

# 2018 Week 50: The Week Ending Saturday, December 15th

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## Sunday

Cooking latkes takes a *long* time. We didn't actually get them on the table until midnight. The kids were slow to help clean things up and Grace was working on a big pot of beef broth, and so we had no bedtime story and got to sleep very late, well after 1:00. I had forgotten to turn off the alarm on my cell phone, so it still went off at 6:30. I got up to shut it off, and then had a hard time staying asleep for another couple of hours, with kids getting up to use the bathroom and leaving all the lights on. Even the bathroom light shining under our bedroom door is enough to make me unable to sleep.

It's been a slow day and I've spent it mainly recruiting the kids to work on some of the cleanup jobs that they didn't do on Friday and Saturday — finishing loads of dishes, hand-washing the things I'd already asked them two or three times to hand-wash. I deep-cleaned the stovetop and the oven. Grace and I went through the freezer and pulled out a number of small bags of things that we'd frozen for making more broth — chicken bones, lamb bones, fish heads, etc. So she's going to make, as she puts it, an “epic” amount of broth.

Veronica made a baked pasta dish with yeast sauce and she's taking it to a youth group Christmas potluck at St. Joseph. She made two batches, so we ate one baking dish full. I put too over-easy fried eggs on top of mine, which made a delicious mess. A little later I toasted the kids some bagels.

I finally finished *Moderan*. The last few stories are some of the darkest. What a collection! It is hard to read because of the grim future it imagines, but Bunch seems so insightful about human nature that they have a ring of undeniable truth to them. It's a bit stunning to consider that he was writing these devastating parodies of militarism, misogyny, and consumerism in decades ago, and perhaps not so surprising that he didn't find a wide audience; they weren't ready to learn what he was teaching.

I'm about to leave to take Veronica to the church. I'll have about two hours, but it's Sunday night and nothing around will be open, so I'm not quite sure what to do while I wait for her. Maybe I'll sit in the car and read a few more chapters of *Oryx and Crake*.

For dinner tonight we'll probably eat another bagged salad and pan-fry some more lamb steaks, and eat those with leftover rice.

## Evening

I couldn't think of any really good way to spend the time while I waited for Veronica. I could have driven home and back, but that would have meant another 35 or 40 minutes spent driving. I couldn't think of any place near the church where I could spend an hour, like a bookstore. I should look at some maps and see if I can find something better to do next time. So I did in fact sit in the car. I alternated between reading *Oryx and Crake* with a flashlight and listening to songs from *Akhnaten*. I ran the car a few times so I could turn on the heat, as it is in the twenties tonight. She came out of the potluck dinner a few minutes before eight.

At home I cooked the lamb steaks. Instead of searing them in the big cast-iron pan, I decided to try an aluminum-clad steel pan with a lid. I cooked them in two batches because this pan is smaller. I dusted them with salt and pepper, and browned them in olive oil for about two minutes, then put the lid on and let them cook for two minutes. Then I flipped them and dusted the other side with salt and pepper, adding some rosemary and smoked paprika, and gave them the same two-stage cooking treatment. I pulled them out of the pan, topped them with a bit of butter, and let them rest. I gave the second batch an extra minute per side in the closed pan.

Both batches were delicious, with a nice crust on the top and bottom and the meat inside in several stages, from browned to medium rare to blue rare at the bone. I didn't really notice a difference in doneness between the two batches but next time I would probably give them three minutes on each side in the closed pan, since not everyone in the family likes them quite as rare as Grace and I do. They were so tasty, and eating them such a pure carnivorous experience, that I felt like I should have been wolfing them down while rolling around on the floor grunting and growling and perhaps fighting over them with the other members of my pack. I managed to restrain myself somehow, though.

There was lots of cleanup to do, since searing the lamb steaks gets grease all over the stove, and we were already behind on dishes. The kids were fairly cooperative though, so it's now about twenty after eleven. Grace is reading chapters from Luke, and if that goes OK I will read a bit more from *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Five days to go!

## Monday

It took quite a while to get through three chapters of Luke, although the kids settled down. They settled down, in part, because a couple of them fell asleep. Success!

Grace and I got everyone put to bed before midnight. I had hopes of getting up and out early, but Grace spent some time replying to text messages, and I wound up having a call with my friend Rich, who caught me up on his week. Rich ran sound for a cool concert in which local musicians covered the music from the 1978 concert film *The Last Waltz*. The film documents the farewell concert by The Band (yes, the band's name is just "The Band" — they gained fame originally as the backing band for several frontmen, including Bob Dylan). If you've never seen it, there are a lot of clips on YouTube. Here's one, featuring Joni Mitchell singing "Coyote". That song by Mitchell is a favorite of mine. Her lyrics still astound me! And here's a clip of one of their better-known songs "The Weight." Those YouTube clips are probably not authorized, and so might be taken down. The movie is definitely worth watching if you like roots rock or Americana at all. (Or even if you don't, or don't know if you do — it would serve as a good introduction to those styles of music!)

