

*From A Bright Swarm of Beetles, by Don Zolidis ©2011*

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MIKHAIL, 30s

YELENA, 30s

Moscow. 1934. Mikhail is a famous playwright who is infuriated with the glacial pace of rehearsals for his newest play. He confides in Yelena, who is cheating on her husband with him.

MIKHAIL

He's the devil. Rewrite this, rewrite this, eliminate the third act, what the hell does he think I am? 'The play is about Bulgakov' of course it's about Bulgakov what the hell else would it be about? It's like I'm an errand boy! Fetch me more dramatic irony in act two! Bring me back a seven minute scene! Wash my underwear in act four!

YELENA

Take a break, Misha.

MIKHAIL

That's what he tells the actors! Every ten minutes they take a break to rest their fucking spirits.

YELENA

Read to me from the novel.

MIKHAIL

I haven't added anything to it. My brain is full of blisters.

YELENA

I don't mind hearing the old stuff again.

MIKHAIL

All right.

YELENA

Tell me something: does the story end happily?

MIKHAIL

I'd hate to spoil the surprise.

YELENA

For Margarita at least?

MIKHAIL

Well... first she must leave her husband – leave him for the writer.

YELENA

But that is very difficult to do.

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It is.  
(Pause)

Mikhail...

I think it's time. I love you very much.

No.

No to what?

I can't do it. I can't –

You have to have courage –

He suspects us.

Your husband?

He knows.

How does he know?

I don't know. He makes these comments – it's like he's a spider, waiting in its web.

Tell him then.

It's not so simple.

Why must we crawl around in the darkness?

MIKHAIL

YELENA

MIKHAIL

YELENA

MIKHAIL

YELENA

MIKHAIL

YELENA

MIKHAIL

YELENA

MIKHAIL

YELENA

MIKHAIL

YELENA

MIKHAIL

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YELENA

I have children, Misha.

MIKHAIL

Who you never see.

YELENA

Who I love very much.

MIKHAIL

Who have been taken from you—

YELENA

He'll do something terrible to them.

MIKHAIL

Bring them here.

YELENA

I don't have that kind of power. They're away at school, if he suspects I'm going to leave him he'll... I don't know what he'll do but there are times I look at him and there's a madman behind his eyes that I've never seen before. He pretends not to be jealous, he pretends to smile at me, but he's a stormcloud gathering now, I can feel it when he touches me –

MIKHAIL

Please don't talk about –

YELENA

Who else can I say it to? You expect me to lose everything to be with you.

MIKHAIL

Listen to me: All these things that you imagine you'll lose, they don't exist. I know. They're just... ribbons around our lives but they mean nothing. I've already lost everything and yet – these have been the happiest days of my life. Absolutely. Without question. I can't imagine any better existence than to wait in this tiny, humid little apartment, scratch out a few sentences and listen for your footsteps on the steps outside. I'm telling you I am resurrected. You have done this. The moments you're here with the sun streaming in and the sounds of the birds outside and quiet quiet afternoon – it's all the beauty of the world shrunk down and solidified right here. And then you leave, and the door shuts, and the grimness of everything comes back. And the mice creep from their hiding places and I'm a sad failed person again.

YELENA

I cannot continue to do this.

MIKHAIL

You don't need to live in some marvelous apartment, you don't need –

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I have to end this. I'm so sorry Misha.	YELENA
No no no, don't say that.	MIKHAIL
I have to go.	YELENA
No please God don't go.	MIKHAIL
He knows about us.	YELENA
Do you love me?	MIKHAIL
You know that I do.	YELENA
Do you love him?	MIKHAIL
I love my children.	YELENA
Do you love him?	MIKHAIL
Why ask me? You know that answer.	YELENA
Tell me.	MIKHAIL
No I don't love him.	YELENA
That's all you need to decide, isn't it?	MIKHAIL
No it's not.	YELENA

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MIKHAIL

I'll find a way to get your boys here, we can all live together –

YELENA

He's a very powerful man, Misha, you can't possible hope to –

MIKHAIL

I have powerful friends too.

YELENA

Goodbye, Mikhail.

MIKHAIL

Please don't do this.

YELENA

I have to.

MIKHAIL

Please stay.

YELENA

I'm sorry.

*(she gets up.)*

MIKHAIL

When will I see you again?

*(she leaves.)*