

Book Review: Winter Song
By Rebeca Lee Morales

Thanks to NetGalley and Ecco Press for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "Winter Song" is scheduled for release on December 1, 2026.

In 1986, in a small town in rural Minnesota, police chief Gordon Trent is wrestling with life without his deceased wife and the pending prospect of mandatory retirement.

Into his life comes Byron Lugo, a 26-year-old who was just released from Stillwater prison for a vehicular manslaughter crime committed four years ago. Lugo has served his time, but he remains adamant of his innocence and is Hell bent on proving it. And resuming the life he had prior to his incarceration.

But Lugo soon finds out you can't always go back home.

It's an interesting premise and an easy read. But the narrative plods along with frequent chapters that left me wondering what bearing they have on the story. The answer, in the end, is none. So why include them? If they're there to paint a more vivid picture of the various characters, that didn't work.

There are no surprises in the narrative. It's easy to decipher where the story is going and what's going to happen well before the reveals. So when key moments occur they have minimal impact.

The dialogue, too, is awkward. The exchanges between Lugo and his two friends, Charlie and Andres, is pedestrian at best. It's hard to believe that friends, even back in 1986 in rural Minnesota, spoke to each other in the depicted manner.

The descriptions of life in rural Minnesota in January are interesting, and some are quite vivid. But they're just nice window dressing. The heart of the book didn't embrace me nor entice me to read enthusiastically.

Two stars for “Winter Song.” Its melody is too far off key.