

Finding
My
Father's
Song
a novella
by
Hadas Yisrael

**Finding My Father's Song: A Novella of Loss, Loneliness, Love,
and Hope**

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This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance of any of the characters to people you know in real life is merely an intriguing coincidence.



CHAPTER 1

“**B**ut I was okay with it back then,” said Rina to her fiancé. “Really?” said Troy, frowning with his arms crossed over his chest. “You know what I think? I think you just agreed to my condition because you thought I would change my mind later.” He paused. “Or you thought you could get me to change my mind.”

Rina’s eyes widened as she opened her mouth to speak. Then she shut her mouth and gulped.

It was true. When they first talked about getting married eight months ago, Rina was certain that eventually, Troy would want children with her. Didn’t everyone want at least one child at some point? She thought that with time, and if she could make him love her enough, he would come around.

As Troy contemplated her now, he shook his head. “See?” he said. “I’ve got your number.”

Recovering her voice, Rina said, “But a lot of people change their minds about this issue.” She swallowed again. “It’s totally normal, especially as you age.”

Troy sighed. “If it’s so common for people to cut a U-turn on this issue, then why did you agree to the condition in the first place?”

Rina gave him a nervous smile and held out her palms toward him. “Well, because people do turn around on this issue.” She swallowed and tried to smile again. “Anyway, I didn’t think about it so much. I just—I just loved you so much and I wanted—I wanted—”

But Troy turned away before Rina could finish.

“You duped me,” he said, punching his fist against the refrigerator door. He blew out his breath and rubbed his dark blond hair with his hand. Then he turned back to face Rina. “That’s pretty manipulative and I’m not having any of that. So here’s the deal.” His voice remained quiet, but his brown eyes turned black with intensity. “Either you promise to never bring this up again or we split up.”

Rina felt the color drain from her face. “I don’t—”

Troy held up a palm as if to halt her next words. “That’s it. That’s my ultimatum.”

Rina’s shoulders sagged as she stared at Troy. She willed herself to say the words he wanted her to say. But somehow, she couldn’t. The past three years of giving and giving in had led to this moment. The one time she held her ground with a specific issue—this one—Troy refused to budge.

And Rina really didn’t understand why.

Almost every long-term couple they knew had at least one child, if not with their current partner, than with a previous partner. It seemed like such a normal desire—a need, really. How was she to know that Troy would be so different from everybody else? Troy, in addition to being successful and charming, had always been strong-willed and goal-oriented. But even people like him still had a child or two.

As Rina stared at Troy, he leaned against the kitchen counter and tapped his fingers against it as he blew out through pursed lips. Then he wrinkled his nose and frowned at Rina as he waited for her answer.

“I can’t promise you that,” Rina heard herself say.

Troy’s eyes popped open wide. “You what?” he said as his fingers froze in place against the counter.

Rina shifted from one foot to the other. “I can’t make that promise,” she said in a small voice.

Troy started, then slammed his fist down on the counter and said, “Damn you!”

Then he stormed out of the kitchen.

Rina stared after him for a moment, then looked around as if seeing the kitchen for the first time. Its spotless walnut cabinets contrasting with the ivory porcelain remained unmoved by the storm of emotion that just crashed through. Everything stood tidy in its proper place—except for Rina’s heart, which hung in shreds within her chest.

She felt bad, just like she always did when they argued. Troy always seemed right. Even when he was wrong, there always seemed to be at least a sliver of truth to his side. And now was no different. Rina was twenty-two and in love with Troy. She had agreed to his condition, certain that along the way, he would change his mind. Secretly, Rina banked on a change of heart either because he loved her and wanted to actualize that love through a child or because he’d eventually feel the normal human desire for children.

Taking a deep breath, Rina marched out of the kitchen and upstairs to their bedroom where she knew Troy would be checking his Twitter feed.

“Troy,” she said, facing him as he slouched on the bed and scowled at his phone. He didn’t answer. He didn’t even look up.

“Troy,” she said again. “Just so you understand, even if it won’t change your mind, I need to tell you about the dream I had last night.”

She paused, but he refused to look at her.

