

My dear Sofochka!

Today is October 11, the two years' and three months' anniversary of our life together, the hard life of a seaman's family. I always wrote to you whenever we were apart on this day, and so I am writing to you now, even though I have no idea when I'll be able to mail this letter to you, but the thought of being with you, at least this way, is just too tempting. I am looking right now at your dear face, and I long to be by your side so much, and I believe we are going to be together again soon. It's pretty hard now, and I think it's going to get much harder, but I know that if I go through all this, I will be with you again, and this gives me all the strength and energy I need. I know that someone's waiting for me and thinking of me, that I am not alone, and that's the main thing. I think back to my 1960 voyage: even though it wasn't anywhere near as hard as this one, it was much harder for me. Wait for me, beloved, and we will be together for sure. Our love will prevail. Our day will come.

So, what has happened since the day we parted? I tried calling you on September 30, but was told you had left together with Mukhtarova (*Mukhtarov's wife - Eds.*). I went to meet her, secretly hoping that you had "done something silly." But she arrived alone. After that, I went to pick up the ship's mail. The post office was closed, but I still managed to get them to give me the mail, and I even received my encyclopaedia. I dropped in at the barber's, got a haircut, so now I look like a hedgehog (*see drawing*), but it feels comfortable, and the hair is sure to have grown back out by the time I see you.

(*Text missing*) ...the encyclopaedia needed to be (*illegible*). They were having a small get-together there, so I had to join them and have two quick drinks: one to the birthday girl's health and another to my safe sailing. I came back to my place and thought I'd try calling again, but... the phone wasn't working. We were cut off from the rest of the world. We even had a floating store docking with us. I bought two kilos of apples to take with me, which I finished today. Those were our last hours before leaving. Finally, the battle alert came. I scribbled a couple of lines to you at the very last moment, to be sent courtesy of Mukhtarova, don't know if you received them.

Our voyage began. For the first five days everything was quiet, the weather was auspicious. But then it became worse, it got to be so that we would feel uneasy if we didn't get drenched once in every 15-20 seconds. But we were wearing protective clothing, so Neptune was powerless against us. The sea looked beautiful at night. The water is luminescent at this time of the year, especially in the Norwegian Sea, and that's quite a sight to see, even when this water is running off you in a luminescent cascade. Even our situation being what it was, we couldn't help admiring the view. I so wished at such moments I had a deck under my feet, at least the *Rossiya's* (*a famous Soviet luxury liner of the time - Eds.*), and next to me, instead of the helmsman/signalman in a rubber suit, you, in a light summer dress, and that you would feel chilly, and we would stand with our arms around each other, admiring the beauty of the sea by night.

Day followed night, watch -rest -watch. Alik Mukhtarov is out of commission. He 's been replaced by (*illegible*) , while he is lying in bed and groaning. Please don 't tell his wife. Otherwise, things have more or less settled down. It's our tenth day on the seas, and we still don't know where we are bound for. Only yesterday the Commander told us our route. So you see, I guess you knew where I was going before I did. Today we reset our watches four hours all at once. Now we have breakfast at noon, lunch at four, and so on, and in general, everything's turning upside down. Yesterday the sky was clear, and I, first of all, found your stars in the Constellation of Orion (remember those three stars?). If you find them, too, we' ll be able to send messages to each other via those stars, OK? Each ship's night (I no longer know which is day and which is night here) I see you and Lyalechka in my dreams without fail. I wake up and, first thing, say good morning to you both. Our quarters are fully occupied now, with three families sharing them: the flagship mechanic's wife and daughter under the glass (I introduced you in the store on your last day), Tolya Potapov 's wife and two kids on the wall, and you and Lyalya in the frame. So, as you can see, there are ten people living on just 3 rrr', and co-existing quite peacefully.

We celebrated Vladik's birthday. I, on behalf of the whole crew, presented him with six chops topped with fried guinea-fowl eggs. This time even he had to admit he was full. He, in his turn, gave us all a surprise: he produced a bottle of beer. For the most part, we drank different wines.

Sweetheart, I have to get ready for my watch, which means again donning my "spacesuit," which is pretty slow going. I will continue this letter later, but now I just want to tell you that you are my most wonderful wife, that I love you very, very much and I miss you like hell, I dream of our future meeting day and night. A huge hug and a thousand kisses on your sweet eyes, lips, nose, and cheeks.