My alarm went off at 7:30, and then Grace's alarm went off at 8:00, and a bit after that I got bathed and out the door. Grace had two appointments today, but fortunately they were back-to-back and at the same doctor's office. When I got in to work, my co-workers had found a bug in some of my LabVIEW test code. I managed to fix that, or at least I thought that I had fixed it, and built a new version for them to test, and got out the door about 12:10 to go back to the house.

I met up with Grace, and she drove us to Brighton. She had her appointments, we grabbed a quick lunch, she drove us back home, and then I drove back to work. Unfortunately it was almost 4:00 when I got back, so I had missed almost four hours of work, which means I had to stay very late in order to get my hours in.

When I got back to the office my co-workers had found another problem in the LabVIEW test code. I tried to diagnose it by stepping through the code and logging, but wasn't able to identify the problem. I will need to run it tomorrow downstairs, on the bench setup, with the actual hardware under test, and see if I can figure out what is going wrong.

I didn't wind up eating dinner with my family, which is disappointing — I ate some of the leftover summer sausage and crackers. It's pretty quiet in my office after 8 p.m. That's good when I'm there because I'm deeply into writing code — I can really concentrate and get things done with no one else there. But it's not so fun when I'm staying late so I can get enough hours on my time card to avoid having to take any of my remaining paid time off. If Grace and the baby make it to Friday, I'll take Friday off, and Monday and Tuesday, and then I'll have to figure out how she is doing and whether I can go back to work the rest of next week.

I have a situation coming up Wednesday morning. I'm supposed to be in a group Skype call at 9:00, but I'm also supposed to drop off my car at the Honda dealership in Ypsilanti at 8:00. So I'm going to try to arrange to have my laptop

and headset with me and maybe I can call in using the dealership's WiFi. If that doesn't work, I may have to miss it. I don't think I'd be able to get them to drive me all the way to the West side of Ann Arbor by 9:00.

## **Tuesday**

I got home about 10:30 last night — we've been putting so many miles on the Element that I had to stop for gas. I had eaten some leftover summer sausage and crackers for what I thought would be dinner, but when I got home there was an Instant Pot of beef stew still cooking. So we wound up having a very late dinner of beef stew. The broth was delicious and it helped me feel better after a day of cold snacks eaten here and there in a hurry. It was too late for a story, though, and I was really exhausted.

My friend Rich finished an initial mastering job on his concert recording, and I downloaded the first part to my phone, but was too tired to listen to more than a minute or two before I went to bed.

Grace had a bad night. She had painful Braxton Hicks contractions intermittently for hours. So she didn't even attempt to come to bed until 3:00, and then was sitting up awake and uncomfortable over and over. In addition, Elanor apparently had painful gas and so she was howling and waking up over and over again. So their bad night's sleep became my bad night's sleep. This morning before I left Grace called the nurse for her obstetrics practice just to talk over how she was doing. These symptoms were not any of the danger signs they look for, so they did not advise her to come in. She may just have to endure this for a while longer, until her scheduled delivery by c-section on Friday.

Because I slept so badly, I needed to get a little more sleep after Elanor finally settled down and slept more easily, so that I would at least feel that I could drive safely. At 51, I no longer can just easily shake off a bad night's sleep like I could decades ago. So I got out of the house very late this morning, grabbing a coffee and day-old scones at Joe and Rosie Creamery on my way in to work. This morning (which I can barely call morning anymore) I am working on trying to diagnose the puzzling problems with my LabVIEW code. When I take a lunch I will run out to Meijer and pick up two prescriptions that I ordered refilled by text message.

## **Evening**

I figured out the problem with my LabVIEW code. It's a strange story. At some point I wound up accidentally modifying a file containing a strict type definition accidentally, because I was reusing a type definition in a different project. I wound up removing a cluster from the type definition.

Naturally, after did this, any of the VIs in my original project which made reference to the members of that cluster were "broken" — they wouldn't compile, because they contained references to elements in a cluster that weren't there.

