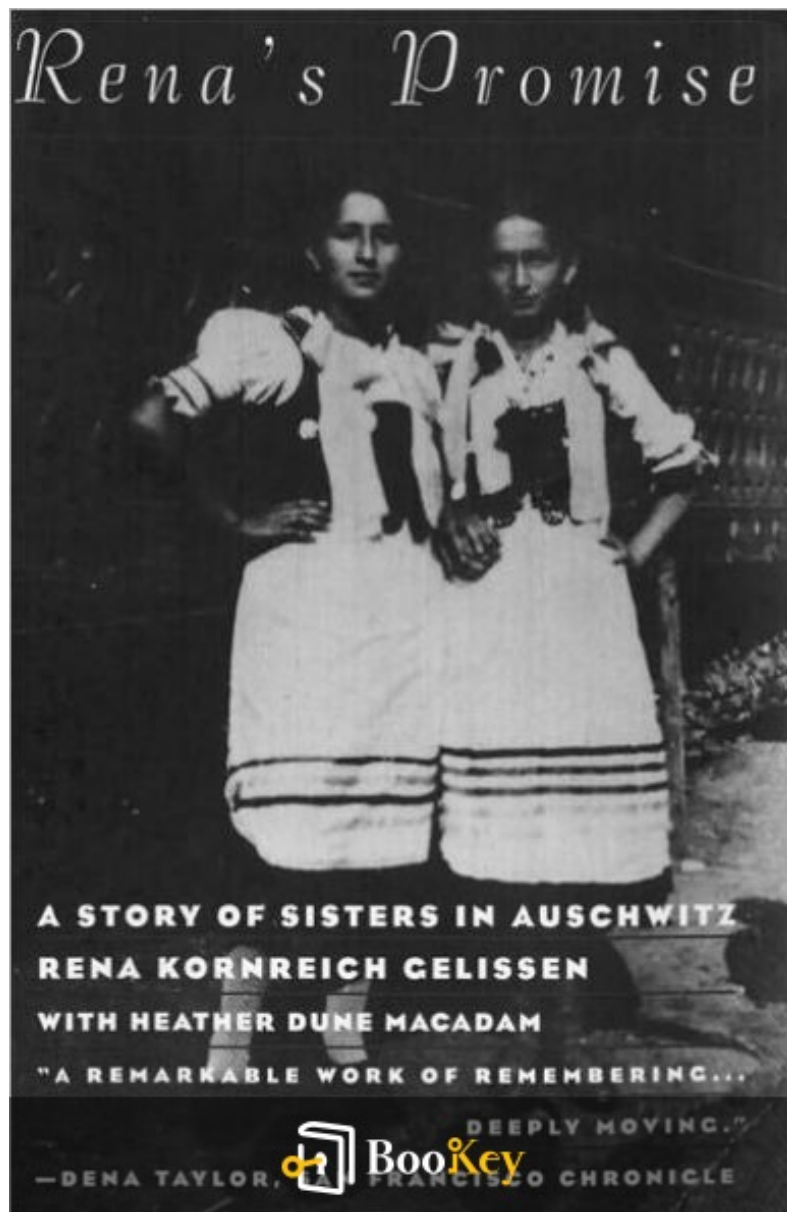


Rena's Promise - Two Sisters In Auschwitz PDF

rena kornreich gelissen



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About the book

Quote Reflection

"I do not hate. To hate is to let Hitler win." - Rena Kornreich Gelissen

Critical Acclaim

- "The most important book of the modern age!" - Neal Lavon, Voice of America

- "The most historically accurate book ever written of the first transport of women into Auschwitz; the only narrative by a survivor of that transport, who endured 3 years and 41 days in the camps." - Irena Strezlecka, Director of the Museum of Women at Auschwitz

Historical Context

March 26, 1942, marked the arrival of the first transport of 999 young Jewish women into Auschwitz, including Rena Kornreich, the 716th woman numbered at the camp. Shortly thereafter, her sister Danka joined her, initiating a poignant journey of love and bravery that would span three years and 41 days, from the establishment of the Auschwitz death camp until the war's conclusion.