Rina took a deep breath and said, “I dreamt of my own funeral.” She swallowed. “It was so real. It didn’t feel like a dream at all. Even after I woke up, I still felt like it actually happened.”

His only response was the movement of his finger as it swiped the screen.

“And nobody was there,” said Rina.

Troy’s eyes remained magnetized before the thin rectangle.

“Not you, not my mom who died last year, and not my dad who abandoned us when I was little.” Rina folded her arms. “There was no son or daughter or grandchild wiping away tears while standing over the casket.” She paused. “Nobody.”

She could still see the image of a new casket embedded in the grass on a gray and misty day. Surrounded by weathered tombstones, it lay there silent and alone with Rina inside.

“Maybe it was a premonition,” said Troy. “If we split up, I sure won’t be coming to your funeral either.”

His words struck like ice water over Rina’s heart. As she gaped at him, she saw the real Troy: scowling eyes focused on his phone’s screen rather than on his bride-to-be, his hard jaw line, and the arrogant tilt to his face. Before, she’d only seen a handsome, confident man. But now she just saw a mean petulant bully.

It’s better not to have children with such a father.

The thought shot through her mind. Despite all her pain, Rina still sensed the gleam of fate’s kindness lining the thundering cloud Troy cast over her.

“So that’s it then,” Rina said softly.

Troy’s head snapped up to look at her. “Oh, yeah?” he said. “So you’re not willing to admit you’ve been totally manipulative?”

“That’s not how I saw it,” she said, still frozen as she stood. “I didn’t see myself as manipulative. I saw myself as optimistic.”

Troy curled his upper lip as he sneered at her. “Everyone always puts a nice spin on their lies and manipulations.” He raised his palms in mock surrender. “Ooh!” he said in a high falsetto. “I was just being helpful! I was just trying to be nice! I was just trying keep up a positive attitude! I really thought it was okay!” Then he dropped his arms, shoving one hand into his pocket and returned to his phone.

For the next few silent moments, Rina stared at Troy and Troy messed with his phone. Then he looked up at her and said, “So? This is your last chance.”

Rina’s eyes widened and her mouth opened, then it closed again.

“Well?” said Troy again. “If you apologize and promise never to bring this up again, I’ll consider it over and done with.”

But Rina knew he wouldn’t. He never did.

From now on, Troy would use this as a whip. If she ever complained about something, or made any kind of request, she knew that Troy would accuse her of carrying a grudge or of trying to get him to make up for rejecting her desire for a child. He would bring in other people, explaining that he and Rina had gotten engaged under false pretenses—with poor Troy as the innocent victim.

It's what he always did and somehow, Rina always saw his side of things—which made things confusing because she also saw her own side, and struggled to decide who was right. Or to decide who was *more* right. But for some reason, the blinders had dropped from Rina's eyes and she saw more clearly now. Of course she shouldn't have made a promise she had no intention of keeping. But at the same time, Rina knew that it was normal to want a child at some point. Even people who truly intended to remain childless often ended up changing their minds.

Buttressing her arms more tightly around herself, Rina said, "I *am* sorry for having lied to you. Once. Yes, one time, eight months ago, I made a promise I had no intention of keeping because I was sure that with time, you'd change *your* mind. But still, it was wrong of me. And I do apologize for that." She paused and took a deep breath. "But I don't apologize about the very human desire for a baby. And I won't deny that it's something I still want very much."

Pressing his lips together, his head cocked to the side, Troy's gaze bored into Rina's. And he said, "Then this is it."

And with that, he marched across the room to the door, causing Rina to gasp when he knocked her with his shoulder as he passed her.

At the doorway, he whirled around. "But remember—you aren't getting a damn thing. Everything here is *mine*."

This was true. Troy made a great living despite his age. This was his home and Rina had moved in. At his invitation, of course. But still.

Misreading the look in her eyes, he added, "See you in court if you don't like that!"

Then Troy left, slamming door downstairs as his final good-bye.



CHAPTER 2

The separation went even worse than Rina expected. Because he made more money than Rina, Troy kept insisting that their possessions were mostly bought by him with only minor contributions from her.

“But of course you make more money!” Rina tried reasoning with him. “Your job pays more and you can work more hours—you don’t have any other responsibilities.”