I could see where the errors were, in VIs that used “Unbundle by Name” and “Bundle by Name” on wires that have the type of that strict type definition. Those “Unbundle by Name” and “Bundle by Name” instances still showed me what they were supposed to refer to. The strict type definition was called **Data**. **Data** is a cluster that had another cluster in it called **MC Resources**. That’s the cluster I wound up deleting accidentally. One of the “Unbundle by Name” objects on the block diagram might have, for example, a reference to **MC\_Resources.VPD.Set V** and with the **MC\_Resources** cluster missing, LabVIEW couldn’t compile the VI containing that “Unbundle by Name” objects.

So I fixed the type definition — I put a cluster called **MC\_Resources** back in it, in the same place where the old one was, containing the exact same elements in the same order. Then, boom, all those VIs with broken references to elements of **Data.MC\_Resources** worked again, and the project would compile and run again. So I thought I had fixed it, and I made a new compiled application for my co-workers to test.

What actually happened was not what I expected. LabVIEW apparently fixed up those broken references to elements of **Data.MC\_Resources**, but as it did so, it *changed* all of them to refer to the first of the ten different cluster elements they used to refer to. Each of these cluster elements is a .NET task reference. They are all used to control DAC and ADC channels. LabVIEW changed my VIs so that instead of controlling ten *different* DAC and ADC channels, they all controlled the same channel. And this change was applied to four different VIs without any noticeable warning or indication that it had been done.

My mind is struggling to come up with a scenario in which this would be the expected, planned, or wanted behavior, and I can’t come up with one. It highlights again how bizarre LabVIEW is and how it plays badly with version control systems. In the C language, if I changed a type definition in a header file that was used in a number of source files, those files would “break” (refuse to compile) in a similar manner to the way my LabVIEW VIs refused to compile. That makes sense. But if I fixed the header file so that the structure elements referenced in the source files made sense again, all would be well, and the compiler wouldn’t somehow decide to alter all the source files that make reference to the type definitions.

I also struggle to come up with what kind of a design resulted in this behavior. In LabVIEW type definitions, elements of a cluster have names. You can then find these names using pop-up menus. When the type definition broke, the VIs that now referred to elements that no longer existed still displayed the old “path expression,” so they had that path cached somehow inside their data structures. This implies that their references to the cluster elements wasn’t just *positional* (they weren’t just pointing to the 2nd element of the cluster that was the 4th element of another cluster, or something like that). And they also remembered the *type* of the thing they originally referenced. But then somehow when the type definition changed and became compatible again, all those references were modified to refer to the first element of the cluster that was of the appropriate

type.

It's bizarre, and it really makes me wonder what kind of algorithm LabVIEW uses to determine if two types are the same, or different, and how it decides when a type has changed. In a language like C this is very simple, with a couple of simple namespaces for **struct** and **enum** and type definitions to put them in the general namespace. In C++ with more elaborate rules for scoping and namespaces there are ways that the compiler "decorates" the names (or, if you prefer, "mangles" them) so that they are unique by the time the linker sees them.

So, just to summarize, LabVIEW must be taking some pains to preserve the names of the elements and their paths that "Unbundle by Name" and "Bundle by Name" objects refer to, but then, apparently, completely and silently botches the "self-repair" of these references that it does when the broken type definition is fixed.

This is really pretty bad. Those .NET task references are controlling the voltages that we are feeding to a device under test — an amplified photodiode. Fortunately this exact failure scenario didn't wind up applying damaging voltages to the part, and my code does elaborate current-draw monitoring to shut down any excessive current draw as quickly as possible, to prevent damage. But LabVIEW is used to control all kinds of instruments and industrial processes and the idea that it might silently rearrange references to external hardware devices at, say, Dow Chemical, where I briefly worked — well, that's the stuff of nightmares and cold sweats.

I finally found the problem by extracting the previous, working version of my code from my Git repository and using LabVIEW's "Compare VI Hierarchies" to show every difference between two versions of all the VIs in my project. There are over fifty of them and it shows *all* differences, leaving you to decide if the minor wire cleanup I did or improvements I made to comments is semantically significant, or not.

Have I mentioned that LabVIEW is not my favorite programming language?

Have I also mentioned that I think the visual, data-flow paradigm *could* be done better?

Tonight Grace is feeling well enough to attend a book club dinner, so we'll see how she does with it. I'm feeling protective but not concerned, if that makes sense — she's really uncomfortable as we get down to the very last few days of this pregnancy. But all the discomfort she's having doesn't seem to point to any real threat to her health or the baby's health. She's not experiencing anything on the "warning signs" checklist. The discomfort is mostly just breaking down her morale, I think. But it does have an end date.

Tomorrow morning I have to get up and out and get the car to the dealership by 8:00. Then at 9:00 I have to call in to a conference call. I thought I could Skype in, but apparently it is configured to be accessible using "Skype for Business"

and when I tried to access the URLs to sign in, it turned into a mess of unsafe security certificate warnings and broken links. So I got in touch with the guy who set up the call, and he set up the call so I could verify that I can call in via my cell phone and access the conference using the conference ID number.