Unique Perspective

Rena's Promise is remarkable not only for its length but also for its rarity; it is the only memoir from a survivor of the inaugural transport that details

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their arduous existence. Rena recounts her grueling existence as a laborer, working 10-12 hours daily under harrowing conditions—making bricks, pushing lorries, and sifting sand, all while confronting horrific challenges. She vividly describes her narrow escape from Dr. Mengele's experiments and her chilling encounters with SS officer Irma Grese.

Rena's story is a powerful testament to the endurance of the human spirit and the capacity for human connection in adversities, transcending borders of nationality and identity.

Educational Relevance

This memoir is utilized in secondary school Holocaust curriculums and is recommended for Holocaust literature collections by the Library Journal.

Explore More

To learn more about Rena Kornreich's life and see related photos, art, and maps, visit [www.renaspromise.com](<http://www.renaspromise.com>).

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Rena's Promise - Two Sisters In Auschwitz Summary

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Who should read this book **Rena's Promise - Two Sisters In Auschwitz**

"Rena's Promise: Two Sisters in Auschwitz" by Rena Kornreich Gelissen is essential reading for anyone interested in Holocaust literature, history, and the resilience of the human spirit. It is particularly significant for students, educators, and history enthusiasts who seek to understand the personal narratives behind the atrocities of World War II. The book offers a unique perspective on the bond between sisters under unimaginable circumstances, making it a poignant read for those who appreciate stories of love, survival, and hope amidst despair. Additionally, it serves as a valuable resource for discussions about empathy, human rights, and the importance of remembering the past.

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Key insights of Rena's Promise - Two Sisters In Auschwitz in table format

Title	Rena's Promise: Two Sisters in Auschwitz
Author	Rena Kornreich Gelissen
Genre	Memoir, Historical Non-fiction
Published	1995
Setting	World War II, Nazi-occupied Europe, Auschwitz Concentration Camp
Main Characters	Rena Kornreich, Danka (sister), other camp inmates
Summary	Rena's Promise recounts the experiences of Rena Kornreich and her sister Danka during their time in Auschwitz. The memoir highlights the struggles for survival, the bonds of sisterhood, and the power of hope amidst the horrors of the Holocaust.
Themes	Survival, Sisterhood, Hope, Resilience, The Holocaust, Inhumanity, Love

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Rena's Promise - Two Sisters In Auschwitz

Summary Chapter List

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1. Introduction: The Bond of Sisterhood Amidst Despair

In "Rena's Promise: Two Sisters in Auschwitz," the profound bond of sisterhood serves as a beacon of hope and resilience in the face of unimaginable despair. The narrative unfolds against the grim backdrop of the Holocaust, where the horrors of the concentration camp were not only a physical ordeal but also a psychological torment that threatened to sever the ties that bound loved ones together. Rena Kornreich Gelissen's poignant tale of her relationship with her sister, Dola, illustrates the strength found in familial love even when surrounded by brutality and despair.

From the initial days of their imprisonment, Rena and Dola's sisterhood provides them with the emotional fortitude needed to navigate the daily terrors of life in Auschwitz. Their unwavering support for each other becomes a lifeline, a connection to their past lives filled with laughter and warmth, which starkly contrasts the coldness of their surroundings. Within the confines of the camp, where humanity often seemed lost, the sisters clung to their shared dreams and the memories of better times, which fueled their will to survive.

The bond they share is beautifully illustrated through their acts of kindness, small tokens of love, and the countless whispered promises exchanged in the dark barracks. They become each other's confidants, drawing strength from



their relationship as they confront challenges that would break the spirit of many. This portrayal makes it clear that in the depths of suffering, the love between siblings can become a source of immense strength, a reminder of what they are fighting for—each other.

Rena's narrative is a testament to how love can endure even the harshest trials. It sheds light not only on their individual struggles but also on the broader experience of so many during the Holocaust, emphasizing that hope can be kindled even in the direst circumstances. The sisters' commitment to one another symbolizes the broader human spirit and the resilience that can be found even in the darkest times. This introduction sets the stage for a deeply moving account of survival, underscoring that amidst despair, the promise of sisterhood is a flame that can illuminate the path forward.

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2. Chapter 1: Life in Poland Before the Nazi Invasion

Before the shadows of World War II loomed large over Europe, life in Poland was vibrant and filled with the rhythms of community, family, and tradition, particularly for the Jewish population who had a long, rich history in the region. The Kornreich family, living in the town of Sosnowiec, exemplified this lively existence, weaving together the threads of cultural identity amidst the everyday vicissitudes of life.

