

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

The Terezin Promise

A One-act Play

by

CELESTE RASPANTI



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, P.O. Box 129, Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMIV by
CELESTE RASPANTI
Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(THE TEREZIN PROMISE)

ISBN: 1-58342-200-5

For Raja Englanderova

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in this book, may be used on all programs. *On all programs this notice must appear:*

Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The story of the 15,000 children who passed through Terezin concentration camp from 1941 to 1945 was recorded in thousands of poems and drawings. Teachers in the camp hid the materials in bundles and suitcases. At the end of the war, Raja Englanderova, a teenage survivor, discovered hundreds of drawings in two suitcases in the attic of their barracks classroom and took them to the officials of the Jewish community in Prague.

Today the drawings and poems belong to the State Jewish Museum in Prague and have been exhibited around the world. A collection in English was published in 1964 with the title *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*; a revised edition was published in 1993.

THE TEREZIN PROMISE

A One-act Play
For 4 Men and 4 Women, Extras

CHARACTERS

RAJA: Sixteen, she has been in the camp since she was 12. She was an assistant to Irena and a leader among the children.

IRENA: The teacher of Terezin who set up the school in the camp, taught the children to draw, to write poetry—and to survive.

EVA: A young teenager, she's curious and unafraid. She stays close to Raja, whom she admires.

HELGA: A teenager, she is outspoken and direct.

HANUS: One of the older boys in the camp, he is a leader among the children. He's self-confident, daring and a little devious, qualities that have served him and the children in the camp well.

PETR: Energetic and lively, he wants to be a leader like Hanus, whom he admires and follows.

RUDI: A teenager, he is willing to take risks for his freedom.

NICOLAS: He is a member of the Hitler Youth corps called into action in January 1945. Wounded, defensive and afraid, he is torn between wanting to be a loyal soldier of the Third Reich and just wanting to go home.

EXTRAS: Camp guards, Nazi soldiers, children, as needed.

THE TEREZIN PROMISE

SCENE: *Terezin, April 1945. Dim lights on an open stage with three platform areas: UR, an area that represents the remembered past; C, the interior of Barracks 410 in darkness; near the left wall of the barracks, steps to a platform that is the attic of the barracks. The sky is visible through the garret window in the attic and behind the barracks. Sounds of bombs and artillery fire in the distance.*

RAJA rushes in looking for a safe hiding place. She reacts to the sound of bombs. DC, she faces the audience.

RAJA. The bombs—we can hear them now—every night, all day. We first heard them falling on Prague in March and began to hope, living on rumors: “The war is over; the Allies are coming.” When the Red Cross came in April, we thought it was the end. But the Nazis used us again, planning the route for the delegation. They saw only what the Nazis wanted them to see—newly painted barracks, flowers in Marktplatz—a park on the corner—a pretty mask on an ugly face.

And then we began to notice changes in the guards. They were disturbed, distracted. Some of them deserted, just left the camp, disappearing into the woods around

the fortress, anywhere to escape capture by the advancing army. But many of them stayed to carry out their orders: destroy the camp, destroy the evidence; get rid of the Jews.

(UR, steam hissing, train sounds. RAJA turns to follow the sound. Lights come up on the area.)

VOICES OF GUARDS *(shouting over the noise of the transport train)*. Schnell, schnell! Move, move! Get along. The train is ready, now get along! Here, you there, get in line. In line, and move. Up the steps! Come on, get along. Into the car. Move! Move!

IRENA *(walks into the scene, turning, looking behind her)*.

Raja? Here, over here!

RAJA *(runs into the scene UR)*. Irena—you can't go. You can't!

IRENA. Now, shh, don't make a scene or the guard will hear. Come here. Shh! *(Pulls her into the corner.)* Come here.

RAJA. No, you can't go.

IRENA *(sternly)*. Listen to me. What I have to say is important.

RAJA. No, nothing's important...

