

On Writing While Titrating

Alex Brianson

So, Reader dearest, I've been AWOL again, haven't I? It's been another of those times that people with chronic illness know only too well – the quest to uncover the potential of a different drug (yay!), which involves the Graded Titration Down and then the Tentative Ascent Healthwards. In theory. So, having broken up with Venlafaxine – he likes to just take over everything, like a chemical Ed Sheeran – I've been on the rebound but getting it on with Amitriptyline. Mirtazapine, the old retainer, is still around, bless his heart. And now we're in a game of Play Your Cards Right, where we try to find the right dosage. Higher! Lower! Higher! *Such fun.*

As always in life – cue profound insight – there's been light and shade. I know, right? Colour me the new Buddha. On the light side, I've had a bit more energy, and have been able to write for the first time in five months. In fact, in a manic period provoked by the shifting chemical balances in my body, I wrote about 30,000 words and completed draft 1 of my second novel. And I have been awake enough to identify some of the emotions that Venny boy had been masking under his medicinal straitjacket. So that's good. And if I can strike a better balance on this drug between being off the suicide list and actually having the wherewithal to have a Life, that will be ace. So far the signs are promising.

But there's also a fucking big Vader of a dark side, because such understanding comes at a price: I'm tired a lot (in addition to the chronic fatigue...). And I seem to be spending a lot of time as either a big gay Hulk – pink, of course, and just *enraged* about everything – or as a juddering jelly of snot and tears. I spent the whole two-and-a-bit-hours of the *Sense8* finale in torrents of saltwater. Just as well there's no movie of *The Last Battle*, because I would have gone from a solid to a liquid state by the second reel.

The serious point about all this is that so much of recovery is non-linear. Sometimes that's for psychological reasons, and sometimes it's the fruit of environmental factors. Sometimes, like now, it's because there's always a liminal stage in the change of a medication regime, and that just has to be traversed with as much patience as you can muster. Which on Hulk days is not a whole lot.

So, on the latest stage of my transition to Becoming a Writer, I am trying to learn patience. I've done a lot of enduring over the years, but I'm finding I can't draw on that experience very much, because I'm just so bored and annoyed by the whole erratic schlep. I also have to say that the passage of time seems different to me now – in rather less than two years I'll be 50, and with the best will in the world there's a lot less of my life to live now than there was even a decade ago. It's hard to be patient when my inner Alexis Carrington-Colby-Dexter spends the day bellowing that I have to Make It Happen and I am so aware that my energy levels oscillate enormously. But at least just now the whole enterprise doesn't seem impossible physically. And I have material to draw on for poor Nick in novel 2.