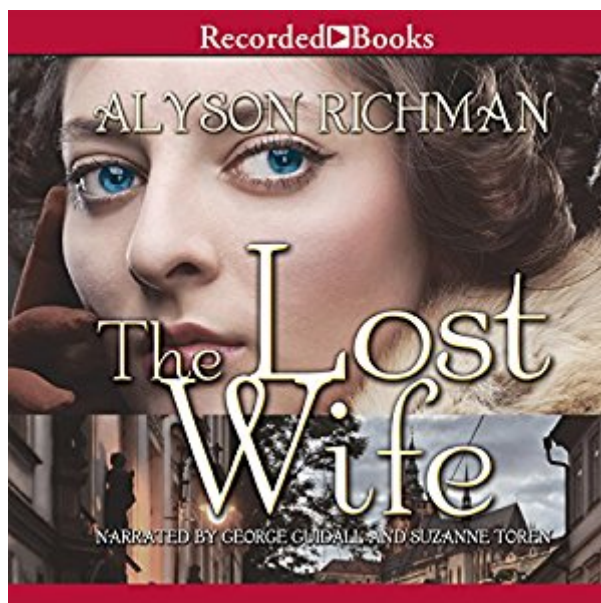


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# The Lost Wife: A Novel



## Synopsis

In pre-war Prague, the dreams of two young lovers are shattered when they are separated by the Nazi invasion. Then, decades later, thousands of miles away in New York, there's an inescapable glance of recognition between two strangers. Providence is giving Lenka and Josef one more chance. From the glamorous ease of life in Prague before the Occupation, to the horrors of Nazi Europe, *The Lost Wife* explores the power of first love, the resilience of the human spirit, and the strength of memory.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was asked recently if I felt that there are too many books being written about WWII, and my answer then was "no", because there are so many stories still left to be told. *The Lost Wife* reinforces my answer as a resounding "NO", because here is a story that is unexpected, a look into the ghetto of Terezin, and the brave people who lived within its gates, specifically the artists who were imprisoned there. The story begins in the year 2000, when Josef and Lenka, young lovers who had been torn apart by the atrocities of the second World War, are unexpectedly reunited 60 years later, each having believed that the other had perished. The rest of the book fills in the years since they were separated, as each recounts those years of desolation, tragedy, and even, finally, love. Lenka's stories take us through the streets of Terezin, the desperation of the Jews living in the ghetto, and finally to the horrors of Auschwitz. Josef's story is quite different, but his reminiscences are haunted by ghosts. This book is exquisitely written...I cannot say enough about the beauty of

the language on every page. Every image and emotion are masterfully crafted with words. The vibrancy of the colors before the war, in contrast with the colors during the war....the stench of the ghetto and the transports...the love that exists between Lenka and Josef...the devotion of both Josef and Lenka to their families...all told with beautiful words that bring out the poignancy and heartache. Passages such as these: "As a young man, I fell in love with a girl who loved me. Her smile was a golden rope around my heart. Whenever she pulled me, I followed. But sometimes even the thickest rope frays and gets lost." And this one: "There are two sensations of skin you will always remember in your lifetime: the first time you fall in love—“and that person holds your hand—“and the first time your child grasps your finger. In each of these times, you are sealed to the other for eternity." These are words that take my breath away, sheer magic.

If you are expecting a conventional Holocaust novel with a love story as the background of the plot, this is the wrong book for you. Alyson Richman has created a heart-wrenching story of Terezin and Auschwitz through visual arts of the main female character and the profound pain of the central male character. Lenka Maisel, a beautiful young girl, lived in Prague with her gentle, intelligent father, artist mother and younger sister. She had wonderful friends, a comfortable life and was talented enough to be accepted at an elite Art academy. She met her true love, Josef Kohn, also from an accomplished family. Their only problem was they lived in Prague and they were Jewish. The beautiful city of Prague with its elegant landscape and historical architecture was one of Hitler's conquests. As in most European cities during World War II, the Jews were the scapegoats, and the Germans enacted the Nuremberg laws giving the Jews little freedom and removed all their worldly possessions to fill their illicit coffers. Despite this despicable course of action, Josef and Lenka marry quickly. Fleeing the Nazis was the only salvation for any European Jew. Josef's family had secured exit visas; Lenka's family had no money or possessions to buy their way out of the Czech homeland. What follows is not the predictable ghetto/concentration camps horrors, it is more of palpable images. From the perspective of an artist, Richman gives the reader the beautiful, radiant red and orange colors of Prague, the countryside, and happiness to the grays, blacks and fetid odors of the camps. Her writing evokes the smells of flowers and the stench of the train cars, barracks and the wretched illnesses prevalent in the prisoners. It is well known that art and music became the only enjoyment allowed prisoners juxtaposed to the Nazi's enjoyment of sapping the Jews' intellect to destroy them. I have read many Holocaust fiction and non-fiction books but Richman tackles the subject with a mixture of an undying passionate love with grotesque carnage and humiliation. I could feel Lenka and Josef's singular love and also the absolute horror of Nazi's

atrocities. It is not easy to read. The author gives us the day-to-day operation of the camps provoking devastating sadness as the terror escalated. There are secondary characters, connecting the plot, who are unique and serve to flesh out a balance of personalities. The only weakness was Richman's abbreviated attention to Lenka's second marriage in contrast to Josef's years with Amalia. Josef's profession as an obstetrician served as a sharp contrast from the death knell of the war. Survivor's guilt seems to prevent Lenka and Josef from fully enjoying their continued existence. The reader once again learns about the enduring love of family at all costs and remains horrified of what others are capable of doing to extinguish their lives.

You are gripped from the first chapter that sets the stage for what is to follow. Heartbreaking, informative & uplifting for the Jews who survived against all odds. Reminds us that we can never forget the horrors perpetrated by the Nazi criminals who treated fellow humans with such disrespect and cruelty. It reminds us how critical living a life where moral guideposts are so essential to a world where love shows the way...

Moving through the unimaginable horrors of the Jews during the holocaust one is lifted up by the strength of the human spirit. Amidst hunger, death, fear, these survivors wanted to enrich the lives of the children in the camps, wanted to inform the world through their artistic depictions of camp life and continued to bond together to make this happen. This read was inspiring and uplifting while also horrifying and painful.

This one is a keeper. I love stories of a family's history and how war affected the outcome. This one is both sad and hopeful as you see the character's grow and change with their dire circumstances. It starts at the end of the story and goes back to the beginning of her life to tell you what happened along the way. True love never ends. The ending tied things up, but left me wanting to know what happens next.

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