IRENA. Listen to me. *(She takes her hands.)* The war is almost over. The Nazis know it, and they're leaving. They're burning everything.

RAJA. They're losing the war.

IRENA. Yes, but more than that. They're destroying the camp—and everything in it. Do you know what that means?

RAJA. If the war is over, we'll be gone.

IRENA. Raja, they're burning the records. Last night in the Marktplatz, bonfire. They're burning the evidence.

RAJA. Evidence?

IRENA. Evidence of what they've done in Terezin—and more important, they're destroying the evidence of what we've done here. We can't let that happen.

RAJA. What difference does it make?

IRENA. It makes all the difference to all of us. If they burn our records, if they burn the poems and drawings that the children did, no one will know they were here. They'll erase us from history. *(Pause.)* You and I. And the children—can you forget them? Do you want them to be forgotten?

RAJA. No, but...

IRENA. Then you must promise that you will find the bundles we've hidden, save them, take them to Prague. Karel is there. He will know what to do with them.

RAJA. How?

IRENA. Remember, we buried the bundles near the walls—in each corner of the fortress. They should still be there. And there are two suitcases I didn't have time to bury. If Barracks 410 is still standing, look there.

GUARDS *(shouting)*. Get in here! You, there, what's going on? Get along.

IRENA. Find the bundles, find the suitcases; save them. You have to get them to Prague.

RAJA. But, everyone's leaving.

IRENA. You can't leave without the suitcases. Raja, think of all the hard things we've done—you and I and the children. You can do it. Tell the others, talk to Hanus. He can help. Now, promise you will save the children's work. Raja, look at me. Promise.

RAJA. But, I want to go...

IRENA. No, you must stay—to find the drawings and the poems. They must not be lost. Think of it. It's the only way the children of Terezin can survive. *(Pause.)* Now, will you promise?

RAJA *(quietly, with resignation)*. I promise.

IRENA. And one more promise...

RAJA. Yes?

IRENA. Promise that you will not forget...

RAJA. Forget you?

IRENA *(overlapping)*. Promise you will not forget the lessons we learned...to live and to hope... Promise?

RAJA. Yes, I promise.

IRENA. And you will tell the others?

RAJA. Yes, yes...

IRENA. Together, you will keep the promise—and you will survive.

GUARD. Move, move along. The train is ready, now, move!

(RAJA and IRENA embrace. IRENA tears herself away from RAJA, who stands alone as the lights dim in the area. Sound of GUARDS shouting, steam hissing, the train leaving.)

RAJA *(downstage, addresses the audience)*. The promise was made, and we would risk our lives to keep it *(Sound of train pulling away. RAJA turns to follow then sound and then turns back to the audience.)* Late in April the Nazis started cleaning out the camps in the east, getting rid of evidence that would tell the world of their crimes. Terezin became the gathering place for prisoners from

these camps. We saw thousands of the living dead arrive, and knew the end was near. The Nazis knew it too. They were driven, wild—there was no stopping them. At last, we thought, they're afraid, afraid to be caught with blood on their hands. Everything, everyone must go.

(SOLDIERS rush across the stage carrying boxes and files toward the back wall. Flames of a bonfire light up the sky.)

Records, lists, names, numbers—everything—into the fire. That's when we decided to hide.

(She moves into the lighted area, Barracks 410, hiding in the shadows until she reaches the door opening. She slips inside and crouches on the floor as the light of the bonfire in the courtyard outside brightens the room. As the fire dies down and the shouting lessens, she moves into the room and lights a small lamp.)

HELGA *(from a corner of the room)*. Raja? *(Startled, RAJA hides behind a cot in the corner. HELGA emerges from behind a pile of boxes in the back.)* Raja, it's me, Helga.

EVA. And me, Eva.

RAJA. Good, you're here. Where are the others? *(She's carrying a bundle which she places very carefully under one of the cots. She starts to look around the barracks.)*

Where are they?

EVA. They're not coming.

RAJA. Did they get caught?