Half a month gone. We are sailing undersea. The pitching and rolling is terrible. Everyone's feeling very funny: the men don't get seasick but simply tired out by all this tossing. You can't even get a good night's rest: you have to hold onto something even in your sleep, or else you'll fall off. And the gale isn't even all that heavy, it's just the ocean surge. The bridge is still getting flooded. Our eyes are so full of salt they hurt. You can dodge one wave, but not all of them. Even our rubber suits aren't much protection, we still have to dry our clothes after the watch even as it is, and just think what we would have done without them! We have a salty taste in our mouths all the time, there's no getting rid of it, as you get to swallow enough saltwater during your watch, and we don't get any more freshwater for washing, we already wasted such a lot of it early on. This morning my watch started at 8 A.M. (Moscow time), first thing I did was say hi to you via Orion, we have this constellation directly overhead now. The sun rose at 13 minutes to twelve. We were accompanied by a bunch of tunas for an hour, they kept up with us all the time. Where do they get the strength, I wonder? They only dive in for a second and then surface again with a powerful push. They are a sight for sore eyes. I saw a flying fish for the first time in my life, it's very small.

(Drawing)

This is what the moon looks like here: horns up and bottom down, not at all the way it looks in our latitudes.

(Drawing)

This is what Orion looks like here. It's directly overhead, and there are three other stars in there, but they are very small.

Wow, quite a watch I've had. For the first time in my life I got covered by such huge masses of water that my ears were hurting under the pressure, the way they do when you are on an airplane but minus the soft seats. All my watches are "lucky" in regard to bumping into planes and ships. Everyone else's watches are uneventful, but if it's me, we are sure to have to dive two or three times per watch. During the night, I think I got scared of my own shadow. The sun had just set, and suddenly I saw a fast-moving light in the sky coming from the opposite direction. I thought it was a jet plane, and ordered an emergency dive. We submerged. Then, about 30 minutes after we emerged, the signalman again shouted: "Plane!" I looked and saw he was pointing to Sirius. But his Sirius looked exactly like my jet plane. I pointed out the signalman's mistake to him, but as for my own... Let it be my little secret. I think what happened was that Sirius had been the first star to come out, and the clouds moving fast across it gave the impression of it moving. Please don't tell anyone how I got scared by a far-away star, OK?

And we are plowing on and on. Leningrad, Moscow, Stalingrad, the Crimea -we left them all behind. Somewhere to the right is the northern US border; to the left, France, Spain, Portugal. You and I are farther and farther away from each other with every passing moment, but while the distance separates us, I've never felt quite so close to you both in spirit. All my thoughts are about you, my little girls. Why is it that people don't fully appreciate the happiness of being together all the time? This happiness is not available to us now, but some day it will be ours for sure. Yesterday I got out the pictures I have here with me, and have been studying each darling, sweet feature of your faces. Here's Lyalechka sitting in the sand with her little arm raised; here are you, my little mermaid, coming out of the water with such a nice smile; Lyalechka unravelling yarn and looking very businesslike; and you trying to get a ball away from her with a most serious face. All this is so dear and precious to my heart and my soul. What are you doing right now, my dear girls, how are you feeling? We have only just had lunch, but where you live, it's already 6:30 P.M. Perhaps you are out walking now, and Lyalya doesn't want to keep walking with her own two feet and is trying to get you to pick her up, and you, sweetheart, are a little angry with her, because you are so tired by the end of the day, but still you pick her up, violating every rule of child rearing. But how could you not to, with her so sweet and tender, such a sly little darling?

Thinking of you, I am thinking of our near future. What's in store for us, how necessary is all this? It all will, of course, become clearer once we get there. We've been trying to tune in to

the news, but we can't get anything. All we got is that the temperature in Moscow is +7°C, while our water here is +17-22°C, the air is about the same, although there is practically no sun and a southern wind is blowing all the time. Are you cold there? Is the heating all right? How I'd love to get even a tiny note from you, how I wish I'd taken your letters with me, I would now be reading and re-reading them day in, day out.