## Drama

Grace tells me that today our housemate's boyfriend showed up in the yard and our housemate was trying to draw Grace into more drama, sending her text messages asking Grace to tell him she wasn't at home. I haven't gotten the full story of today's events yet, because there wasn't time before Grace went to her dinner out, but this is really getting old. He's not supposed to be at our home at all. Grace had been repeatedly and abundantly clear with everyone involved about that. I think our next step may have to be a restraining order, although the last thing we wanted was to have to use the machinery of the state against anyone.

## Weeks and Weeks and Weeks

A quick check of the word count tells me that these blog posts have piled up over 420,000 words so far. When I convert it to `.odt` I get 728 pages.

I'm not yet done with week 50, and there are 3 posts to go after that: week 51, week 52, and a partial 53rd week. Whether you count this as the 53rd week or not depends on what week-number scheme you go by; ISO week numbers are calculated with years starting on a Monday:

The ISO week-numbering year starts at the first day (Monday) of week 01 and ends at the Sunday before the new ISO year (hence without overlap or gap). It consists of 52 or 53 full weeks. The first ISO week of a year may have up to three days that are actually in the Gregorian calendar year that is ending; if three, they are Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Similarly, the last ISO week of a year may have up to three days that are actually in the Gregorian calendar year that is starting; if three, they are Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The Thursday of each ISO week is always in the Gregorian calendar year denoted by the ISO week-numbering year.

In that scheme, the 30th and 31st of December are part of week 1 of 2019. I'm not going to use that system. In fact, for most people, using week numbers is inevitably going to be confusing. So I don't actually use them, except that I've been using them for file names. This source file is `2018_week_50.md`, and my entries for the last two days of the year will go into a file called `2018_week_53.md`. The actual *titles* of the posts as currently written don't mention week numbers.

Don't get me started about trying to fit my quarterly summaries in between weekly posts that end on Saturdays. Will we ever get a more consistent calendar?

Three days to go!

## Wednesday

Last night Grace drove my car to her dinner out, then I drove my car back, and she got a ride home with one of her friends, so that she didn't have to attempt to start my car. She had a good time. The kids had been grazing and making food for themselves, so they had already eaten, but there was some leftover pasta and yeast for me. We had the usual struggles over cleanup, but there was enough time to read to the kids before bed.

## Luke

Grace and I read chapters ten and eleven of Luke. There are some great passages where Jesus criticizes the pharisees:

Woe to you Pharisees! You love the seat of honor in synagogues and greetings in marketplaces. Woe to you! You are like unseen graves over which people unknowingly walk.

Then one of the scholars of the law said to him in reply, "Teacher, by saying this you are insulting us too."

And he said, "Woe also to you scholars of the law! You impose on people burdens hard to carry, but you yourselves do not lift one finger to touch them.

Woe to you! You build the memorials of the prophets whom your ancestors killed. Consequently, you bear witness and give consent to the deeds of your ancestors, for they killed them and you do the building.

Was there ever a better description of something like the widespread media hagiography of recently deceased former President George H. W. Bush?

## *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Despite having to get up very early, I really wanted to finish reading "The Ring Goes South." This last part, describing the Fellowship's failure to cross the Misty Mountains, feels a bit slow. There are some moments I had forgotten. I don't think *miruvor*, the "cordial of Imladris," is in the films:

As soon as Frodo had swallowed a little of the warm and fragrant liquor he felt a new strength of heart, and the heavy drowsiness left his limbs. The others also revived and found fresh hope and vigour. But the snow did not relent.

I was amused by how mocking and annoying Legolas was, with his apparent immunity to cold, and ability to walk on the snow without sinking into it:

Legolas watched them for a while with a smile upon his lips, and then he turned to the others. ‘The strongest must seek a way, say you? But I say: let a ploughman plough, but choose an otter for swimming, and for running light over grass and leaf, or over snow — an Elf.’

With that he sprang forth nimbly, and then Frodo noticed as if for the first time, though he had long known it, that the Elf had no boots, but wore only light shoes, as he always did, and his feet made little imprint in the snow.

‘Farewell!’ he said to Gandalf. ‘I go to find the Sun!’ Then swift as a runner over firm sand he shot away, and quickly overtaking the toiling men, with a wave of his hand he passed them, and sped into the distance, and vanished round the rocky turn.

