



Source: Mark Heinrich, Reuters, 'Tehran under pressure over new allegations on nuclear technology', *The Age online*, 29/02/08.
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The moment had come.

She was at a complete standstill. Silent. Unable to move. To speak. Her limbs did not move, her concrete heart was heavy in her chest. At that exact moment, it seemed as if she couldn't even breathe, so palpable was her paralysis.

Immobility had been her condition for many years, of course. She had been still, silent, implacably patient; content enough in many ways with her lot, even on occasion entirely, blissfully, happy. But it was odd, the way she had positioned herself, such an unusual posture that her friends had commented on it, sometimes to her face, more often repeating her story amongst themselves, standard gossip for their set, as a kind of exotic trope, a sort of a local wonder. It was impossible to overlook—a grown woman standing on her head. In public. For a decade.

And it was in truth a very uncomfortable way to live. To hold one strenuous position like a headstand for such a length of time had been a considerable strain, and it showed—in the line of her shoulders, in the peculiar stiffness that she held deep in her torso, in the resolute set of her jaw. Even her feet had tired of their immobility. There were any number of social consequences, too, involving certain restrictions in dress required by modesty and a strictly limited set of choices in entertainment (cocktail parties and openings were good, going to the movies out of the question, drives in the country impossible, low-slung coffee tables a hazard, etc.). Eventually the laws of gravity could not be denied and medical assistance was sought to remedy some of the grosser results of her long-term inversion. All this she had borne with considerable aplomb. Her commitment never faltered, her poise was commendable.

The sheer bloody-minded determination that had kept her inverted and silent for so long was a continuing source of mystery to her family and her friends. 'Why are you doing this?' they would say. 'What is wrong with you? Why can't you move, why can't you speak?' It would have been more astute of them to ask if she had wanted to move at all, to ask what she might have wanted to say if she ever spoke again. And, most crucially, what was she doing, what was she saying, by spending every day silent and upside down. That was the key to the problem, after all. What did she want? What did she desire? Her continued inversion was too excessive for a considered life choice, too persistent for a mere whim. So what was it? A commitment or a protest? Was she perhaps an Antipodean incarnation of one of the ancient Christian ascetics, like Saint Simeon Stylites who had lived for 37 year on a pillar on a mountain in Syria? Worse, was she completely crazy?

Mute, she would not answer any of these questions, whether articulated or manifested silently, as implications, even sometimes as accusations. Of course she was entirely aware of the exquisitely elaborate hum of interrogation that surrounded her. It had not been her original intention to seek this attention—or so she told herself—but now that she

had, there was nothing to do but bear it as patiently as she maintained her posture. Never, not by a single facial expression or by a stray word or by any slight movement in her position did she reveal what her thoughts were or what might release her from this commitment.

One day all that suddenly changed. In an instant. For reasons that she was never fully able to divine, the decisive moment simply arrived and she felt impelled, quite irresistibly, to loosen her hold on her headstand and she returned to an upright position.

'So this is the day,' she murmured. 'This is the day that I've been waiting for all this time. It's finally come.'

Her limbs were heavy, her sheer solid physical weight was terrible, and her feet were not sure what to do after all those years spent flapping uselessly. But she began to breathe once more. Despite this present discomfort, despite the terrifying prospect of moving once again, she knew that life had altered irrevocably and that she would never go back. This was literally her ground zero, the place from which all her future was starting. It was an enormous relief—there was so much that she wanted to do, so much that she had to say.

More than that, delight began to bubble and ferment.

Then, just as suddenly, another thought popped unbidden into her mind. It was a revelation:

'I can go', she thought. 'I don't have to stay here any more. I can just walk away.'

But first she had, in all fairness, to talk to her family and to all the friends who had stayed with her so faithfully through all those topsy-turvy years. They were owed some sort of explanation, if not for her decade of immobility, at least for her decision to leave now. After all that time, she had to convey a message somehow. She had to speak.

'I love you all very much,' she said to her assembled friends, 'but I am going away.'

'Why?' they said. 'And where?'

'Well, if I knew why,' she replied 'I wouldn't be able to start. And if I knew where, I wouldn't need to go. Goodbye.'

She looked around at the baffled expressions on their faces and she laughed. What a turn-up for the books, she thought: for ten years she had spoken through her body. Now she had turned the tables on her life in just a few sentences. Speech does act after all, she thought.

She looked around her once more, at those dear faces, at that incomprehension. 'There's nothing I can do about that,' she thought. 'It's enough to get myself going.'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Julie Ewington.