

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

From A Bright Swarm of Beetles

MIKHAIL, late 30s
YELENA, late 30s
MARTA, their neighbor.

Moscow. 1938. A famous writer tries to survive one of Stalin's infamous purges. Yelena has just received word that her ex-husband has been arrested.

YELENA
Thank you.
(she hangs up.)

MIKHAIL
Well?

YELENA
The children are safe. They're staying with his aunt in Smolensk.

MIKHAIL
Is there no hope for him?

YELENA
They printed his confession in the paper today. They plan on murdering him. They were holding him at the Novibrankya Prison. Would you mind if I tried to see him?

MIKHAIL
Of course not.

YELENA
If he's still alive.

MIKHAIL
Why arrest him?

YELENA
He was intelligent and good at his job. That's why. A threat. The serpent is eating its own tail.

MIKHAIL
Let's hope it eats its own head.
(YELENA is after him quickly.)

YELENA *(a fierce whisper)*
Don't be an idiot. They have ears everywhere.
(he nods)

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

MIKHAIL

Do you think the boys are safe?

YELENA

They're at school. They're the sons of a traitor now.

MIKHAIL

Perhaps you could send for them –

YELENA

I don't want them here.

MIKHAIL

We could make space –

YELENA

There's no space! What could we feed them?

MIKHAIL

Perhaps there is a way –

YELENA

Misha. They weren't with Yevgeny when he was taken. That's why they live. Smolensk is a good palce for them.

MIKHAIL

So far away?

YELENA

Why are you being so dense?

MIKHAIL

I don't understand.

YELENA

If they were here, and something happened... to you... how would that look? The sons of a traitor and the stepsons of a... I don't want them to be here if they come for you.

(MIKHAIL nods.)

(pause.)

MIKHAIL

Let's not talk about that.

YELENA

I'm sorry.

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

MIKHAIL

I find myself as surprised as you are. Men have been killed for reporting the wrong weather.
(there's a knock at the door. YELENA and MIKHAIL freeze.)

(wordlessly, MIKHAIL hides the scraps of the novel he's been working on.)

(Another knock, louder this time.)

(YELENA opens the door. MARTA, a neighbor, is there..)

MARTA

Yelena Sergeyevna. Mikhail Afaniasievich.

YELENA *(not really letting her in.)*

Marta. How are you?

MARTA

How is anyone. A miserable day today, wasn't it?

YELENA

I can't wait for spring.

MARTA

And how are you Mikhail?

YELENA

He is not well.

MARTA

So sorry to hear that. Are you working on a new play?

YELENA

He no longer writes.

MARTA

Probably for the best. Such trouble with the plays.

YELENA

Do you need anything?

MARTA

I was wondering if you had any tea I could have?

YELENA

Of course. Stay right there. Mikhail is quite contagious.

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

MARTA

What is your sickness, Mikhail? I hear many people in Moscow are ill these days. Perhaps you should see the doctor.

MIKHAIL

I'll see the doctor when I'm better.

(YELENA returns with some tea.)

MARTA

I heard about your old husband. Such a shame. And you never knew it was going on under your own roof, I suppose?

YELENA

It was a shock to me.

MARTA

Of course.

YELENA

Goodbye Marta.

MARTA

You need to keep alert, you know? I hear there are traitors everywhere.

YELENA

We'll keep our eyes peeled.

MARTA

I've heard the theatre is a hotbed of it.

YELENA

Goodbye.

MARTA

I'm a little short on money these days.

YELENA

We have nothing to give you. Now go.

MARTA

No need to be rude.

(she exits. YELENA locks the door behind her.)

YELENA

Bitch. She'd condemn her own cat.

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

MIKHAIL

They'll be arresting cats next.

(YELENA sits heavily. She kicks at something.)

It's all right, Lena.

(he approaches her.)

YELENA

Devils everywhere they're –

MIKHAIL

We're still here. I'm still here.

YELENA

They're going to –

MIKHAIL

They're not going to take me.

(pause)

Should I read to you from the novel?

YELENA

Please. It's the only thing that keeps me going.

MIKHAIL

This will change one day.

YELENA

I can't let myself believe that.

MIKHAIL

The fire will burn itself out. It has to. And we'll grow old together. No, we will both be old one day.

YELENA

Stop. Read the story.

MIKHAIL

And there will be sunlight and a soft breeze, and we will never speak of these days. You will see. I see such things in the future, my love. Such bright and wonderful days ahead of us.

YELENA

You're being ridiculous now.

MIKHAIL

You'll see. People will read this novel on every street corner and say, "by God he was right all

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

along.” Don’t you believe that?

YELENA

I can believe anything you say.

MIKHAIL

There’s the fool I married.

YELENA

And what else does the future hold if your vision is correct?

MIKHAIL

Apples.

YELENA

Apples?

MIKHAIL

Apple trees. Fields of them. We shall live out in the country somewhere and in the fall you will find those apples – and bring them home to us – I’ll become like Tolstoy a grow a beard below the waist – won’t wear clothes any more, just wrap it around myself like a grey blanket while I sit on the porch –

YELENA

Contemplating your next great work, no doubt?

MIKHAIL

Oh I will be finished then. Mostly it will be nude compositions of poetry. And thinking of the past. Old friends. And the surprise of that one masterpiece.

YELENA

Show me.

MIKHAIL

Page 102. the Devil’s banquet.