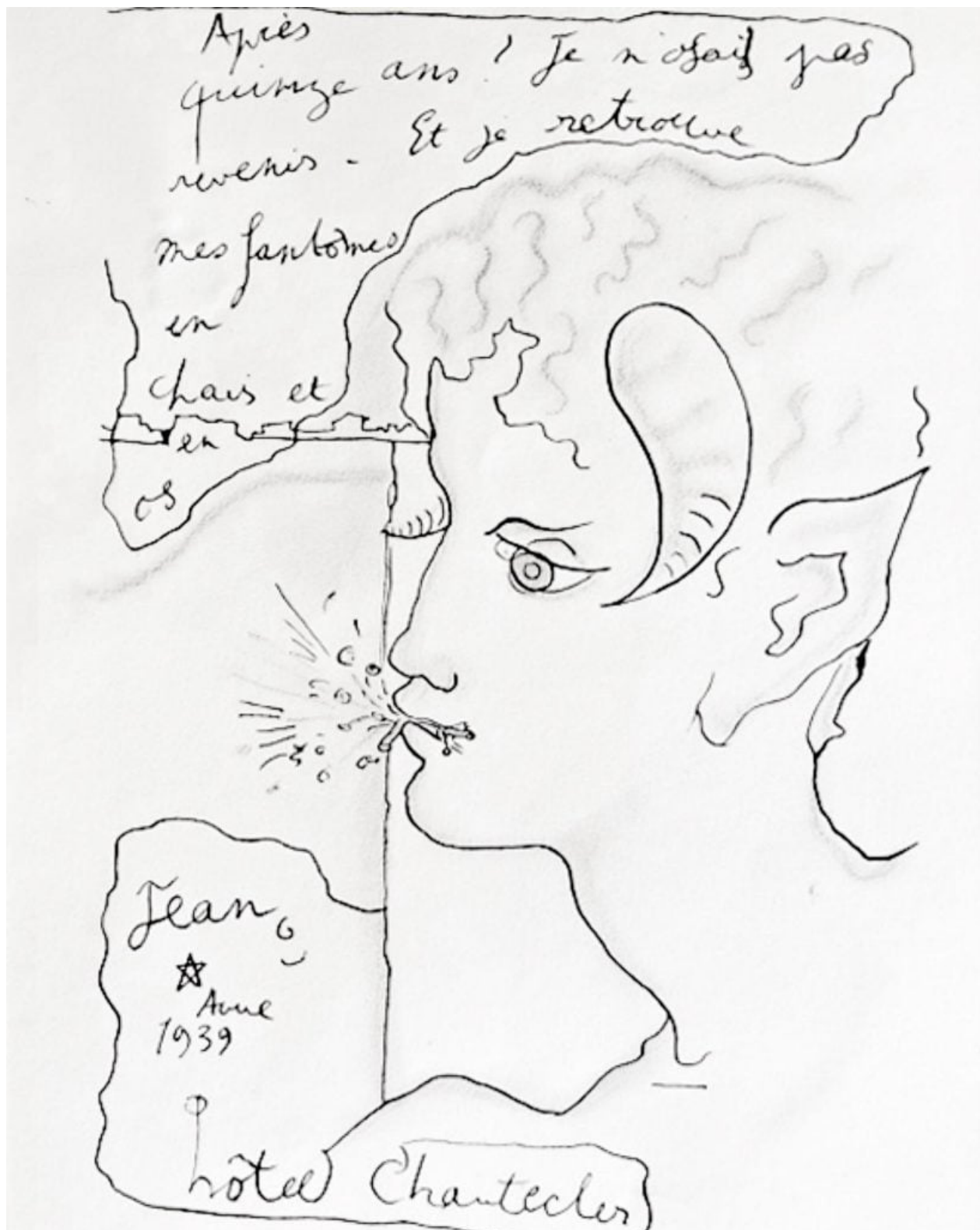


# Coming Down, Then Back Up

by [Carl Nelson](#) (April 2024)



Faun a la brindille -by Jean Cocteau, 1939

**Since the pharma giants' crimes** have been as exposed as publicly as The Emperor's New Clothes, what with the post Covid-19 vaccination revelations, I've been tailoring my current medications in line with the new information acquired via substacks and a network of informational links. It seemed I might put some of the knowledge acquired getting an MD degree to use. My doctor is a decent fellow, but he doesn't work for me. He works for the hospital which is a corporation. He is not someone I can trust, but a tool I use. No offense meant and perhaps none taken. I suspect we may have a tacit agreement as to this—but don't discuss it. (Rather like Solzhenitsyn's famous comment regarding being under the thumb of the Soviet government: "We know that they are lying, they know that they are lying, they even know that we know they are lying, we also know that they know we know they are lying too, they of course know that we certainly know they know we know they are lying too as well, but they are still lying.") That is, we are colluding for mutual benefit under the cover of an agreement we might or might not actually have—but that it could be disabling to question. ("Well, I'm sorry. But that's where we are," I tell my dog, Tater, when I confide this.)

