



Source: Abraham Rabinovich, 'Khatami 'from material that makes for great leaders'', *The Australian online*, 29/01/07.

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Under-bite. Under-bite and tight little lips. A black baseball cap with some corporate insignia. He leans into the wind. Holds his fists tight. Underbite thrust ahead. Sucking in air. Legs all pumping. He heads up the street. We lie in ambush. He turns the corner. Stones flying. Blam blam blam.

Constant change demands constant updates. And this just to hand: 'Panic begins to set in with over-breathing'.

Everything got worse from that point. Lots of questions to answer. No real answers. They punched me in the stomach and knocked the air out of me. Then they gave me coffee. It was awful. But it was still satisfying to be doing something practical. You know what I mean?

In most cases panic sees an instant escalation of anxiety into terror. Overbreathing is a way to deal with the flight or fight response. Your body is made up of millions of cells. Haul in the air, oxygen sticks to the red blood cells, enabling it to be dragged around the anxious body.

'I wanted to kill him', I told them. They laughed.

Overbreathing is unpleasant, the racing heart or chest pain may be taken as a sign of a stroke or a heart attack.

In the last hour of official meetings I found myself sharing a cigarette with a young delegate from a country which is technically at war with my own.

'I'd like to visit your country,' I said.

She smiled and we got back to talking about the trees which line the road to the parliament. Poplars.

But then once oxygen is used up, carbon dioxide is produced. Carbon dioxide makes red blood cells less sticky and so oxygen becomes unstuck. Weirdly, by breathing in more oxygen and breathing out more carbon dioxide you cut the amount of oxygen reaching the blood cells.

'No really, I would,' I say as we prepare to part company. 'I've never been there but I know it's a place of great beauty'.

She shrugs, we shake hands, exchange cards, bid each other farewell.

A person who is afraid of shaking in public will become anxious when the muscles tense and shake. Anxiety is mostly felt in the chest.

After the meeting I travel across town to visit an elderly uncle. He's recently gone into a retirement home. Or is it a 'rest home'? I'm not sure now that I come to think of it.

An 'old folk's home'? It's not a 'village'. The village is further up the street, next to the Quaker Settlement where old 'friends' live out their days tending vegetables and discussing world peace.

Also this overbreathing is causing blood vessels to shrink. The oxygen released has to travel further from the blood to the cells. So oxygen is now not reaching the cells of your body or your brain.

The village is for 'independent seniors'. Uncle S isn't independent. He's barely mobile these days and spends most of his time in bed in the hospital wing of the home. I take him a monster box of chocolates which means he has little time to complain about his various ailments and we sit for long periods of silence. I listen to his breathing, look at his chest, so wrinkled.

Overbreathing. Panic. Dizziness. Light-headedness. Feelings of unreality. Hot, sweaty, flushed. The second stages of overbreathing: dizziness and nausea, choking as the throat closes, muscle paralysis, blackouts.

I say, finally, 'Write down my words you pigs. I don't want to waste my breath on you.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Laurence Dowse.*