How magnificent the ocean is when it's angry! It is all white. I have seen bigger storms, but never anything more beautiful than this. It isn't simply all covered in whitecaps; the whole surface is white. It brings to mind Gorky's "Song of the Stormy Petrel": "O'er the white vale of the ocean Angry storm clouds are a-gathering..." From time to time there's a glimpse of blue water, a brilliant blue, just like that blue lake on the way up to Lake Ritsa, remember? And the waves, what waves! They are not just high but also long, they rise like mountain ridges, seemingly stretching on without end. Our vessel looks like a tiny bug next to them, there can't even be any comparison.

But when dusk fell, that same ocean became terrifying and menacing, and the beauty vanished, all that was left was the dismal blackness and the sensation that anything might happen any minute, any wicked trick might be played upon us. But I was soon relieved from watch, although it's still worse inside: everything is tossed about, things are flying, and so on. During the night you are too busy trying to keep from tumbling out to sleep, the self-preservation instinct kicks in.

You know, the smell I've come to hate most is rubber. I wasn't too crazy about it to begin with, but now -ewww! All the time I am up on the bridge, I have to be wearing this rubber suit, I can't even smell the fresh air for this stench. Today I revolted and came out to the bridge wearing a raincoat. Twenty minutes later I was drenched to the bone. I guess from now on I'll have to suit up properly, after all.

We were tossed about for over two weeks, and finally the sea mellowed and let us take a breather. It's wonderful up on the bridge, but inside it's horrible.

The sea, or rather, the ocean, is absolutely calm. The sun has been shining brightly for the past three days. The colour of the water is something between navy blue and purple. The temperature of the water is +27°C, and of the air, +25-28°C. Even at night you can keep watch wearing nothing but a light jacket. When we heard over the radio that winter had come to Murmansk, we could hardly believe it. The flying fish are flitting all around. Now we've finally been able to take a better look at them. They are very small, no more than 10-15 cm, with wings, can fly for over 50 metres, darkish in colour, look green and absolutely transparent in the sun, very, very beautiful.

Tonight I was lucky enough to see the two satellites at once, both ours and American. I've never seen them before.

Ours looked like a quite impressive star and was for some reason swinging from side to side as it flew. The US one was barely visible, very faintly flickering. We determined which of them was which by their orbits, so please don't laugh about how we managed to read what's written on them!

And inside the sub it's terribly hot. Even in the coolest places the temperatures are +35°C or higher. The heat's driving us crazy. You know how much I "love" heat, as much as you "love" cold. Humidity's gone way up. It's getting harder and harder to breathe. Everyone's walking about wearing nothing but shorts and sandals, only the officer-on-deck puts on a navy blue jacket, for propriety's sake.

My darlings, how hard it is for me to be without you, so dull and tiresome. All my thoughts are with you, or rather, just one thought, for the most part: when will we be together? In three days things might become clearer. We are passing one of the most "jolly" spots. So far everything's OK. Today our dear doctor gave us a demonstration of his skill. One of the men assigned to our sub developed an appendicitis, so the poor doctor had to operate. All went well, except that Vitya lost about ten kilos, his eyes even started bulging. Tomorrow's going to be hard, we'll have to stay under in this heat, but what can you do? We are SUBMARINERS, after all.

Yes, it's hard to stay undersea all day long in such heat. Everyone 's agreed that they would rather have frost and snowstorm. We are simply going crazy. In some compartments the temperature went up to +57°C, +37°C in the coolest places, and all this stuffiness into the bargain.

The next few days are looking about the same. What's going to become of us if this goes on for over a month?

Darling, how are you feeling, how is Lyalechka? I go through your pictures several times a day, studying every feature. I am willing to go through any ordeal, if only it brings closer the moment of our meeting.

The heat again. Normally submariners like to let their moustaches and beards grow out during such missions, but no one's doing that now, everyone's shaving, most even shave their heads. There's an electric fan working right in front of me, but it doesn't help one little bit, there's no freshness at all. I keep thinking that you like warmth so much, but you have cold weather, it's all upside down and inside out.

We still don't know anything for sure. There's something new every day, and it only puts us all on edge. I am sure you listen to the radio, so you know the situation around us. If only there were any definite information, even if it's the worst, it would still be better, at least we would know what to do, because the uncertainty is really getting to us.

My dearest, by the time you read this, it will be all over, so don't get upset. I am glad you don't know anything right now.

It's my watch now, I'll be twisting the periscope for four hours -that's our only connection with the surface. It's so good up there: clean air, lots of sunlight, very calm sea and myriads of flying fish.