I wore my MAGA hat to a previous appointment, just to send a message.

"You've got balls," my doctor noted.

So perhaps the communication was received.

When I dumped my statin, Crestor, I was afraid we might have a battle about that. (And this is concerning, as getting a doctor around here is not the easiest. And he's like ... my 'supplier' of healthcare.) I don't know how much leeway (free choice) the corporations will allow their doctors to allow 'their' patients. (We know they pull licenses, and they know we know they pull licenses...) But he only noted that though the cholesterol was up around 200, the balance of good and bad were excellent. He has also stopped suggesting any

vaccinations. I also shaved my hypertensive medications by half, substituting vitamin B3 for the nightly dose. I was shocked by the results. About 15 minutes after taking the B3 I became severely flushed all over and prickly as if suffering from extreme sunburn. At first, I was concerned I had gotten a bad batch of supplements. After Googling the matter, I found this could be a normal reaction to a dose of B3.

My doctor laughed when I told him, and shared that he had two male patients who had gone to the emergency room after taking the supplement.

In retrospect, it's nice to feel a medication's effect. Most of the time we haven't any idea of whether the pills we take chronically are doing anything at all (or anything good), which brings me to the topic of this essay. I don't know whether my doctor and I are on the same page, but I have to look after myself in this New World Order and am deciding by fiat, that he understands.

I recently finished the book *Why We Sleep*, by Matthew Walker, PhD. Seventeen years ago, I suffered from an exasperating bout of insomnia—something I would not wish upon even a Canadian Goose (and God knows these fowl poopers deserve the worst). I tried Ambien, but was able to secure the prescription only on a very limited basis, and then through a fraying relationship with a personal friend. This failure was fortunate, however, as whereas the Ambien put me to sleep, the next day my mood was the same as if I hadn't slept at all. I rapidly went from a real bear to grizzly. Near that same time I had had foot surgery, and though had little pain post-operatively—they prescribed me Oxycontin as if they were handing out M&Ms. So, thrashing about for some relief, I tried these. They were useless for sleep, but I certainly enjoyed that great warm, fuzzy pink feeling while studying the bedroom ceiling. Enjoying it way too much, as it soon became clear, until I flushed the remainder. It's scary feeling the premonition of an addiction rising out of the desires to meet with you ...

rather like conducting an exorcism. Don't speak with it. Don't even open your mouth.

At the time I was self-producing my play, *Saving Harry*. There seems to be nothing in the theatre which can be humdrum and planned. Rather, production is like coaxing a covered wagon along a stony and crevice ridden trail over a mountain pass in order to meet a critical deadline. When one broken axle or lost wheel has just been fixed or recovered, another one goes. Psychically, it was a four month panic attack.

Due to my wife's urging, I met with the family physician who placed me on Venlafaxine for anxiety. He assured me it was non-addicting but would take several weeks before fully acting. This was true. It also cured my insomnia, and as an added benefit, provided a bit of psychological cushion to my interactions. It was rather like wearing a thin wet suit, so that collisions with the world came with a two second warning and a quarter inch of cushion. This was a life ring. And I clung to it over many years and through the services of several physicians. When I had a new physician, I'd tell them that the Venlafaxine (Effexor) was for my insomnia and had worked wonders. And they would happily renew the prescription, saying, "Well, we don't want to mess with that."

Until this latest Covid-19 pandemic response and vaccination atrocity, I hadn't questioned either vaccination efficacy nor the sulfurous fumes coming from those pharmaceutical corporations. Lately, however, I've become a regular Inspector Jarvert (from *Les Miserables*) on the topic of pharmaceuticals, and have re-opened the files on all of my medications. Matthew Walker, of *Why We Sleep*, noted that his two bouts of insomnia had lasted for a few months and then disappeared. When I Googled Venlafaxine, I found that it was often prescribed for a duration of just a few months. What if the insomnia I had suffered was simply a passing blip, like a cold or the flu, and not a susceptibility of my brain requiring long term drug maintenance? Perhaps I had been taking Venlafaxine without

necessity for seventeen years! I needed to find out.

