

Futures

A sequence of memories

Days to remember. By Eva Papasoulioti

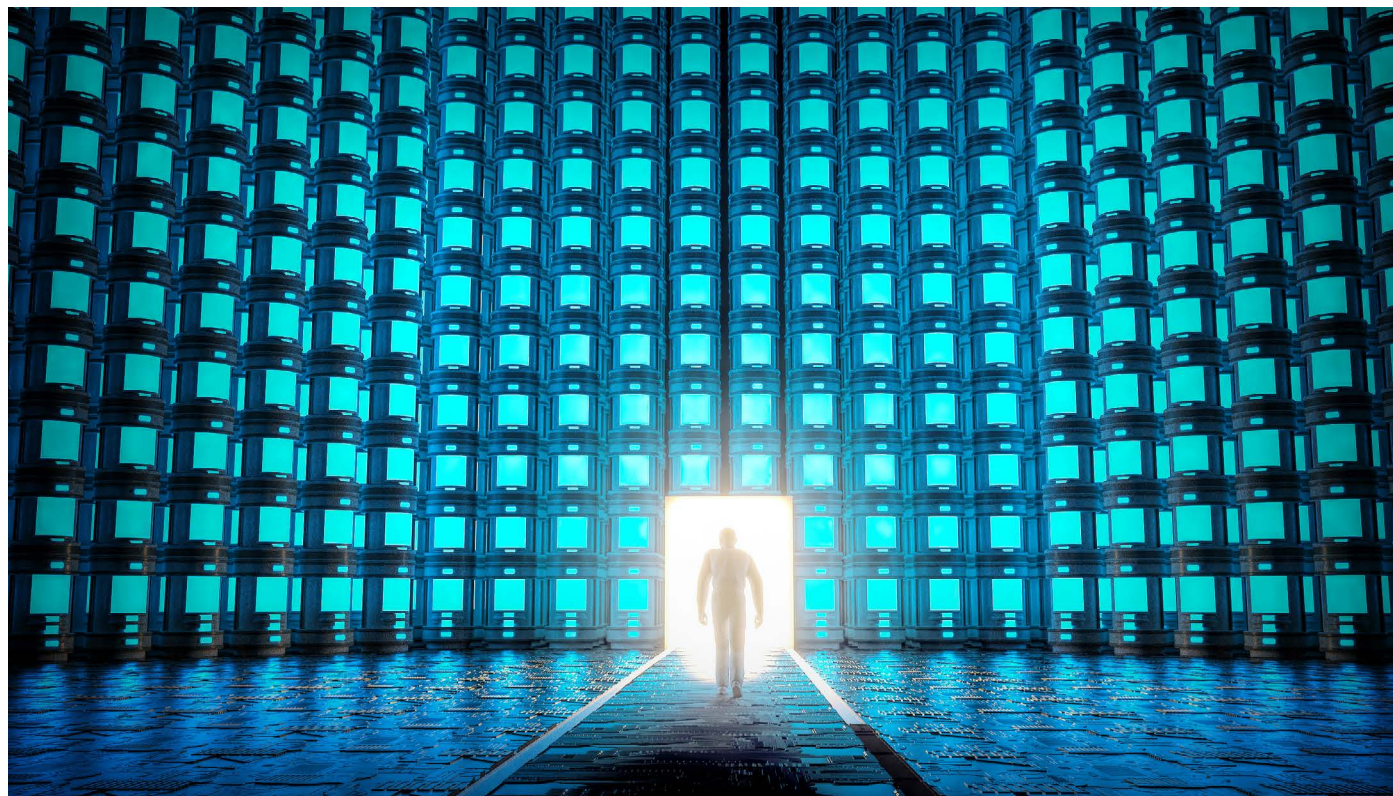


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

The ship rattles like a toy in a child's hand. The lights flicker and the metal groans, vibrations spread from the outside of the hull to the plasma core of the ship. The air reeks of ozone, and my ears pop. Space is a terrible place, and traversing it in this crappy generation ship that's falling apart by the second makes the experience even worse.

My joints scream with the effort as I pull myself up and head towards the kitchen. At 89, surviving on artificial gravity, crappy food and regular turbulence, I'm lucky I haven't broken anything yet. The corridor is empty, as always, other than me and the shaking walls. This ancient, whiny ship never liked this kind of abuse and as time passed, as it got older, it got whinier. Like me.