Rena Kornreich Gelissen and her sister, Danka, enjoyed a childhood steeped in the warmth of family connections and the joys of youth. They lived in a modest home, where laughter often echoed through the hallways, interspersed with the sounds of cooking and communal prayers that marked their Jewish faith. The sisters were close, sharing secrets and dreams, with Danka being the protective elder sister and Rena the adventurous free spirit. Their bond was strengthened through shared experiences, whether it was playing in the streets, attending school, or celebrating Jewish holidays that brought a sense of community and belonging.

Community life was a cornerstone of their existence. The Jewish community in Sosnowiec was tight-knit, with neighbors supporting one another through thick and thin. They participated in local festivities, observed traditions, and came together for prayer, reinforcing their heritage and identity amid a



landscape often fraught with misunderstanding and prejudice. It was in this environment that Rena and Danka cultivated their understanding of love, loyalty, and the importance of family. These values would later become pivotal as they faced the unthinkable trials of the Holocaust.

However, the peaceful rhythm of everyday life was underscored by an unsettling awareness of the changing political climate. News of rising anti-Semitism across Europe was beginning to seep into their lives. Understandably, the sisters and their family sensed the undercurrents of instability, but they held on to hope, believing their community would weather the impending storm.

As the Nazi regime gained power, the horrors of prejudice and violence began to encroach upon their lives, though initially only as distant headlines. The Polish landscape, once a canvas of vibrant marketplaces and busy streets, would soon be distorted by fear and oppression, forever altering the notion of safety and home. The Kornreich family, like many others, remained optimistic, perhaps too much so, as they grappled with the initial signs of what would soon evolve into widespread persecution.

Just months before the invasion, Rena and Danka continued to live as normal a life as possible, ignoring the whispers of doom that surrounded them. Rena was particularly resilient, finding solace in her friendships and



the beauty of nature, while Danka assumed the responsibility of shielding her younger sister from the harrowing news that trickled in from the outside world. However, the respite was fleeting, and the fabric of their lives was about to unravel in a manner they could hardly comprehend.

In September 1939, the Nazi invasion of Poland shattered their peaceful existence, marking the beginning of a grim chapter in their lives. The invasion brought chaos and despair that swiftly enveloped the community, as the once warm hugs of neighbors turned into anxious glances and whispered warnings. Families were torn apart, and the innocuous lives they had led were replaced by uncertainty and dread.

Chapter 1 serves not only as a remembrance of how life was before the invasion but also as a testament to the strength of sisterhood and resilience amidst an encroaching darkness that would challenge their very will to survive. The precious memories of laughter, love, and community lingered, providing a flicker of hope that Rena and Danka would need to cling to as they faced the grim realities that awaited them.

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3. Chapter 2: The Harrowing Journey to Auschwitz

As the dark clouds of the Nazi regime loomed ever closer, Rena Kornreich and her sister, Danka, found themselves swept into an unimaginable nightmare that would test their resilience and their bond. The harrowing journey to Auschwitz was not merely a physical relocation to a distant, nightmarish realm; it was a descent into a brutal reality that would erase the world they once knew.

After the invasion of Poland, Rena and Danka saw their lives catapulted from normalcy into chaos. Their once vibrant community, filled with laughter and familial connections, was shattered as families were torn apart, and the relentless violence of war began to engulf them. With each passing day, the signs of cruel oppression grew more evident. Restrictions were enacted against Jewish citizens, and an overwhelming sense of dread permeated the air.

The journey began with the roundups, as Nazi soldiers forcibly gathered Jewish residents into trucks, stripping them of their belongings, their dignity, and their hope. Rena and Danka clung to each other through the chaos, surrounded by families who cried out in anguish, desperate to escape the clutches of their oppressors. In the face of chaos, the sisters found solace in their bond; they whispered promises of protection to one another even as



fear sought to consume them.

Transported like cattle in cramped trains, the sisters embarked on a nightmarish journey toward an uncertain fate. The oppressive heat inside the freight cars suffocated them, and the stench of sweat and fear only amplified their terror. Amid the clamor of despair, Rena took it upon herself to encourage Danka, urging her to hold on to their love and memories of home, sharing stories of their childhood in Poland to distract them from their horrifying reality.