The literature says that it's prudent to gradually taper off Venlafaxine—especially after long term use. But I'm a person who not only likes to know how I get into situations—but, also, whether I am out of them! In short, I went cold-turkey so as to compare clearly where I stood to where I would stand. Because, as far as I could tell, taking the Venlafaxine gave me no side effects—in fact had no effects at all, as the long duration of my drugged state had become the normal.

Immediate Venlafaxine withdrawal symptoms are said to be “nightmares and insomnia, anxiety, depression, panic attacks, suicidal thoughts, seizures ... Symptoms usually appear within the first three days and can last as long as three weeks.” My immediate symptoms were more like whining about life—like a kid on summer car vacation—which was just taking an awwwwfully loooong time to get to the next promised thing. In short, life just seemed like it was taking too damn long! No panic attacks, no seizure, no nausea nor vomiting, and most surprising of all: no insomnia. But I was impatient! I did experience chills, then a bit later would be uncomfortably hot—but without any perceptible illness.

The best things were first, no insomnia. Second, my muscles seem more aware, quicker to react and tire less easily during my swim. Last, my regular thoughts—which now seemed to have been running in third gear—shifted into forth. No improvement in my memory, but insights of a whole new nature, it seems from a different realm, popped into my head. For example, it suddenly occurred to me that I wasn't seeing the graffiti on the bathroom stall partition walls as was always there in years past. I decided that this must be due to the advent of cell phones. Another whimsical realization occurred, that in spite of thousands of years of war, brutality and the most inhumane conditions – flowers and puppies still flourished. Go figure? Not even a dent has been made in their popularity, presence, nor lifespan. This is just ... charming.

The second and third night I had trouble getting to sleep. But the most predominant and escalating coming-off symptom was irritability. I could feel or hear (wasn't certain which) the crackling hair net of irritability soon as awaking. There is a funny video of a person placing a sheet of tin foil across a kitchen counter to keep the cat from climbing up on it. As soon as the cat steps upon the tin foil, the sound and texture of it are so alarming, that the cat's spinal reflexes catapult it some ten feet clear of the kitchen. It's hilarious. But that's also what this irritability sounded (or felt) like in my head: a cat walking across tin foil. In my mind's eye I could see the fractal jagged lightning shards enveloping my brain like a hair net.

My wife looked at me as I rose from bed.

I raised a palm, as her lips began to part for speech. "Don't Say. One. Word!"

I walked off to dress, find coffee and to sit alone. The woman at the latte counter told me, "I hope you won't take this poorly, but you can look *very* intimidating."

"I like that." I nodded. "Thank you."

That had made me feel good. Maybe I would be left alone.

So while I'm setting alone with my coffee in the central lodge area – trying to hold my situation together—this middle-aged blond, all dressed up in the latest outdoor hiking apparel—a totally athletic appearing Karen—passed close. She stopped to stare at me as if my fractious expression were a blight upon the lodge culture and her sunny morning in particular. "That frown doesn't fit very well here. Smile!" She commanded.

"Fuck off," I responded.

Considering that there is currently being found an overwhelming correlation between mass shootings and SSRI

medication usage and/or withdrawal, perhaps being a Pollyanna isn't the best survival tactic in these trying times. Someone should mention this to her, but I knew I'd best not get into it.

Actually, an entire re-evaluation of my life was taking place. Over breakfast I told the wife,

"I think I'm done with Christmas cards."

Her response was to not give any indication of how she felt though.

I had also re-evaluated our neighborhood over breakfast. I was in a budget-cutting mood.

"I've been an energy donor, to a bunch of hillbillies whose social baseline is the feud," I said. "Neighborhood functions, helping out, getting to know everyone ... it's all been a pouring in of outside funding to what is essentially a 'feudal society. The family near the corner, their kids bike the neighborhood yelling "motherfucker!" while their parents perform from their porch as screaming drunks. The neighbor one house away sends a drunken text to the neighbor two houses away to quit trying to steal her husband with her big tits. Then another text, apologizing. "I think I'm going crazy. And then I drink to settle that." And then another text. "We're going to build a tall fence between your home and ours! Just a warning." And the guy across the street is in a feud with everyone, over near everything, but filtering down to the parking spots he squats on in vehicles that won't run. What have I been thinking?"

Again, my wife played the good listener.

"I'm also unable to decide whether my loyalties—which seem to run well passed their expiration date aren't a fault, instead of the virtue I've pretended them to be," I continued. "I've quit my book group. Lenin's description of these people as

“useful idiots” still superbly describes them. The last woman presenter was a bit mental. But it was the others, who primly cheered on while watching a mob of bald lies overtake and pummel the belligerence of the facts. I just don’t want to associate with them anymore.”