Troy bristled.

“I have all the household management to deal with,” Rina said in her defense.

Troy rolled his eyes. “I let you have a cleaner!” he said, thrusting a finger in her face.

Instinctively, Rina’s head jerked back, but she held her ground. “Only once a week,” she said. “And a cleaner is still an employee I’m responsible for. Maintaining a cleaner is a supervisory position.” Rina hoped that by putting it in business terms, Troy might see Rina’s contributions in a different light. “Anyway, maintaining the cleanliness of the home for the rest of the week fell on me.”

Troy smirked. “There was just the two of us, anyway.” He wrinkled his nose at her. “You think *that’s* so hard and here, you wanted to have a kid on top of it all!”

Rina winced, but resisted getting dragged into a side argument. “You insisted on having a very clean home,” she said.

Then without meaning to, she suddenly recalled all the times Troy left his shoes in the middle of the floor, his wet bath towels thrown over

the expensive wood bed frame, his shaved facial hairs plastered all over the bathroom sink—then yelled at *her* for being a lazy housekeeper. Troy left a relentless trail of mess throughout the home, but insisted that his workhorse hours and burgeoning salary overrode any obligation to clean up after himself. It was only fair, he insisted, that if she worked less and earned less, then she should be the one to pick up the slack at home.

“Of course I wanted a clean home,” he said. “Any civilized person wants a nice home.”

“But I also did all the cooking,” Rina said.

“That’s your *job!*” said Troy, throwing his arms up in exasperation. “After flogging a twelve-hour day, am I supposed to come home and whip up a nice supper for *you*? You’re already home anyway!”

Rina just sighed and shook her head. She’d never managed to make him see how much she really did. And she couldn’t make him see it now either.

Her other problems started at work.

Rina proofread patents, which was very detailed and nitpicky work. As a proofreader of patents, Rina needed to make sure that the product sketch matched the product’s description. Sometimes, tiny parts were labeled with thirty numbers that corresponded to thirty labels. And the proofreader needed to make sure that all those little parts and numbers and labels added up just right. Many times, Rina proofread designs without being able to figure out what they were. Entire days could be devoted to abstract sketches, jumbles of numbers, and misspelled words. Rina felt she concentrated better and worked more happily if she hummed or sang to herself. But she worked in a cubicle where humming and singing would bother the other employees.

With all the stress, sleepless nights, and late arrivals to the office, Rina lacked the focus and eagle-eyes necessary for scrutinizing the patents. Her boss cut her some slack, but at one point, she said, “Listen, Rina. I’m sympathetic to what you’re going through right now, but our other employees have to shoulder *your* responsibilities. And we’re coming up to

that crunch time when you know we get inundated with patents.” Rina’s boss shook her head. “I’m sorry, Rina. But this slack has been going on for too long. And I know it’s not your fault, but....”

Rina swallowed back tears. “I’m sorry. I’m really trying as hard as I can.”

“Yes, I definitely realize that,” her boss said, nodding her head. “But it’s just not working out from our end. Can you see that?”

Rina felt the blood drain from her face as she realized what her boss was saying. “But isn’t—isn’t an experienced proofreader still better than no proofreader at all?”

Her boss bunched her lips up together in a regretful smile. “Well, the thing is, Rina...the quality of your work has fallen, too. And I *know* it’s not your fault. But others have to go over the work you do manage to complete.” Her boss took a deep breath. “I’m sorry, Rina. It’s just that we’re coming to the crunch and...well, we have people with fresh eyes and energy willing to jump in.”

“But all my experience....” said Rina.

Her boss shook her head. “It’s not that hard to learn how to proofread patents. And we have people in training now.” Her boss’s shoulders sagged. “I’m sorry, Rina. But we just can’t pick up the slack anymore. We need to remain competitive. But don’t worry—I’ll make sure you get the best severance package possible under the circumstances.”

And she did.

But as the break-up continued to steamroll over Rina, she lost any will to fight.

In addition to losing her job, she also lost Troy’s home (which in her heart, had been hers too), the summer cabin, and anything else that wasn’t exclusively hers. (At least she could keep her clothes and her laptop.)