The kitchen lounge takes me by surprise. It's the same kitchen and yet, the lights are brighter, the inox cupboards aren't foggy, the tables are overflowing with baby stuff and there are people laughing and smiling.

I haven't seen anyone other than people sleeping in the pods for the past 40 years.

A big, pastel green bag takes up a whole table, surrounded by pacifiers, a stack of old-fashioned synthetic diapers and a handful of rainbow baby clothes. Behind the table, sits my mother the way I see her in my dreams, young, timeless. She's holding a three-year-old and talking to her friends.

I'm frozen there, fixated on the smile on my mother's face. The ship's journey must have already started and they're celebrating. I hear the words *new worlds, chance, a future for our children*, and I'd like to tell them that they're mistaken, that we'll be stuck in here for the next few centuries, but I don't.

I head to my room, dizzy. Maybe I hit my head when I fell. Maybe I need to sleep it off. But in my room, there is me as a five-year-old holding a tea party with my stuffed toys, and when I run to the medical bay – I really need a physical evaluation – there is me blowing candles for my eighth birthday, surrounded

by other kids. Old friends. Dear Universe, I had forgotten that this place was a classroom before we turned it into an emergency medical bay 20 years ago.

Common room B isn't a refuge. The whole crew is here. I remember that day. Ten years since we started our journey. There's balloons and cakes and sodas. A party. I want to say they're celebrating incarceration, but I think, they're celebrating still being alive. Back on Earth, most of them – most of us would have been dead by now.

I walk into the dining hall only to find my friends and I eating artificial peanuts and drinking our first pink alcoholic beverage after our graduation. I got my degree in maths some 68 years ago.

I don't understand what's happening or why, but no one ever accused me of hiding. I keep going.

In the quiet room, I'm drinking wine. It must have been my third glass. I didn't become a mother and I never regretted it. For me,

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coming here was a situation. Not a choice. Not bringing another life into this situation was my choice. I have forgotten a lot, but I remember this day like it was yesterday. Me sitting in the dark, the stars surrounding me like a crown, trapped in a metal box with a questionable view and yet, it was the only moment I ever felt free.

In the greenhouse, I pause. I don't remember this day at all. I must be over 50. The lines around my mouth and eyes are those of laughter. I look happy. Alive. That was way before I lost the woman I loved to the fever. Before the epidemic. Before the loneliness. Before the flood. Before the fire. Before the meteor shower that ruined our navigation system. That was before the crew decided we needed to return in the cryo-pods, leaving awake only a skeleton crew. For years I thought there was nothing good for me before all this

and yet, here I am, smiling, talking with the woman I love, throwing my head back and laughing as if I have no care in the world. I've forgotten how it was to care. About a cause, about someone, about myself.

Sometimes I think loneliness is all I'm left with. Loneliness and this rusty, half-empty piece of junk that carries 10 million people I'll never meet, and who'll never know about me. And yet, this woman reminds me of tight hugs and warmth. She reminds me that my best friend was a boy with long black hair and dark eyes like space. How my aunt kissed my forehead every night after my mother died until I turned 13. The professor with the freckled, sharp nose, who smelled of jasmine and ignited my passion for maths. The captain who taught me orbital manoeuvres in a patient voice. My niece with the round cheeks who asked me for piggy backs and how periods

worked and why the Fibonacci was everywhere around us.

My body isn't what it used to be, but my heart is still beating strong, big, full of memories and breathing stories. I hate this ship but I love its people.

I know where the next door leads. This time I choose to take it, the way I never chose to be on this ship, in this situation, this life. I step through and I see myself in that corridor minutes ago, eons ago, an ancient but well-standing 89-year-old, ready to embark on a journey to remember what home is.

Eva Papasoulioti is a Greek writer of speculative fiction and poetry. Her work has appeared in *Uncanny*, *Strange Horizons*, *Solarpunk Magazine* and elsewhere. You can find her on X @epapasoulioti and her blog plothopes.com.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Eva Papasoulioti reveals the inspiration behind *A sequence of memories*.

Generational ships are a fascinating concept to explore. From the duration of the journey and the change that comes to the inhabitants of the ship to all the possible ways things can go wrong. And, of course, the isolation. The question that inspired the story is what happens when one feels trapped in a place that's supposed to be home and hope?

