

Dalia Wolfson

My Father Marries My Mother

My father married my mother in the year 1990.

It begins with that fact- in Soviet Russia, the civil union was registered in a massive ledger, and rings were made with jewels that weren't semi-precious at all.

To compensate, or maybe because they both love Art Nouveau - my mother has received over fifty rings in less than two decades of marriage.

My father does not know when the habit started. He only remembers that if he counts the stamps on his passport, he can find a corresponding number of small jewelry boxes that once contained rings.

For the third time this year, my father gave my mother a ring. He had been searching for a ring in Prague, that city of gray stones and black steeples and blushing clouds. In the communist bloc – beyond the old-town silhouettes- we found an antique store with hand-written price tags and burnished spoons. At the counter, a middle-aged Czech woman with an accent and a too-low, purple V-neck sweater slipped out the velvet display. She pointed, sharply, to an ancient, dirty-gold type with garnet inset like a hornet's nest of small red eyes staring.

My father has a woman's touch.

His gray eyes choose gems with the nimbleness of a duchess' fingers.

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He paid for it in bills with the faces of dictators. Lena – for she had introduced herself, had noticed the lack of a ring on my father’s hand – provided a small box with a cushion. She deposited tarnished *korunas* into his palm and let her scarlet nails slide upon the whorls gently.

Back in the States, at a sink, my mother scrubbed her skin. She let her fingers surround a smooth pellet of ivory soap. She picked at the thickness of her knuckles and lathered the foam until her index finger became white and refined. She slipped on the ring, and the circle of skin underneath it grew thin and aggravated. The ring was an antique, though, so they couldn’t have taken it to the jewelry ring extender, or whatever you may call those men who extract pliers and stretch your ring until it fits the married.

More recently, my mother bought a ring at the flea market. She selected it because of the polished ruby that shone at its center. She aligned it on her finger next to my father’s garnet gift, and the two red stones mocked and winked at each other in the cold November light.

Her friend asked her, darling who bought you that ring it is gorgeous. She said, My husband Eugene (though it wasn’t him).

Later she briefed my father on her response, telling him that she just knew his *taste* and he would have bought it anyway, she was certain. She tap-tapped the silver circlet on our kitchen table and smiled.

Neither one of them wears a golden wedding ring, but besides, doesn’t the garnet look so much more queenly on her right hand? Anyway, they both know that they are married. That fact, above all others, is unforgettable.

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My mother and father fit each other like an allergy. Over the kitchen table, they unclasp and stumble over their own fingers, gesturing and irritating and provoking. They hold hands and the reds are beautiful. They let go and the reds are released.

My parents do not remember, sometimes, why they are bound to each other. Despite this, my mother is betrothed through rings.

My father marries my mother at least once a year.