

Literary Speaking

The Lost Wife

By Alyson Richman

Reviewed by Dana Yanez-Soria, Yankton Community Library

The *Lost Wife* begins in the year 2000 in New York City. A young couple, Eleanor and Jason, are about to be married at the Rainbow Room in Manhattan.

"At the head table, the lone living grandparent from each side was introduced to each other for the first time. Again, the groom's grandfather felt himself being swept away by the image of the woman before him. She was decades older than her granddaughter, but there was something familiar about her. He felt it immediately from the moment he first saw her eyes."

After she denies knowing him several times, he gently raises the sleeve on her blouse to reveal six tattooed numbers.

"Do you remember me now?" he asked, trembling... "Lenka, it's me, Joseph. Your husband."

I was hooked by the end of the first chapter! After this revelation that the couple was reunited after so many years, the plot moves to Czechoslovakia around 1924. The storytelling goes back and forth between Lenka and Joseph's point-of-view. Both characters grew up in fairly wealthy, happy, successful Jewish families. As they grow, Lenka finds her passion in art and is enrolled at Prague's Academy of Art in 1936, at the age of seventeen. Joseph is following

his father's footsteps and is studying to be an obstetrician.

Lenka's friend and fellow art student, Veruska, introduces Lenka to her brother Josef.

There is an instant chemistry between the two and they fall quickly in love. At this time, Lenka says she feels as if she is two different people: someone happy and hopeful and deeply in love and, at the same time, more than a little frightened about the uncertainty and rumors that are spreading about the possible invasion by the Germans during World War II.

As it becomes more clear that they will not be untouched by this brewing war, Josef and Lenka rush to get married in January 1939 with the hope of getting visas for themselves and their families to escape to the United States. They have a small but beautifully romantic wedding. It is very evident that they are both so happy and in love.

However, the morning after the wedding, Josef breaks the news that he was only able to acquire enough visas for his parents, sister, and himself and Lenka. Her family would have to stay behind until they could figure out a way to bring them to the United States. Lenka is heartbroken, torn between her family and her true love. But Lenka is adamant that she cannot leave her family behind. Against Josef's wishes, she stays in Czechoslovakia to wait until they are able to get her whole family to safety.

Shortly after they are separated, the Germans invade and Lenka's family is forced to move into a "Jewish community" and eventually to Auschwitz. The story twists back and forth between Josef's and Lenka's hardships, each of them believing the other had died. Eventually they both remarry, but neither quite gets over that first true love. As Josef explains,

"I am in love with a shadow. I look for her in the darkness of the hallway. I search for her in the eyes of the old women crossing the street. Over sixty years have passed and her shadow still walks beside me".

The *Lost Wife* is a very gripping novel about love, life, survival, and the strength and courage to move forward. It draws you in quickly and you become attached to the characters. You will not regret reading this beautifully written and moving novel!



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