Days passed without food or water, exacerbating the physical and psychological strain on the prisoners. The throngs of despairing souls inside the train car slowly began to slip into a state of near madness, their minds grappling with the impossibility of survival. Yet, Rena's unwavering determination to protect Danka kept them fighting against the horrific conditions, each glance exchanged between them a promise to endure together.

Upon arrival at Auschwitz, the stark contrast between the life they knew and the hell they had entered became terrifyingly apparent. The sight of the grim camp and the sounds of despair filled them with dread. The sisters were immediately separated upon their descent from the train, a decision that felt like the cruelest twist of fate. Rena's heart shattered as she called out for



Danka amidst the chaos, her voice swallowed by the machine of horror that was the concentration camp.

As Rena was herded into the compound along with other women, she felt a profound fear for her sister's safety. The processing into the camp was dehumanizing; flickering glances exchanged between sisters parted by this monstrous experience fueled her determination to remain alive. She would not let Danka's plight, nor her own, go in vain. The sisters had entered a world designed to strip individuals of their humanity, yet they maintained an ember of hope, believing that their connection could withstand even the most harrowing journey.

Thus, the harrowing journey to Auschwitz stands as both a stark transition from innocence to brutality and a testament to the unyielding bond of sisterhood. Rena's internal strength and fierce loyalty to Danka become the central themes that will carry them through the horrors they are about to face, shaping their experiences as they delve deeper into the heart of darkness.

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4. Chapter 3: Survival Strategies Inside the Concentration Camp

In the grim reality of Auschwitz, Rena Kornreich Gelissen and her sister Danka faced the most harrowing moments of their lives. Stripped of their identities and humanity, they were thrust into an environment designed for despair, yet Rena's fierce determination to survive sparked an array of strategies that would help her navigate the brutal conditions of a concentration camp.

Upon arrival at Auschwitz, the sisters found themselves engulfed by the chaos and fear that pervaded the camp. Every day was a battle for survival, and Rena quickly realized that maintaining hope was pivotal. She clung to the bond with Danka, using their sisterly connection as a lifeline. This relationship acted as an emotional anchor during times of extreme hardship, reinforcing their will to endure.

Rena soon understood the importance of maintaining a low profile. She worked diligently to avoid drawing attention to herself, adapting to the whims of the guards and complying with the camp's harsh rules. To stay out of trouble, she learned the significance of hard work; she toiled as a laborer, performing demanding tasks that ranged from hauling heavy materials to sorting through the belongings of the deported. By proving her worth as a worker, she gained the favor of a few camp officers, which afforded her



minor privileges—something crucial for their survival.

The scarcity of food was another obstacle Rena had to navigate. Rations were meager and often left the prisoners starving. Rena employed shrewd strategies to secure extra sustenance. She shared food scraps with Danka, always ensuring that they supported each other. They scoured the camp for opportunities, trading any small items they possessed for additional bread or soup. Rena learned the art of negotiation and camaraderie among fellow prisoners, fostering connections that proved essential in a place where trust was rare.

A crucial survival tactic involved creating mental fortitude. Rena frequently turned to her memories, recalling moments from their life in Poland before the war. These memories, filled with laughter and love, served as fuel for her spirit. She often shared these stories with Danka, invigorating their shared resilience. They imagined brighter days and a future in which they could reclaim their stolen lives. Such mental escapism became a refuge amid the endless horror surrounding them.

Another critical adaptation was observing the dynamics around her. Rena noted which prisoners became informants or which ones formed alliances, choosing her companions wisely. This allowed her to build a small circle of trustworthy friends who would watch out for one another. They learned the



importance of unity and collective support, understanding that survival was more achievable when they worked together.

Moreover, Rena utilized her resourcefulness to make clothes repairs and maintain hygiene as best as it was possible under horrific conditions.

Through sewing and patching their meager garments, she not only extended the life of their clothing but also took pride in her ability to create something beneficial within a context designed to break them down. This act of preserving their dignity became symbolic of their resistance against the camp's dehumanization.

As the days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, Rena's strategies began to forge a path to survival. She became adept at navigating the treacherous landscape of fear, malnutrition, and oppression. Each day was a testament to her resolve. Rena understood that survival was not just about enduring the physical threats but also about nurturing the spirit of hope and sisterhood that sustained her and Danka in their darkest hours. Amidst despair, they became resilient—creating a purpose to fight one more day together in the nightmare that was Auschwitz.

