

# **THE TANKER DERBENT**

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The tanker Derbent by Yurii Krymov

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**YURII KRYMOV**

**THE TANKER  
DERBENT**



ЮРИЙ КРЫМОВ

ТАНКЕР  
ДЕРБЕНТ

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ  
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ  
МОСКВА

YURI KRYMOV



THE TANKER  
DERBENT



FOREIGN LANGUAGES  
PUBLISHING HOUSE  
M O S C O W

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#### THE MORSE KEY

THERE WERE two of them on night duty at the Caspian Shipping Line wireless station—Tarumov, the operator, and Beletskaya, whose job was to pass on the radiograms to their destination. Tarumov was a youth of twenty, but he had the reputation of being the best operator on the line. They said he could tap out over a hundred signs a minute. When questioned on the subject he would smile as much as to say: "What do you take me for—a man or a machine?" He knew every screw and wire of his set and could do without the help of a technician. If he noticed anything wrong he would whistle, bite his nails and then get to work behind the control panel. Beletskaya would laugh. "If you get electrocuted, Arsen," she would say, "I'll die of fright. Think of me, at least!"

They were both the same age and had been working together for quite a while. Beletskaya was in charge of taking in and sorting the telegrams. It was a wearing, monotonous job which required no special knowledge. Arsen liked to watch her when they were by themselves in the transmitter room. She went efficiently and unobtrusively

about her work, her lips moving slightly as she read the telegrams. Her hazel hair would fall over her eyes and she would toss it back with a jerk of her head. On such occasions he thought her very attractive. At the end of the shift she was just as fresh as at the beginning except for a slight trembling of her hands.

At the station they called her Musya. She looked quite young, liked a bit of fun and had a glib tongue. Tarumov sometimes saw her home after work, and she calmly hooked her arm in his.

He knew she was married but had never heard a thing about her husband—for all the world as though he had never existed.

Once, as they were going along the sea front, he saw a couple kissing on a bench and looked away.

"What on earth do people kiss for?" Musya whispered mischievously, looking him straight in the face. "Some pleasure it must be, and I don't think!"

He answered in a rough tone to hide his own embarrassment:

"Then don't you kiss your own husband so often. Show more sense than the others."

Musya was silent for a while.

"I've not seen him for a long time," she said with what might have been a sigh or a yawn. "I don't know how long."

"How's that?" he asked, wondering whether she was joking or telling the truth.

"He's fa-ar, far away," Musya drawled out. "He's chief engineer on the tanker *Derbent*."

A change soon came about in the relations between Musya and Tarumov. He caught himself thinking of her even in her absence. He liked to touch articles of clothing or other things belonging to her and it gratified him to hear their names mentioned together, which often happened at the wireless station.

He sometimes felt irritated at himself without any reason: there he'd gone and fallen in love like a schoolboy with a

workmate, another chap's wife. And nothing but dreams could come of it.

And sometimes, watching the stack of papers mounting on her table, he would get a sudden scare; suppose she got fed up with the job and left it, and that was the end of it all. He could not imagine another girl sitting in her place. But Musya had no intention of leaving. She was as merry and as untiring as ever. And when she left him at the crossroads after work she would shout:

"Thank you, my cavalier! Don't get run over by a tram!"

There was not much work that evening. At 11 p.m. Tarumov tapped out the weather report: "In the Astrakhan area, medium-clouded, dry, wind north-east, up to three points. In the Makhach-Kala-Krasnovodsk area, possible light showers, wind not more than five points. Forecast for the next twenty-four hours—further drop in wind, light cloud." In the log-book he found reports from ships that were behind schedule because of bad weather. There had been no reports at noon.

The gale veered off to the south, its tail trailing between Krasnovodsk and Baku. Towards evening the gale signals were taken down and the first steamer left the freight docks with a hoot of triumph.

After sending out the weather report, the operator switched over to reception.