The capitalization of “Elf” also seemed a bit surprising here. And I came across a convoluted sentence that took me a moment to parse. Boromir says:

‘But happily your Caradhras has forgotten that you have Men with you,’ said Boromir, who came up at that moment. ‘And doughty Men too, if I may say it; though lesser men with spades might have served you better. Still, we have thrust a lane through the drift; and for that all here may be grateful who cannot run as light as Elves.’

That last sentence is a doozy. The ending phrase, “who cannot run as light as elves” modifies the subject of the second independent clause, which is “all here.” I seem to recall, dimly, that there’s a name for that kind of structure, where the modifiers pile up at the end of the sentence. If I had edited Tolkien, I would have suggested wording the second half of the sentence like:

...and for that, all here who cannot run as lightly as Elves may be grateful.

I’m guessing that my version might be violating an old grammatical rule that says one shouldn’t insert modifiers between subjects and verbs. Is there such a rule, and is it the reason that Tolkien put the sentence together the way he did? This might be kind of like the rule that one shouldn’t split infinitives. But I don’t think very many contemporary writers adhere closely to that rules.

Maybe Tolkien portrayed Boromir, who is the son of the Steward of Gondor and was raised as such, as a stickler for old rules of grammar and a creator of elaborate locutions like this one, even in conversation. Did he do this to create a contrast with Aragorn, who speaks in a simpler, more direct style? I’ll have to pay attention to their respective styles of speaking, as we progress through the stories.

## Morning

I set the alarm for 6:00. If I had been able to fall asleep as soon as Grace and I turned out the lights and stay asleep when the alarm went off, I would have gotten 6 hours of sleep. But that didn't quite happen. Grace was uncomfortable again during the night. But I did get some sleep. I managed to get up and out in time to get breakfast at Harvest Moon Café, and made it to the Honda dealership only eight minutes late. I missed my turn and had to call Grace for advice, because I still just don't have much practice getting around Ypsilanti. It's a maze of curving streets that keep changing name, interlaced with one-ways. I thought I was on Washington, but I was really on Washtenaw — my vision doesn't help matters. I was able to read the next-to-last line on a recent vision test, so theoretically my glasses are fine, but I have some problems focusing at intermediate and long distances and issues with glare.

At the Honda dealership they were able to reproduce the problem with the ignition. They also diagnosed problems with worn rear sway bar links and bushings, and I'm not at all surprised — I last had the suspension looked at several years ago, and it's been getting noisier and noisier as Grace and I constantly beat up the car on Michigan's legendary roads. I'm actually a bit surprised that I haven't broken an engine mount by now.

This is all going to cost about six hundred dollars, and I don't have six hundred dollars, so it's going to go on to our ever-increasing pile of debt. I'm having to shuffle money and watch every account like a hawk. The dealership needed to keep the car overnight, which I hadn't quite planned for. So I got a ride to my office on the dealership shuttle.

This was all complicated by the fact that I had an important conference call for work starting about a quarter to nine. So I dialed into the call using my cell phone from the dealership waiting room. I didn't need to speak much, but I needed to jump in at a couple of points, including while I was getting a ride to my office. In fact the call ended just as I was walking into the office, which startled my co-worker Adam, much to my amusement; he'd been listening to the call and thought I was still at the dealership, and then I immediately walked in the door.

Grace and I needed to have a working car, because there was a distinct possibility that I might need to take Grace in to St. Joe's, and we have errands we need to run tonight and she has appointments tomorrow. I reserved a car online, and had my co-worker Patrick take me to the Enterprise car rental so that I could rent a car for two days. So I have a tiny blue Ford Fiesta for a while, which seems laughably small, like a toy car, but it will work.

Tonight I'll use the rental to go get groceries at Costco. Then, things may get complicated tomorrow. It depends on when my car is ready to pick up. I need to take Grace to her appointments tomorrow afternoon. If my car is ready before I leave for work, Grace could go to the dealership with me and take my car to

Brighton and I could take the rental car to work. Then I could have her meet me at the dealership when I need to drop off the rental. We'll figure something out. I hope I don't wind up losing as big a chunk out of my work day as I did on Tuesday.

I still have no idea how we're really going to manage with one car after the birth, and going into 2019. I'm going on faith at this point.

Two days to go!

## Thursday

Last night I made it to Costco, then to Meijer, then the Sunoco, then home. Sometimes it feels like I'm in a video game in a repeating cut scene and all my movements are on rails; I just cycle through the same locations via the same route, over and over. I feel like I must be wearing ruts in the road. Or in myself.

There were fat snowflakes spattering on the windshield and the roads were getting slippery here and there. It is melting this morning and it looks like we will have rain, but it won't be cold enough to really freeze up. Knowing that Grace and I are going to be out of the house a lot this weekend, I stocked up on frozen things that are easy for the kids to re-heat, including chicken pot pies and pre-cooked hamburger patties, along with lunch meat, peanut butter and jelly, spicy ramen noodles, and a lot of extra bagels and buns of various types.