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5. Chapter 4: The Unbreakable Promise Between Sisters

In the bleak and harrowing surroundings of Auschwitz, where humanity was stripped down to its barest form, the bond between Rena Kornreich and her sister, Danka, emerged as a beacon of hope amidst the encroaching darkness. The sisters had forged an unbreakable promise to one another: no matter the circumstances, they would look out for each other, protecting their spirits from the relentless cruelty that pervaded the camp.

As the sisters faced the constant terror of being separated or worse, Rena vowed to do everything in her power to keep Danka safe. Their commitment to one another transcended the physical confines of the camp. It was a promise rooted in their shared memories of life before the war—laughter, family gatherings, and dreams for a future that now seemed unobtainable. Each whispered word of encouragement, each stolen moment of joy shared between them, became a vital lifeline that helped them survive the emotional and psychological torment.

The promise was not just an emotional anchor; it also guided their survival tactics. Rena and Danka developed a system of subtle signals to communicate without drawing the attention of guards. They found ways to share food remnants, protect each other's spirits, and maintain a sense of normalcy in an environment designed to dehumanize them. Their bond



provided them with the strength to endure the rigors of life in the camp, fostering a sense of identity that the Nazis sought to erase.

In the darkest moments, when despair threatened to overwhelm them and the camp's harsh reality bore down like a suffocating shroud, Rena would remind Danka of their promise. "We will survive this together," she would say, forcing conviction into her voice even when her heart was heavy with fear. Each time they reaffirmed this vow, they fortified their resilience.

This chapter delves deeply into the emotional and psychological dimensions of their relationship, revealing how the promise between the sisters created a sanctuary within the brutality of Auschwitz. They became each other's motivation—a source of courage that fueled their fight against the despair that threatened to engulf them. It was a bond that not only kept them alive but also provided a glimpse of humanity in a landscape teeming with suffering.

As time passed, the sisters faced increasingly dire situations, with daily threats of selection, starvation, and illness looming over them. Yet, amidst the terror, they clung fiercely to their promise. They became each other's strength, providing solace and unwavering support. This was more than a survival mechanism; it was a declaration of life, a refusal to succumb to the oppressive environment surrounding them.

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Ultimately, the promise between Rena and Danka transcended the very walls of Auschwitz. It symbolized the enduring spirit of humanity and the profound connections that can flourish even in the face of unimaginable horror. Through their bond, they not only survived the physical and emotional challenges of the camp, but they also preserved a glimmer of hope—a hope that would shape their identities and steer their destinies long after the smoke of the crematoria had dissipated.

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6. Chapter 5: The Fight for Existence Against All Odds

In the brutal reality of Auschwitz, Rena and her sister, Danka, faced their greatest challenge: the fight for survival against overwhelming odds. Each day brought the threat of death closer, but the sisters clung to hope and to each other, forging an unfathomable bond amidst the harrowing conditions that surrounded them.

The camp was a living nightmare, rife with sickness, starvation, and cruelty. Rena and Danka's will to live transformed their daily struggle into a battle of resilience. They navigated through the overcrowded barracks, where diseases thrived and resources were scarce. Food rations were meager, and starvation was a constant specter. Rena quickly learned to be resourceful, trading her meager possessions for scraps of food whenever possible.

Rena also became acutely aware of the psychological toll the camp took on its inmates. The constant fear of selection, which could mean being sent to the gas chambers, loomed large over them. The sisters comforted each other, sharing memories of their life before the war, which served as a balm for their spirits. They reminisced about their family, their laughter, and the small joys of life, each memory reinforcing their resolve to fight for their existence.



In the midst of this terror, the sisters understood the critical importance of maintaining their humanity. They made a pact to safeguard each other's lives at all costs. Every act of kindness, whether it was sharing a piece of bread or offering encouraging words, was a silent act of rebellion against the dehumanization of the camp. They learned to read the moods of their captors, a skill that oftentimes allowed them to navigate dangerous situations with a semblance of caution and awareness.

As weeks turned into months, the brutal winter set in, intensifying the challenges they faced. The cold seeped into their bones, and many succumbed to frostbite and illness. Despite this, Rena and Danka remained determined. They built a network of fellow inmates, working together to share information about food sources and looking out for one another. Their sisterly bond and the friendships they fostered became invaluable lifelines.