One night at the lodge, unable to fall asleep after a couple hours practice of summoning a calm mind by picturing a beach scene (first hour), a quiet pool, (second hour), or our summer lakeside swimming dock as a child, (final stretch), I finally said, to hell with it. And I gleefully threw myself into confecting an escalating string of poisonous thoughts and action.

One finally hit the fantasy wall and stuck.

I spent the remaining hours of awakened time theoretically assembling a board game titled, “Heads on Pikes”. It borrowed structurally from Monopoly, but instead of the focus being on creating an Empire—the focus was upon the destruction of one—that is the deep regulatory state i.e. the Leviathan! (This one might have real legs! I was thinking.)

Points were given for various achievements, which when accumulated, could be traded for a head of the player’s choosing to be displayed as trophies on one of the many pikes along the perimeter fence surrounding the rotting, beached Leviathan our White House had become. Somewhere in the wee hours, I fell off into another fractious sleep.

“Exercise!” I decided, awaking that next morning fractious as ever.

Exercise was needed to discharge the fractal net of irritability! So I decided that a short walk to a nearby cave attraction would be in order. My wife can only revolve in short circles around a bum knee, so it was just me.

(In order that this account scrupulously dot all the ‘i’s and



cross all the 't's, I will note that luckily, the dizziness, a noted withdrawal symptom, neither remained nor was dizziness as I'd known it. It hadn't seemed a vestibular matter, but more a sense of not being able to calculate with more than 90-95% accuracy where exactly my body was located. My sense of location kept shifting back and forth, from here to there, like a fly meandering – quite puzzling, but a problem which had evaporated by the time of my hike, fortunately.)

The lodge map flyers were filled with some sort of cuneiform-like hieroglyphics. So that I had trekked a bit one way, only to find and be told by other strollers that the shorter walk was not that one, but the other. So I turned about, and headed towards the other destination, (Whispering Cave). I wasn't dressed for heavy trekking. I wore simple jeans, a long sleeve cotton shirt and a pair of smooth-soled slip-on loafers because the trail had started out as a smooth, widely graveled path.

This soon changed, however, after a few bends and a quarter mile of commitment was wrung from me. Then, the continuing-to-shrink path crept nearer the canyon's edge and narrowed further as its slippery, sandy surface canted towards the cliff's edge. Roots and rock outcroppings appeared irregularly. Plus, it was an up and down business. I began to tire.

"Are you alright?" A leonine woman in spandex asked while passing on the return side of the path. "Just resting." I smiled, and waved a tired hand. "This is the way to Whispering Cave?" I spoke *sotto voce*.

She nodded, discreetly.

Further along, the trail began to fracture into several tributaries, as mountain trails will when encountering a difficult passage. I had to be prudent, scan ahead, see which path looked to be down to my skill level... throughout. It

wouldn't do to get hung up across too large a breach at any point. A mile and a half or so in, I paused to consider that my situation had gotten serious.

If I stumbled, I would likely stumble forward. And while my upper part outraced my lower, I would most likely continue with ill-attempted adjustments, until eventually doing a racing stumble, flinging me off the cliffside, and forty or fifty feet to the ground. I knew well how my stumbling in the yard could lead to an escalating, festinating gait and a crash landing.

Yet oddly, all the while I worried about the upwardly mobile risk-index, I simultaneously waxed philosophical.

It's strange how oddly we are approached by risk, in these modern times, so that we believe it isn't even, really there. It's like standing near a dying friend's hospital bed and conducting a pleasant chat as if at an outside café table, or me, smiling there at the healthy young woman jumping over a few rocks to skip past, as if I were likewise in no danger. Or like Dustin Hoffman reminiscing about driving far too fast along the coast highway while being filmed from overhead when portraying lovesick Ben in *The Graduate*, racing to prevent a his love's imprudent marriage. It seemed to him that he was driving way too fast. "But nobody really dies from driving fast in a film, can they?" Modern life seems to do this to us a lot. Reality is getting harder and harder for us to grasp, even while it is right there.

I was getting very tired. And whereas I stopped often to catch my breath, I knew from past experience that if I were to fatigue my quads, they weren't coming back. Muscles don't catch their breath. I had learned this climbing Mt. Si, in the Washington Cascades, many years ago. I had raced to the top, only to find my quads failing me while walking slowly down. The horror of them 'not catching their breath' and the thought of me having to crawl my way, several miles still, back to the

car was bracing. Quads were like batteries, and when they're drained, they're drained. If that happened, I'd have to crawl out. More people die descending Mt. Everest than ascending, was another factoid which leapt to mind.

