

The astronaut
Natalia Garber, 2009,
from the book «Jam»

To Yuri Usachev,
commander of the cosmonaut corps
of the Russian Rocket and Space Corporation
“Energia”



– I was afraid of boredom before the flight. You know, closed room, tight schedule, just 3 people on board, and all this for 6 months. It turned out that all we could do for the first 2 months was get used to our new life. And then I found myself watching her through the window every time I had a moment.

He hesitated, tears welled in his eyes. He was a small man – his hair thinning, moustache turned grey, coat too narrow for his shoulders. He smiled and went on:

- She is alive. She is a living being. The transition from her atmosphere to space is velvet coloured. I looked at her hundreds of times and it was never enough.

He stopped again, spread his hands and cleared his throat, touched his neck automatically.

- You see, I am still nervous when recall it.

He was in love with her, in love with our planet. Forever in love. But you need distance to see what is great.

That is why he took the deadly risk and became an astronaut, to be her satellite inside a round and defenceless micro-planet in the vastness of Space. He wanted to say: “You and me, we are One”.

He had refused his chance to live on Earth and never think about it for this very moment. He had agreed to early retirement, agreed to work for only 6 months in space and for decades at a classified facility. For years he had trained on a tough schedule and waited for the launch. In the end, you might never go to space, things might just go wrong.

But he waited and got lucky.

Blast-off, at last. G forces, shaking, stage separation, atmosphere escape, zero-gravity field and... hard work and a tight schedule again. But now he could not even get to his dying mother from orbit. Communication with people, except for crew members, was limited to phone calls. He had to sleep standing up, like an elephant, because there is no difference in space. His food was dry and he had to smear water balls over his body with a towel. Because water does not flow in space, it hangs like a satellite within the ship.

But he could look out the illuminator and say: “We are One”. And work, work, work.

And what was the work about? It was about being a man, even when you are so far from the Earth, even when you are in open space.

And why was he doing that? Because he was in love with the Earth. He left us to be with her. He is faithful, he is a constant lover.

The Earth is wise. She knows he had a choice. He could fly to other planets and creatures, but he did not.

Why wasn't he looking for them? Because he knows people. He says that we are aggressive, irritable, unreliable and fussy. We are not higher beings. We just learn how to live in space. And we fail to work it out sometimes. He smiles softly and says that we have to deal with our own life.

The Earth gave us a refuge and now it has a lot of problems with us. But she is patient. She is our Universal mother.

She shouldered the burden of developing life, and she bears it as best she can. Why? She seems to love us. Why else does she need us? We devastate the subsoil and natural resources, kill rare animals and each other constantly. We pollute the seas and land with the abominable leftovers of our vital activity. But Earth has enough typhoons, volcanoes, viruses and other natural weapons to wipe us out in a single day, and then wait for the grass to germinate and animals to take our place in the universe.

But the Earth has decided to be a place for life, and for our life as well. That is why it patiently teaches us to live in peace. She knows that she will continue to wisely take care of us as long as her love lives.

She is a good mother. She loves and sets limits, teaches rules and gives freedom, gives beauty and joy, thankfully takes love in return and fairly punishes violations of her laws. She is strong and natural. She is at peace with life and death. She knows everything about us and takes us with love.

We do our best too. We chose those who can love like nobody else and send them to space. We make them her satellites. They work hard, work to improve themselves and help us with that.

I am standing on the ground looking up. A little, shining point moves in the midnight sky. And I am filled with joy. Because I know – I and the Earth, we are One, one living being. We breathe and feel together.

And our missionary watches us from space. He watches us with love.