Grace and the kids made a pot of black-eyed peas with ham hocks, so we ate that for dinner. The kids had managed to screw up several things she asked them to do — cleanup chores undone, food burned, so it took some time to get the meal finished and by the time the rental car was unloaded and everything was put away and we were ready to eat, I was pretty exhausted.

There are at least two different spills burned on the bottom of the oven. No one will take credit.

Grace didn't get to have a conversation with our housemate today. Apparently she's avoiding Grace and hiding out upstairs, communicating only by text message, and pretending to be asleep if anyone comes up to talk to her. Which means that her kids are effectively imprisoned up there.

Grace had put "chocolate" in her text-message shopping list. I wasn't sure who asked for that or exactly what he or she wanted, so I got a box of Ferrero Rocher chocolates of assorted types including some with dark chocolate, some with almonds, some with a cappuccino-flavored filling (those are really good), and some with something in the middle called a "black pearl," which contains no actual pearls, but was freaking delicious. The kids mowed through the box and everyone pronounced them delicious.

After dinner I managed to read a little bit more of *Oryx and Crake* while the kids did cleanup. It's a pretty quick read and it moves along well. I'm coming up on the climax of the book and I think I have a pretty good idea of what is

coming up. It's a great post-apocalyptic story, and I think we're about to learn the details of the actual apocalypse, which Atwood has only gradually been revealing. There's something that already feels dated about the story, though — I keep thinking “oh, yes, *that* apocalypse, the 2003 apocalypse.” It doesn't feel to me like it is still the one we are headed for. I think we got onto a timeline with a somewhat different apocalypse looming.

I checked my voice mail and discovered that the Honda dealership had called me about 1:30 Wednesday afternoon; my phone never rang, which seems to happen sometimes. They didn't need to keep it overnight after all; they found an ignition switch somewhere. So it was ready yesterday. But I had already rented a car for two days and filled up the tank to full assuming that I would need to drive Grace to Brighton and back.

Our bedtime story was Luke, chapter 12. Jesus makes some amazing statements. This one jumped out at us. It could be, as they say, ripped from today's headlines:

He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west you say immediately that it is going to rain—and so it does; and when you notice that the wind is blowing from the south you say that it is going to be hot—and so it is. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

This morning Grace and I got up pretty early and went to get the Element, then Grace drove it home and I and drove the rental car back to Enterprise, dropped it off, and had them drive me to my office, which is less than half a mile away.

Fortunately because I returned it early, they only charged me for one day, so I'll get about \$325 refunded out of the \$400 or so they charged me, which included a security deposit. That will help to soften the blow of the \$650 car repair bill.

Today our bank account is overdrawn by almost \$700. I think that will be “settled up” overnight and they'll take \$700 out of my line of credit and dump it into checking, leaving the line of credit balance something like \$2,300. But I should also get a paycheck deposited overnight, and at some point soon I should get that \$325 refunded. In what order will the transactions be posted? I don't know. If they process my paycheck and the \$325 refund first, I may be able to avoid digging into my line of credit any further this week. But when I plan out the transactions in my spreadsheet, I arrange them in the order of maximum pessimism, to verify that we will squeak by even in the worst-case scenario.

I'm pretty sure that I'll be getting an end-of-year bonus. I think it will probably allow me to pay off the line of credit. But it may not pay for much else. Even if it doesn't, it would be a big help to zero out at least one of our debts.

I'm trying not to feel too demoralized about our insecure money situation; right now, we have everything we actually need, and so many people are doing so much worse.

I'm very grateful that I don't have to drive with Grace to Brighton and back today. I was looking at losing a big chunk of my work day and so having to stay very late again. But with the rental car turned in, Grace will pick me up when she's done with her errands. And then I'll be done with work for a few days.

One day to go!

## Friday

It's about 8:15 Friday night and I just got home from St. Joe's. It's been a long day. Grace brought me home from work last night and we had some beef stew. The kids had been grazing all day so didn't really need anything. We went through the usual rigamarole of trying to get everyone to work on chores. For our bedtime story I continued right into "A Journey in the Dark," where the Fellowship enters the Moria.

### "A Journey in the Dark"

We read a good chunk of that chapter. There were many details in this chapter that I didn't recall. There's another bit of foreshadowing when Aragorn warns Gandalf:

I will follow your lead now — if this last warning does not move you. It is not of the Ring, nor of us others that I am thinking now, but of you, Gandalf. And I say to you: if you pass the doors of Moria, beware!