Troy also made sure she lost her friends, not that she had any close ones at that point. By their second year together, Rina’s closest friends could no longer stand her relationship with Troy because he managed to

be so offensive around anyone she liked. As a result, Rina preferred solitude to the embarrassment that Troy caused. But over time, Rina made friends with the girlfriends and wives of Troy's friends. Yet now that Troy ragged on how Rina betrayed him through a false promise, she lost these friends too.

So everything in which Rina invested heart and soul was gone.

But after hoarding to himself the whole juicy carcass of their former life together, Troy tossed her one bone: She could keep the car he'd made a couple of payments on when she couldn't cover them.

"I wouldn't be caught dead driving that ugly green car, anyway," he said. "And it's not worth much after you already bought it second-hand."

It wasn't green; it was jade. And Rina loved it. And despite being second-hand, it ran great.

So that's how a slushy day in February found Rina driving up to their summer cabin near a forest lake. (She still thought of it as "theirs.") She'd managed to hold on to one of the keys to the cabin and decided to use it now.

Rina didn't need much time there anyway—just enough to die.



CHAPTER 3

With tears blurring her eyes, Rina slowed the car so it wouldn't skid off the cliff. Funny how she intended to end her life, but she insisted on driving carefully.

Well, it makes sense, she decided. A car accident really is a gruesome and sometimes slow way to die.

Once at the cabin, Rina wrestled with the lock in the frigid weather. Wrestling the door open, Rina peeked inside. Its shuttered windows created slivers of light. She looked around at the dust covers hanging over the furnishings like lumpy ghosts. She didn't hear any mice or squirrels. Rina glanced at the bedroom, which stood over a hidden trap door. Just for emergencies or who knows what, Rina had stored some things there: canned food, bottled water, a disposable cell phone, and a cheap radio/CD player. She wanted to rest, but didn't feel like cleaning up the place to make it habitable.

Slumping against the doorframe, Rina placed a palm over her face and burst into tears. "I have nothing!" she said through her sobs. "My dad ran off when I was just little—and my mom said it was because he molested me, but my heart tells me that's a lie. And my mom—lying and abusive as she was—died a couple years back. My fiancé and my friends—or whatever they were—dumped me. And I lost my home, my job...." Rubbing her face with both hands, Rina added, "And now, I wouldn't be starting all over again...I wouldn't be starting from zero. I'd be starting from minus ten." A ragged sob ripped through her throat. "And I can't stand the thought of that. It's all just too much."

Still sobbing, Rina went back into her car and flung herself back against the seat. "I'll never have a kid anyway. Who'd want to marry and have a kid with a big stupid failure like me?" *That's why so many women are having a baby on their own.*

Rina knew she could do that, too. But she hated the thought of her own child growing up fatherless like she had. That child would never know that other part of herself. She'd walk around the world and look at other men and think that any of them could be her father. And maybe, that child would end up making the same painful mistakes Rina had ended up making.

No one had ever loved Rina and it seemed that no one ever would. She always gave everything she had to a relationship, but it was never enough for anyone. Her own mother never let Rina be herself; Rina needed to toe the line with her mother even when her mother brought home sleazy boyfriends.

Her sobs subsiding, Rina pondered this. Why was it that Rina could never give enough? Other people seemed to both give *and* receive. Other people were allowed to experience times of weakness or illness or exhaustion. Why not Rina? Why did Rina always need to be so flawlessly selfless?

Then snow started falling.

Good. That was exactly what Rina had come for.

The idea of freezing to death came to her out of the blue. She'd been musing over the most painless way to end her life when suddenly, she remembered Laura Ingalls trying not to fall asleep in the deathly cold as Almanzo Wilder took her home in his cutter during a cold snap.

At first, Rina would just be cold. Then she would feel warm and sleepy. And then....

She wouldn't need to worry about pain or vomiting or embarrassing bodily functions, like with pills. Or malfunctions that leave a person disabled or in agony for days, like with guns. And drowning, wrist-slicing, burning, and hanging all sounded so horrid. Furthermore, Rina would

never want to traumatize other people, like by stepping in front of a bus or train.

She could just wait here in the car until the time was right.

