

Without Forgiveness

by Timmothy Merath

Farm field after farm field zip past. Mostly corn, a few alfalfa, all lush and alive.

Click-clack, click-clack. The cadence of the tracks below push George back and forth between what happened and what is to come. From past to future, click to clack. Anguish and regret to fear and anxiety. What awaits him in Chicago seems clear but much of the past has already started to become gray and muddy.

As soon as he boarded the train, he knew it was more of a purgatory than an escape. A place to wait while decisions on his fate were planned, prepared, and readied for execution. Somewhere to allow the fires to spread and the pain and emotion to ferment against him. More than anything, though, this is where he can come to terms with the aching reality of this gruesome tragedy. My Lena, he whispers to himself. My sweet Lena, my children.

Each person that walks up the aisle adds to his stress and anticipation, building girders of fear around him like a twisted sort of remodeling project, moving backwards from majestic structure to dilapidated ruins. He meets each person, eye-to-eye, as they pass by. Even though not one has stopped or spoken to him, no relief comes. The structure keeps going up around him.

My Lena. My children.

George thinks back to his last day in Croatia and his long walk up the ramp to the boat. How he looked back on the land of his birth before turning and joyously moved forward to a re-birth in a new country of hope and opportunity. The love of his life and their children, with another on the way, already there and waiting. As another church flashes past his window, he mistakes it for the small

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Catholic church outside Pazin where he grew up. Strong, solid bricks standing confidently against harsh winter winds and driving snow. The juxtaposition strikes him suddenly and slaps him back to the present and the vivid green grass waving sporadically in the wind kicked up by the train. Back to the problem.

The pistol. Still in the left pocket of his jacket. It still feels warm despite its metal coldness, seeming to burn each time his hand touches it. Burning with questions. Burning with guilt.

My Lena, my poor Lena.

He knows they will be there at the station, waiting on the landing, faces filled with disgust. He knows they'll act swiftly and try not to make a scene. If the gun stays in his pocket, the anger will be quiet.

