

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

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MIKHAIL, 20s
ZAYTSEV, 30s
ZAYTSEV'S WIFE, 30s

Moscow. 1920s. A former doctor who is now a struggling writer (Mikhail) is trying to convince a publisher to publish his novel.

Mikhail, Mikhail, Mikhail.
(he places a manuscript down.)

ZAYTSEV

Did you read my novel?

MIKHAIL

I did. And –

ZAYTSEV

And?

MIKHAIL

ZAYTSEV

You know that I love you and I think of you like a brother, and I would in fact steal my brother's shoes to give them to you, in fact my own brother I hate him he is a bastard and you are like the brother I wish I had, but... I cannot publish this. It's not the quality of the work, you know, it is top notch.

What is it then?

MIKHAIL

ZAYTSEV

You have to understand, the censors are after everything now. Your novel has entirely too much sympathy for the losers of the revolution – you start putting this out there people are going to think you don't like our communist masters.

Communism will be the death of Russia.

MIKHAIL

ZAYTSEV

See it is things like that that are going to get you killed someday. I don't like the Bolsheviks, but they're the ones with the guns these days, so – hey, you want stories about the grandeur of cement factories, I'll print stories about cement factories.

Even if they're shit?

MIKHAIL

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ZAYTSEV

It's a story about a cement factory, what do you want, Tolstoy?

MIKHAIL

Don't we have an obligation to strike at a little bit of truth?

ZAYTSEV

No. I have an obligation to sell magazines. And I can't sell magazines if I'm being shut down. So thank you very much for your wonderful and potentially life-crushing story, I'm going to have to pass.

MIKHAIL

I'm telling you, if you publish this story, it will be the biggest hit you ever have. The people out there are tired of hearing official lies, they are hungry for the truth. They are hungry for stories that reflect what they witnessed, and we all know that none of the sides in the war were armies of angels, we were all devils and we were all angels together – that's humanity, that's what my novel is about. That's why people will buy it when you publish it. Give it a chance.

ZAYTSEV

I'm sorry Mikhail.

(ZAYTSEV'S WIFE enters.)

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

Is this him?

ZAYTSEV

Yes. But please darling I haven't -

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

He doesn't look like a doctor.

ZAYTSEV

It is very difficult everywhere, even for doctors. But I assure you that Doctor Bulgakov is an expert in all matters of the -

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

This son-of-a-bitch said it was a hereditary condition. He didn't have the condition when we were first married, and now all of a sudden I see these –

ZAYTSEV

Doctor Bulgakov can I please talk to you for a moment?

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

Shut up and let the doctor talk. Well? You looked at him?

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MIKHAIL

I did.

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

They come from his whore.

ZAYTSEV

I work very long hours and my wife has these insane suspicions –

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

Insane? You cheating drunk I'll –

MIKHAIL

Madame, I did have the chance to thoroughly examine your husband and I can say with absolute certainty that...

(MIKHAIL surreptitiously pushes his manuscript back towards ZAYTSEV.)

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

Well?

MIKHAIL

They are stress-related.

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

Stress-related?

MIKHAIL

When a man is put under an immense amount of pressure, pressure at work, and then a continuation of that pressure at home, it is possible to exhibit certain symptoms in the nether regions.

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

What?

MIKHAIL

Unfortunately, they can be harmful. If the stress is not eased... possibly fatal.

ZAYTSEV

I told you I wasn't feeling well.

MIKHAIL

So I think the best thing would be to allow your husband some peace and quiet when he arrives home. If you feel the urge to nag or to criticize, remember the turmoil that is boiling to the surface in his groin, and then simply fall silent. That is the only way.

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

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I didn't know. I am so sorry Nikolai.

ZAYTSEV

Varenka, we have serious business to discuss. Please do not add more stress. I am beginning to feel the anger growing in my loins.

ZAYTSEV'S WIFE

Very well.

(She leaves.)

ZAYTSEV

We'll start it in the September issue. And um... I do probably want some medical advice.

MIKHAIL

Probably.