Rina didn't even want to write a note. No one would care anyway. Would her body even be found before spring? She liked the thought of being a mysterious disappearance. Her car would be found here with no note, an abandoned purse, the laptop under the driver's seat, and just a decomposing, maybe half-eaten body. People would wrestle over whether it was intentional or not, and why a young woman with her whole life ahead of her would take her own life. Then her history would come out: her abandonment by her father, her mother's death, her friends' drifting away, her rejection by her fiancé, the loss of her job and home....

And maybe someone would feel a smidgen of guilt. Maybe.

Troy probably wouldn't. In his eyes, it would just be another stupid thing she did.

But maybe her boss would feel bad. Or Troy's friends and their girlfriends. For a little while anyway, people might feel bad. And maybe it would make the newspapers. And her father, wherever he was, might see it and recognize her name and feel bad. Although it seemed to Rina that the type of man who abandoned his little girl might not feel so bad when that same girl actually died later. He obviously didn't care much for her. But still. Death makes everything different, especially when it comes through suicide.

As the snow packed up around her, Rina considered putting on the engine and killing herself with carbon monoxide poisoning. But what if that didn't work? Anyway, she liked the idea of going to sleep in the soft cradle of snow and the fresh clean air.

She didn't think much about what would come after death. Rina was sure that with all the suffering and loneliness life had dumped on her, the Other Side would be pretty understanding.

Her breath came in soft hiccups and the snow plopped into pretty little splats all over her window. Lulled by the peacefulness, Rina struggled not to fall asleep. She wanted to be good and sleepy when she finally went outside so that she wouldn't feel the cold for long.

While she waited, Rina plugged in her favorite album of Amber Day. Amber Day had been Rina's childhood idol and Rina reminisced over the special tone of Amber's voice as she sang literally anything. Rina remembered reading about how Amber Day had fought to do this very album. Her producers warned it wouldn't sell. And overall, it didn't sell as well as her pop albums. But it was a cult hit with her dedicated core of fans. In this album, Amber sang a piece from every type of music: jazz, blues, lullaby, ballad, folk, acapella, Broadway, pop, rock—even opera. It was amazing to hear the unique Amber Day tone expressed in so many different ways.

A starburst of memory flashed into Rina's mind. She was singing together with her father along with Amber Day's rendition of *Stormy Weather*.

The memory hurt so much that Rina tried to push it away, then she realized she should embrace the pain. It bolstered her resolve to end her life.

Rina nodded as she listened to Amber croon *Leaving on a Jet Plane*. Amber's career had ended like a skid in the mud. The intervals between new songs and appearances stretched out farther and farther. New paparazzi pictures showed Amber looking worn and frazzled, her formerly bright look now darkened with heavy eyeliner and black nail polish. Rina remembered her own young confusion and disappointment when smutty pictures of Amber Day appeared all over the Internet. That wasn't the Amber she'd fallen in love with and grown to idolize.

Then Amber Day disappeared from the scene and Rina never heard of her again.

Maybe she ended it all too?

The snow stopped splatting when it landed and instead fell in a quiet torrent, softly blanketing the windshield. Eventually, the car sat half-buried in snow. After struggling with the door, Rina slid out through the window. It was fun balancing on top of the snow and seeing over the roof of the cabin.

She looked up at the cloud-covered sky glowing lavender in the moonlight. Infinite pellets of snow rained down on her face. To her left, the woods looked dark and forbidding. But looking down, the snow glistened with iridescent sparkles.

This is a lovely place to die, Rina thought, smiling to herself.

Crouching down and reaching into the back of the car, Rina pulled out two thick blankets and a pillow.

She spread both blankets out, one on top of the other, then threw the pillow down and inched off her boots. It felt great to be outside in such loveliness with warm fuzzy socks and a thick sweater, even though the cold bothered her more than she'd thought it would. Resting her head on the pillow, Rina rolled herself up into a cocoon of blankets and prepared to go to sleep forever.

She was just starting to doze off through her shivering when she heard branches cracking in the forest.

Then she heard shuffling in the snow.

Finally, snorts and growls sounded out from the direction of the forest.

It didn't sound like people. And it wasn't dogs or coyotes either.