Aragorn doesn't say anything specific about *why* he believes Moria is a particular threat to Gandalf rather than all of them equally. But like Elrond, he must have some premonition of what might happen.

The company can't agree on whether to try entering Moria or not. Frodo asks them to wait until morning to vote on it:

At last Frodo spoke. 'I do not wish to go,' he said; 'but neither do I wish to refuse the advice of Gandalf. I beg that there should be no vote, until we have slept on it. Gandalf will get votes easier in the light of the morning than in this cold gloom. How the wind howls!'

But they never wind up taking such a vote, because they spend the night fighting off Wargs. These fights are told in some of Tolkien's most magnificently alliterative prose:

'Fling fuel on the fire!' cried Gandalf to the hobbits. 'Draw your blades, and stand back to back!'

In the leaping light, as the fresh wood blazed up, Frodo saw many grey shapes spring over the ring of stones. More and more followed. Through the throat of one huge leader Aragorn passed his sword with a thrust; with a great sweep Boromir hewed the head off another.

Beside them Gimli stood with his stout legs apart, wielding his dwarf-axe. The bow of Legolas was singing.

There is lots of great alliteration in this passage:

- fling, fuel, fire
- leaping, light
- spring, ring
- throat, thrust
- hewed, head
- stood, stout

There are some more distant near-rhymes, and similar-sounding words or groups of words, too:

- blades, blazed
- gray shapes, great sweep
- sword with, stood with

The scene is reminiscent of the scene in *The Hobbit* when Gandalf, Bilbo, and the Dwarves climb fir trees to escape wolves, and Gandalf ignites pine cones to fling at them, but this time there are better fighters in the party. But there's a very strange detail mentioned only in passing:

When the full light of the morning came no signs of the wolves were to be found, and they looked in vain for the bodies of the dead. No trace of the fight remained but the charred trees and the arrows of Legolas lying on the hill-top. All were undamaged save one of which only the point was left.

We're supposed to realize that the arrow point was all that is left of the flaming arrow from the night before, ignited by Gandalf, bearer of Narya, the ring of fire:

The last arrow of Legolas kindled in the air as it flew, and plunged burning into the heart of a great wolf-chieftain.

This is the "smoking gun" which tells us that the wolf corpses weren't silently dragged away — they *vanished*. The flaming arrow stuck into the wolf, and the shaft burned away until the fire met the flesh of the wolf and went out, leaving only the point in the wolf. Then the wolf disappeared, leaving the point behind.

The dead wargs just disappeared. Is this something Saruman does from Isengard, or something Sauron can actually do from Mordor? It is not at all clear. It seems like Tolkien may have realized that an enemy that could create and uncreate armies of vicious beasts magically at a distance was a little too powerful for the confines of Middle-Earth, and so I don't think we ever read of such a conjuring again.

There's an interesting change in the film. When Gandalf is attempting to figure out how to open the Doors of Durin, he is the one who finally figures it out:

With a suddenness that startled them all the wizard sprang to his feet. He was laughing! ‘I have it!’ he cried. ‘Of course, of course! Absurdly simple, like most riddles when you see the answer.’

In the film, it is Frodo who actually realizes that “Speak, friend, and enter” has been misread and so become a riddle. This gives him something to do in this scene, but it also makes sense in terms of who Frodo *is*. He’s the heir of the Shire’s most famous player of the riddle game, Bilbo. Although the film then ignores the fact that the book has established that Frodo has a reasonable command of Elvish and so very well might know the word for “friend” without having to ask Gandalf.

### **Malachi Richard**

Grace and I didn’t get a lot of sleep, but we got some. I think I got an unbroken block of about four hours from around midnight to around four, and a somewhat disrupted hour of sleep between four and five. I thought we had to be at the hospital at 8:00 this morning, and so set my alarm for 6:00. But Grace knew that we actually had to be there at 6:00, and so set her alarm for 5:00. So she made me a coffee and coconut milk, with just one teaspoon of instant coffee since I didn’t want to be too wired, while I got a quick shower and got dressed, and we made it on time. Having a baby is always a combination of hurrying up and waiting. The team did a whole bunch of medical history on Grace and there was much reviewing of notes and signing of consent forms. They got an IV port into her arm. I didn’t have a lot to do for this part except to occasionally chime in to make sure some detail was remembered.