'What was I doing?' I wondered. 'I'm seventy four years old. I walk the dog for about a half mile a day. And I take balance classes in the pool, because I've fallen a couple times, walking across the lawn.'

I asked a fellow coming up the trail how much further it was.

"You haven't that much further to go," he said. "It's well worth the hike. I got some great photos." He waved his camera, but didn't extend it. "But you can't see them. You'll have to take your own."

I nodded, and for some reason, liked the guy's attitude.

Just before the final 300 yards, the trail splintered even more widely, breaking into a virtual delta of possible paths, as there was no one clear good one—before finally being resolved into a railed boardwalk for the final 100-yard descent onto the rock amphitheater's sandy floor.

I'd made it. The enormous amphitheater of rock was sobering. I imagined while walking back and forth on the sand below, what it would be like if this huge piece of rock, large as the spaceship Enterprise, were to slip onto me. It might be how it would feel to be a tiny mite crushed beneath a hard-soled shoe.

It was getting late afternoon. Other hikers had disappeared. And I realized that if I were to get back safely, but before dusk, I would have to do so in a very disciplined manner. I needed to fully assess and understand each step. I needed to rest every thirty feet or so, depending. I didn't want to be too tired to make that quick needed correction, stumble and plunge.

This would take a Navy Seal level of concentration. I breathed in deeply before starting off. (I'd never been in the military. But you can learn a lot of stuff watching TV.) First, I narrowed my ambitions to that one goal, obtaining the lodge. Nothing else mattered, even comfort. And second, I narrowed my focus to the next ten feet or so, scrutinizing the path rigorously. I didn't want to be surprised mid-step. And I didn't want to be stranded in an old duffer's cul de sac.

I made the lodge, following quite a return climb and about thirty time outs.

I sat outside in one of the phalanx of welcoming rockers for thirty minutes regaining my composure. My shirt was untucked and soaked. My body was spent. My casual shoes looked a lot more casual. But the crackling in my brain was gone. Fear and exercise had sweat out all the demons. I felt sound as a spud; grounded as a rock. No need here for any Venlafaxine—that was for sure.

Then I wandered inside, feeling ready for some polite conversation.

About a week later, it seemed about 17 years of insulated emotion began to burble up. I was chatting with the wife over a Sunday restaurant breakfast. The conversation led to nieces and nephews. The Golden Boy of them all had to have been Levi. Bright, (IQ of 140), inquisitive, well-intentioned, he was the first athlete from Marietta High School to go to State in wrestling. He was enormously popular and his senior year he was riding the very crest. I remember sitting with him there, after a Friday night high school football game, eating pizza with the other relations, as he sat, leaning back in the cheap chair next to his girlfriend—calm, relaxed, confident, laconic—sitting in the catbird seat. His girl friend was not only darkly beautiful, but mesmerizing. He was madly in love and ebulliently proud. And that was when his life turned a corner from which it never recovered. The girl's father didn't

like him.

“I don’t know why!” Levi was distraught all that latter year. “Everybody has always liked me. I’ve never had anybody not like me. I don’t know what to do!”

“No matter what I do, I can’t get him to like me,” he declared, and the father insisted his daughter begin seeing other young men, who were planning for college. Then, he broke the father’s driver (he regularly hit over 300 yards), on the links trying to bond. “I offered to buy a new one.” It was clear panic was setting in, and he became even more unraveled as his possibility of holding onto the girl kept retreating like the nap of a table cloth you just can’t seem to grasp. There just isn’t enough purchase. It’s as if the deal had already been signed away.

Following that, everything fell apart. He argued with his dad. He tried college and flunked out. He gained a lot of weight and became somewhat windy, holding forth in the living area after the family meal talking a bit too much. He ended up in a job refinishing bathtubs up around the Great Lakes—where he was found dead one afternoon, by the homeowner. Apparently the seal on the mask he used leaked, and he had died breathing in the caustic vapors.

His funeral was a huge event; people circled the block.

“I don’t know why I’m breaking down in tears while we’re talking about this,” I told the wife, as I set my fork over my breakfast. “I have no idea where this is coming from! But I can’t seem to stop it.”

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**Carl Nelson** has recently finished a book of poetry titled,

*Self-Assembly*, which will be published shortly, and from which the above poetry has been selected. To see this and more of his work, please visit [Magic Bean Books](#).

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