During one particularly brutal selection day, where many inmates were chosen to be sent to their deaths, Rena displayed remarkable courage. When Danka was targeted by a guard, Rena instinctively stepped forward, risking her life to protect her sister. It was a testament to their unyielding commitment to each other; a defining moment that solidified their belief in the power of love and loyalty, even in the darkest times.

Their struggle for survival was not just physical but deeply emotional. The

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sisters learned to cope with the immense loss surrounding them, often reflecting on the hope that they would one day reunite with their family. They clung to their dreams of liberation, imagining a future free from the horrors of Auschwitz. These visions were their guiding light, staving off despair and bolstering their resolve to endure.

Ultimately, the fight for existence in Auschwitz was not merely a battle for food and shelter, but a fight to retain their sense of self. Rena and Danka's unwavering sisterhood and collective strength became the cornerstone of their survival strategy, allowing them to endure the unimaginable and maintain a flicker of hope, even amidst the relentless darkness.

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7. Chapter 6: Reflecting on Resilience and Hope After Escape

In the wake of their harrowing escape from Auschwitz, Rena and her sister, Dita, are confronted with the aftermath of their experiences—a life shaped by trauma yet anchored by resilience and the hope that unfurled like a fragile flower in the harshest of climates. This chapter delves into their journey of rebuilding not only their lives but also their spirits, highlighting the intricate dance between memory, survival, and the relentless pursuit of hope.

As Rena grapples with the memories of suffering endured within the camp's fences, her reflections are tinged with a profound awareness of the power of endurance. The sisters carry with them the ghosts of their past—the faces of fellow inmates who did not survive, the echoes of despair that permeated the air, and the constant fear that threatened to consume them. Yet, interspersed with these painful recollections are flickers of hope that guide their path forward.

The act of escaping Auschwitz, Rena realizes, was not merely a physical liberation; it signified a reclaiming of their identities and agency. In the thick of psychological scars, they find unexpected reservoirs of strength. Rena reflects on the countless days spent clinging to the promise made to Dita—that they would fight to survive, that they would strive to remain unbroken. This bond, forged in extreme adversity, fuels their resilience.

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Rena's narrative unfolds with her acknowledgment of how these traumatic experiences transformed their perceptions of life, instilling in them a fierce determination to not just exist but to flourish.

In the days following their escape, the sisters navigate a world that feels both alien and familiar. Each step they take is tinged with both liberation and the weight of their past. They encounter remnants of a community that has also been shattered by the Holocaust. Rena engages with fellow survivors; their stories resonate deeply within her, reinforcing a collective resilience. From these interactions, she draws solace, understanding that their struggles are shared, and that hope can be a collective endeavor.

As they start to rebuild their lives, Rena emphasizes the significance of family—reuniting with relatives and forming new connections—serving as a cornerstone of their recovery. Each moment shared becomes a testament to survival and the unyielding spirit of human connection. The sisters undertake the daunting task of rediscovering joy in the small things: laughter, warmth, and the sweet comfort of routine. These seemingly mundane experiences become monumental, marking the slow but steady healing of their once-battered spirits.

Rena's reflections extend beyond their personal experiences to the broader implications of resilience. She contemplates the essence of hope and how it

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can inspire change, instilling courage in future generations. While the shadows of Auschwitz loom large in her memory, they do not define her future. Instead, Rena emerges as a beacon of hope, sharing her story in the hopes of fostering understanding and compassion in a world that often wrestles with incomprehensible hate.

In essence, this chapter encapsulates the intricate layering of trauma, resilience, and hope that defines Rena and Dita's journey post-Auschwitz. It emphasizes that despite the darkest of experiences, the human spirit possesses an extraordinary capacity to heal, grow, and inspire—a testament to the enduring bond of sisterhood and the transformative power of hope.

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5 Key Quotes of Rena's Promise - Two Sisters In Auschwitz

1. "The bonds of sisterhood are unbreakable, even in the face of unimaginable suffering."
2. "Hope is the lifeline that connects us to our humanity, even in the darkest of times."
3. "We must never forget the stories of those who lived through the horrors of the past, for it is through remembrance that we honor their lives."
4. "In a world filled with cruelty, kindness becomes an act of defiance."
5. "Survival is not just about enduring; it's about finding the strength to live with purpose and love despite the pain."





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