

Story for performance #968
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Source: Michael Schwartz, 'Iraq's broken pieces don't fit together', *Asia Times online*, 13/02/08.

Tags: [disease](#), [child/parent](#), [travel](#)

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Zosha checked for the gold penputer in her pocket one more time, smoothed down her black cashmere uniform and stepped out of the ready room. Protocol written by some desk monkey had her at the gate for a ceremonial procession designed so that povcams could best take in the entrance to Wiltshire International's brand new cruiseliner. As she prepared to meet-and-greet Zosha swivelled her head towards the succession of imposing columns leading to the passenger entrance of the Starship Masako. Each pillar evanescently painted by an artist of the day in bright floral geometric patterns that reminded her of Catalan, the Alhambra, and art deco all at once. But then the very fabric of Gate 17 Chopin Spaceport seemed to bend and her 78-year-old feet got tangled up in each other. And then nothing.

Fourteen hours later she sat up and blindly tore at the saline drip in her right hand. She didn't know that both eyes were swollen shut. Someone with a voice she didn't recognise put her back in bed and sedated her.

Some hours later she sat up again. Although a master of three languages, she could only manage English, but here no one spoke that. Her niece arrived, coaxed a few words out. One eye was open. She went back to sleep.

Another day went past. Every time she woke, anger rose up inside her. Things were coming back. She had plotted a course; she was about to start a journey. As the first captain of the Masako she was charged with an onerous but enviable task. She was to pilot the luxury cruise liner to Mars. The hot, dirty, intensive care ward at Brudno Regional Hospital was not where she was meant to be.

'You still can't remember what happened?' asked her daughter Ewa eyeing the frayed sheets uneasily.

'No, but how can Wiltshire have let this happen? Where was security?'

A tick in Ewa's cheek belied the stress she was under. With pursed lips she examined Zosha's shaven hair peaking out from under the bandage interface to the nanos.

'I want to buy a wig,' said Zosha. 'Pass me your phonenet, maybe someone can deliver to the hospital.'

'Don't be disgusting,' replied Ewa. 'Your skin will rot under that plastic garbage. Let it grow out on its own, it'll be an inch in no time.'

Zosha felt defeated, worn out, scared. She wanted to look like a woman again, she was used to looking heroic, dignified, in charge. 'This isn't how it is supposed to be,' she snapped.

She couldn't remember. It was all fuzzy. Now her youngest daughter was here. From Australia. Odd. 'What's it like living with my parents, Zina?'

Zina looked at her evenly and replied 'Mum, I'm sorry to say this but your parents died long ago.'

Zosha thought for a minute. 'So who are you living with?'

'I'm staying with your husband—my father—and

Jadja in your flat in Pulawska. It's a nice place and I'm keeping your bed warm until you get home.'

Zosha's brain made a new pathway between old ideas. Alik, bed-bound, waiting for her to return. 'Ah yes...how is your husband and the little prince?'

'Snow and Hunter are fine and they send their love' said Zina, much relieved that her mother had remembered.

Zosha's second eye opened. The nano-stitches finished their pre-programmed routine and the bandage fell off. She looked in the mirror. The head looking back at her resembled a tennis ball. Short grey hair and a fresh scar snaking down around her temple and up around the back. She gingerly felt the skin where the bone had fractured and a piece removed. Didn't people who performed self-trepanation claim to be smarter? She sighed. Her space career was over, Wiltshire couldn't insure people without whole skulls.

Zosha's brain worked at its own pace. With setbacks and leaps forward it returned to some equilibrium that saw her walk out of the hospital and become accustomed to earth-bound life. Her family rallied in its own way. Some did paperwork, others got Zosha to the doctors and back. Specialists came to the house. Endless tests, re-tests. Little things were different, memories lost or requiring re-ordering, some 3D objects seemed to change their meaning, she was a little less patient, she no longer cared for uniforms, or ceremony.

Zosha found herself looking out the window of her flat at the busy sky, reliving the test flight of the Masako. It had been a smooth ride, solar flare activity was light, and the starship had handled like a powerful cloud. The test ballast weight meant that the ship was heavy, but it felt good. She was looking forward to filling Masako with life—animating her. Then Zosha remembered her office, penputer, uniform. Walking up towards the row of pillars. The closest one on the right pale sepia infused with cerulean geometric sunflowers—Buddhist almost—resonating a milky centre. Next a sandy column with purple and navy pendulous chrysanthemums on terracotta stalks. Immersed in the riot of colour receding into the distance, the pillars began to take on a never-ending quality. The entrance—the event—always out of reach.

The fact was, no-one knew what had happened despite Wiltshire International paying a small fortune to find out. The available footage was useless. Zosha had walked onto the aero-bridge before the mediacam embargo was lifted. Her own povcam hadn't been switched on yet. Platform cams couldn't see into the colonnade and the hatchcam hadn't registered a trigger movement.

Zosha felt lucky. At 78 she was the right age for a captain, but medicine hadn't fixed all the problems of aging, and brittle bones were her weakness. Zosha's own will had literally revived her. But whatever had happened was hidden inside her brain. She had maybe 40, 50 years of good life left. One day she'd remember.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Zina Kaye.