

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

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MIKHAIL, 20s

TATIANA (TASHA), 20s

Moscow, 1920s. Winter. A young married couple is struggling to cope with desperate poverty in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union.

(TATIANA brings the heated water to MIKHAIL and he warms his hands over it.)

When are you coming to bed? TATIANA

Soon. MIKHAIL

I'm crawling back in. TATIANA

Fine. MIKHAIL

I love you. TATIANA

I love you too. MIKHAIL

(They share a perfunctory kiss. TATIANA gathers the blankets about herself and settles onto the small bed.)

Let me know when you need more water. TATIANA

I will. MIKHAIL
(MIKHAIL writes.)

Misha? TATIANA

Please, Tasya, I need to focus on this. MIKHAIL

Come to bed please. It's too cold here without you. TATIANA

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MIKHAIL

I need to finish this chapter.

TATIANA

Every night you're—

MIKHAIL

I need to finish it. Lezhnev runs a small literary journal now—he might be interested.

TATIANA

What is it about? Your novel?

MIKHAIL

The revolution.

TATIANA

No one wants to read about that, Misha. You need to write something people will buy.

MIKHAIL

I write what I write, whether or not people buy it is immaterial.

TATIANA

You can't keep writing things in order to provoke people.

MIKHAIL

What do you mean, provoke people?

TATIANA

These stories. They don't—

MIKHAIL

Please don't speak about things you know nothing about.

(Silence.)

I'm sorry. I should not have said that.

TATIANA

Is that what you think? I'm just a stupid girl?

MIKHAIL

I didn't say that.

TATIANA

Do you think that?

MIKHAIL

Do you ever show an interest in my work? Do you ever read it? When I first met you, when I

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wrote those little stories, you read them all. And now—

TATIANA

I'm exhausted.

MIKHAIL

And I'm not? I can't see straight half of the time. How am I supposed to work when I can't even see what I'm doing? Damn it it's freezing in here!

TATIANA

Talk to Anatoly—

MIKHAIL

We need to move.

TATIANA

How on earth are we going to manage that?

MIKHAIL

This apartment materialized out of hell. But Tasya...
(he stops)

TATIANA

What?

MIKHAIL

Nothing.

TATIANA

You were going to say something.

MIKHAIL

Do you remember, before the war, when I was still a student—we used to go out to dinner, at those cafes, as soon as I scraped together some money—that time you wanted to ride in the motorcar?

TATIANA

Yes.

MIKHAIL

And I said, damn it, let's do it. If you want to ride in a motorcar, we'll ride in a motorcar. Who cares what it costs?

TATIANA

I remember that.

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MIKHAIL

Do you remember how happy we were then?

TATIANA

We knew nothing.

MIKHAIL

I suppose that's what happiness is, isn't it? The knowledge of love and nothing more.

TATIANA

I am still in love with you.

(short pause)

Do you still wish to be married to me?

MIKHAIL

Of course I do.

TATIANA

It's possible, you know, if you don't want me any more—

MIKHAIL

Of course I want you.

TATIANA

You never... I don't know that I believe that. Every day when you go to work, Misha, I try to clean this place, it's disgusting, and I try to think of ways for us to get money. We've already sold our old furniture and our silver, and I think, it's worth it because he is going to be a great man, and we must make sacrifices. But I worry that if you become a great man you will no longer want me—you will be beyond me, and I am too stupid and too plain for someone who is going to shake the world.

MIKHAIL

That's not true.

TATIANA

Do you know what I did today? I went down to the jeweler and I asked him how much he would give me for my wedding ring. A hundred rubles. And I was about to sell it to him—

MIKHAIL

No—

TATIANA

Because I thought that perhaps we needed the money more than we needed the marriage.

(pause)

Aren't you going to say anything to me? Misha?

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