Our time has now shifted a full eight hours. We have breakfast at 3 P.M., go to bed at 6 A.M., when you are already getting up. We are getting used to this, too, what can you do, man gets used to everything, except being away from his near and dear. My darlings, you are now going to bed, good night to you, and we've just had lunch.

Well, our "friends" the Americans fixed us but good. They won't let us show our noses on the surface; even at night they won't leave us alone. And in such a situation, when you'd think all this was bad enough, the commander's nerves start fraying around the edge. Thus I became an enemy of the nation, a criminal. The thing is, this heat is already reaching the freezer room. Despite our efforts at keeping it cool, the temperature has been climbing slowly but surely and has reached +8°C. I called the mechanic, the hold operators, they looked it over and said there wasn't anything they could do. The meat was going bad, so I increased the ration. When the commander found out the temperature in the freezer had gone up, he said I was making the provisions go bad on purpose. There was a big row, and now I feel very badly about it all. But the heat's been getting to us, and everyone as if right after a steam bath. We are beginning to feel the first consequences of such conditions. Everyone is having some sort of problem, mostly with their feet. And the Lord only knows how much longer all this is going to last. I think the only ones who know are the ones who wrote the orders.

Darling, I am worried about your college. Have you heard back from them? What did they say? Of course you should graduate, it would be a pity to drop out now, after you've spent so many years on it, and besides, you wouldn't be happy staying at home as soon as Lyalechka is a bit older. Sweetheart, how I long to see you both, to hug you, kiss you and go for a walk with you on a sunny day on the clean new snow.

Another day gone. It's night already.

I had to stop writing just as I was about to write how much I love our little girl, how even in the hardest moments I remember her tiny hands, her happy smile, her little nodding head across the table from me, her laughter and her caresses -and I myself can't hold back a smile.

We are in the enemy's lair, and we can't reveal our presence to them, but they sense our nearness and are searching for us. They detected us yesterday, but we managed to escape. Something exploded somewhere, but at a distance from us, so we don't know how serious it was. But here, inside the sub, the situation is very serious. The men are feeling notably worse, a lot of them are ill, people are fainting, many have swollen feet, no one can sleep in this monstrous heat

and stuffy air, even though everyone is very tired and weak. Everyone's skin is covered with rash, some look like Indians -they put some (*antiseptic ointment, bright green in color - Eds.*) on their rash, and it got smeared all over their bodies because of the sweat. I now have the following ration: after I am relieved from watch, I go straight to bed without breakfast, as it's a tiny bit cooler at that time; then, at lunchtime, I drink a cup of compote; at suppertime, a dairy meal and a cup of compote; and then evening tea, two cups. Freshwater is strictly rationed, only for cooking, and even that is and everyone is also thirsty. That's all everyone's talking about: thirst. Oh, how thirsty I am. It's hard to write, the paper is soaked in sweat. We are all looking like we just came out of a steam bath. My fingertips are completely white, as if Lyalechka were again one month old, and I washed all her diapers.

Now we are under the ..., some fresh air is coming in, and everyone is breathing it with mouths wide open. Through the periscope I watched the Americans stop two transports, probably for an inspection. They are quite brazen about it, while the planes are making us dive again. I wish this were over, I'd rather be in a fight than down here, I wish we could do something here soon and go home, to you, my darlings.

The worst thing is that the commander's nerves are shot to hell, he's yelling at everyone and torturing himself. You can tell he's never before been on independent voyages: he doesn't realize he should be saving his own strength and the men's, too, otherwise we are not going to last long. He is already becoming paranoid, scared of his own shadow. He's hard to deal with. I feel sorry for him and at the same time angry with him for his rash actions.

Our poor doctor, he can't even take the patients' temperature, as there is no place on the sub where the air temperature would be under +38°C, so all thermometers read off-scale.

For four days we haven't been able to get a breath of fresh air, to emerge at least to periscope depth. The compartments are hot and stuffy. I made the rounds of the compartments, and the only one I saw was the officer-on-deck. All the rest gather in the two places where the temperature is slightly lower, about +40°C. I lay down in Compartment One, hugging the [*torpedo?*]. It's getting hard to breathe in here, too much CO₂, but no one wants to leave, as it is slightly cooler here. I barely made it through my previous watch. I feel faint all over, slightly dizzy, and I am also showing the results of this way of life, something like hives.

[*Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive.*]