

Zakor. Al Tichka. : Remember. Never Forget.

Sarah's Key

By Tatiana De Rosnay

France Loisirs

Historical Fiction: Holocaust

293 pages

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Two can keep a secret if one of them is dead.

What would you do if you discovered a secret that would change everything?

Tatiana De Rosnay's rapturous New York Times bestseller, *Sarah's Key*, trowels into the lives of a survivor and a journalist that later become intertwined by a twist of fate. But more importantly, taps into the life of a social outcast, giving the readers a glimpse of the inequity and injustice that coexisted during a time of such atrocity, which many have come to know as the Holocaust.

The novel unfolds the life of ten-year old Sarah Starzynski, a Jude born in France who comes face to face with the brutalities of humanity, notably the meaning behind being a Jew. As Hitler's ideals begin sweeping across Europe, Sarah and her family are subject to an array of grisly events, the roundup of thousands of Jews at the Vélodrome d'Hiver marking the first they encounter. However, the roundup was executed by the French not the Germans thus establishing a grim period still lingering in France's history. Having no understanding of her surroundings, Sarah, like any other kid her age, reassures herself that all will seize to peace. However, to her dismay, the French would make such a thought impossible, ultimately shredding all traces of hope within her. The novel predominantly focuses on her undying quest to save her brother, Michael, whom she had previously locked up in a obscured cupboard in the hope of saving his life before the roundup. Furthermore, discovering her past and the enigmas posed by the Holocaust

through journalist Julia Jarmond, who uncovers a secret connection that her in-laws possess with the Staryznskis.

Redemption, figured as a prominent theme in the novel, left major characters Julia, Sarah, and Edouard feeling the need for restitution to escape personal problems, atone for the past, and even cleanse themselves of their regrets.

Rosnay's novel sold over three million copies as well as being published in thirtyeight different countries making her France's number one European writer. The journalist for French ELLE also wrote and published ten novels including *A Secret Kept*, a novel akin to *Sarah's Key* proving how the power of a past secret can affect the present. During an interview, Rosnay explained that her motives, which had compelled her to write this novel, were similar to that of Julia's in the book. She was never taught about the Vel' d'Hiv roundup nor the dire events that had taken place in 1942 and that such events were simply shrouded by taboo. Possessing feelings of obligation, the commemoration of four thousand Jewish children who were stripped of their childhood the day of July 16th, 1942 indeed served as Rosnay's true intention for writing *Sarah's Key*:

I caught a glimpse of my face in the mirror as we glided up. I looked as eroded as the groaning lift. What had happened to the fresh-faced belle from Boston, Massachusetts? The woman who stared back at me was at the dreaded age between forty-five and fifty, that no-man's land of sag, oncoming wrinkle, and stealthy approach of menopause.

Rosnay's use of rich vocabulary and imagery allows the audience to get a better sense of the characters' emotions as well as their mental state. Rosnay's most notable strength is embodied in her distinct writing style and how she is able to shift from one character's

life to another, from past to present, and still have the capability to join the two parallel worlds.

On the contrary, in spite of the novel's strengths, there were lapses later on in the story where a continual cycle of events occurred all within a short time frame. "'Yeah,' drawled Charla later on when I explained all this, 'Yeah, sure, running off to Tuscany with Zoe, finding this guy, and just saying sorry sixty years later'". Rosnay's struggle to organize these events then led to characters jumping from point A to point C with no middle ground. The idea of pregnant Julia retrieving Zoe, her daughter, from her summer vacation to venture into the streets of Tuscany where she would meet up with Sarah's son, and amidst all this, while jeopardizing her love life seemed almost too impractical. The mass genocide that took place under Hitler's tyrannical regime, the Holocaust, remains an open wound for many, but in others, it sparks an unusual interest. This novel would likely appeal to those who are inquisitive and curious of this tragic legacy, but rather hearing such a story through the eyes of a little survivor and how possessing a yellow star implemented such woe and adversity.