



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, '[More questions for Olmert over links to Lowy](#)', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 11/10/07.

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Six days in the Sheraton Hotel, Sydney, being interviewed by Israeli police sounds better than the three days I spent there with you. Frank Lowy would have been surrounded by security, well fed and reasoned with, a respected multi-billion dollar man. You couldn't take any food and were surrounded by the ghosts of your madness, dictating to you from inside your head. I kept your thirst at bay, thimble by thimble, like playing God with a leper.

So many of you go this way: Johnny, Michael, Brian, Janis.

And now you.

In-between the hallucinations that accompany withdrawal, you have lucid moments. I slip the knife in. Sometimes with ease, sometimes with force. I mean to push your buttons and pick away at your fear with silence, while the chatter in your head soldiers madly on. The demons between your ears draw swords with the angels in this, the loveliest of hotel rooms.

*En guard.*

While you sleep I slip away and do the bended knee gig at the cathedral, pay homage to things once baffling. Still baffling. There's no shame in a Hail Mary. Like all cathedrals, the acoustics are bad unless the place is full. Which it isn't these days, though the wars between the religious fill the fields of battle. We could have filled this cathedral in our hay-day, just like we used to fill the foyer of the Sheraton with fans, desperate for a glimpse, as if it could change their lives. The emptiness of misguided pleasures was everywhere then, and now.

You're alone in this hell. I'm the only witness.

Back in your room I undress you as you lie in lathers of sweat in the bed. You're a putrid sight, with poison seeping out through your pores, making me drunk on the stench. I should take you to hospital, but you beg me not to. You can't go anywhere looking like this. An ambulance perhaps?

Vanity and pride have killed people.

In the cathedral I burn a candle. In the confessional I declare myself a sinner, make amends to the work of the soul, long abandoned by our reckless infidelity to all things deserving, punctuated by the wars of our wanderings, survived by our soldiers' hearts.

Who needs a real combat zone, when we have this?

The ants are crawling all over you competing with the

slugs that fill your nostrils. So you think. It's just snot and the remnants of vomit that leaks out of you. You won't let me turn the light on because the extra-terrestrials pop out of the bulbs. You can't decide if I'm a goody or a baddy. Better not to see me.

Just hold your hand in the dark.

But tell me who the real goodies and baddies are? Where was the first misery born? How did we inherit this tragic disposition? Self-destruction is the worst kind of murder, because the original perpetrator is always someone else. But how many 'someone elses' have there been to endow this generation with so much trauma?

I used to be a 'yeah I know' girl. But today I don't know.

The tremors start again. You're frothing at the mouth, crying a lunatic's cry, grabbing me by the throat, begging me to take away the nightmare. This time the ambulance comes and takes you, through the back doors of the Sheraton, no fans, no press. Just a piano player, humming in your ear. For comfort.

Hearing is the last sense to go, before death.

They park your gurney in the corridor, grey lino floors, light grey walls and a flickering fluorescent light that agitates you, has you clinging to my shirt, like a little kid on the first day at school. The nurses' shoes squeak along the lino. The clatter of kidney trays echoes down the corridor. Another ambulance pulls in.

It's Saturday night.

When you try to leap off the trolley they find a spot for you in ER. The nurses are busy and too young to know who you are. I'm glad of the anonymity, you would hate the world to know you like this. I wash you like a baby, newborn and helpless. But the dirt is on the inside, like a tattoo that only you can reach.

The doctor comes and shoots you full of Valium dissolving your anguish. But you don't look right to me. You've gone a funny grey and your half-open eyes look past me, not at me. I dress you in a crisp white gown, ready for the next step. But you don't get to the next step.

The clouds come over you, wash the colour from your eyes.

Your fingertips go pale.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Shé Hawke.*