As write this next part please keep in mind that I am not a medical professional, and I did not take notes today. There may be errors in the details — but the following account is what happened as I remember it:

As they monitored Grace it became clear that her blood pressure was unusually elevated, which was especially strange given that it had been fine the previous afternoon, and Grace had just taken an early-morning dose of labetalol. We all started to have concerns about pre-eclampsia. They took blood and urine to do lab tests to try to determine if she showed any of the other danger signs. There was nothing. She had no headache or visual disturbances. They pushed some IV labetalol and it came down a bit and seemed stable, although it was still higher than her normally well-controlled blood pressure. The “cure” for pre-eclampsia is to deliver the baby, so they got her into surgery.

I’ve been through this c-section process with her before — twice before, in fact. I found myself particularly nervous today. A good chunk of it was because I’ve had so long to worry about it; this was scheduled months ago. In the two previous cases, the c-section was done on an emergency basis, so we didn’t have a lot of time to worry about the situation, and in both of those cases it was the health of the baby, not Grace, that was the worry.

The c-section went well. There was no excess bleeding or other difficulty. Baby Malachi Richard was born about 8:45 and came out in excellent health. He looks quite a bit like Pippin did. They didn't weigh him or measure him immediately, but got him on Grace's chest immediately where he settled down while the finished sewing her back together. Grace's blood pressure during the surgery remained elevated but didn't spike alarmingly.

After surgery they brought her back to recovery, and weighed the baby. He was 7 pounds, 2 ounces at birth. I held him on my chest for more skin-to-skin for a while while Grace got settled in recovery. As she has with every birth, she began to shiver violently. They have always wrapped her up in heated blankets and it has passed after a while. This time it didn't pass for a long, long time, despite the blankets *and* the big apparatus of plastic tubes piping warm air onto her — I have no idea what that thing is called.

Grace's blood pressure readings went "off-the-rails." One reading came up at 198 over 178, or something like that. Now I was starting to feel terrified. Grace still had none of the other warning symptoms of preeclampsia, though, and the nurses wisely realized that the automatic sphygmomanometer was not giving good readings on limbs where the muscles were violently contracting, so they finally busted out one of the old bulb-and-stethoscope models.

Grace's diastolic blood pressure was *not* almost 200, but it was worryingly high, even higher than it had been before the surgery. So they continued to add IV medications and started a protocol for adding magnesium sulfate to her IV, which is designed to prevent possible seizures. The protocol involves a bolus dose and then a steady drip for the next 24 hours and the bolus does produce a big flush response. About the same time they also put the baby back on her chest.

Between the reestablishment of skin-to-skin contact with the baby and the medications, Grace's violent shivering finally came to an end and a few minutes later they could strip off the heating apparatus and extra blankets. Her blood pressure started to seem much more stable, and she was nursing the baby, so I took the opportunity to go get my first real food of the day. After another coffee, a green juice, and some sushi, I started to feel somewhat calmer.

The afternoon and evening were quite uneventful compared to the morning. Grace's blood pressure remained somewhat elevated but stable. Another round of lab tests came back without indication of preeclampsia. She never developed a headache or visual disturbances. The baby was quite mellow, alternating between nursing and just lying on Grace's chest sleeping or looking around. When they both slept, I finished reading *Oryx and Crake*.

There was some annoyance because one of his heel stick blood glucose tests came back one digit too low, and so they had to do a more elaborate test. That one came back fine. The following tests were even better. So they might be able to stop the heel sticks.

We sent and received a lot of text messages notifying family and friends. Grace posted a picture on Facebook and I posted a couple on Twitter. The magnesium sulfate protocol unfortunately meant that Grace couldn't eat anything but clear liquids. But she downed ginger ale, apple juice, water, and jello. The staff offered me a couple of spare food trays so I got two more meals and left about 7:30, 13 and a half hours after getting there this morning. I was both tired and antsy and I wanted to check on the kids. Several of our friends had stopped by during the day to check on them, so they were fine.

On the magnesium sulfate protocol, Grace won't be allowed to keep the baby in her room overnight without another adult present, even if the baby is in the baby cart. This could be a pain. We're not sure whether the baby will be able to settle down and sleep in the nursery. With the other kids, some haven't minded it, and some have. They should bring the baby back to nurse. I just couldn't stay any longer. I'll get back as early as I can tomorrow and just hope that they can soothe the baby. Otherwise we might get into the cycle where he burns his energy crying, his blood sugar drops, they do more heel sticks, he cries more... then they want to feed him formula, or start an IV. Let's hope that doesn't happen. I don't want to go back in the morning and find an exhausted baby who would have been perfectly happy had they not tried to get him to sleep in a plastic baby cart instead of on his mom's chest.

I'm not exactly sure what is going to happen for the rest of the weekend. We're not sure when Grace might be able to come home.

Goodnight!

## Saturday

It's 11:28 Saturday evening and it's been another very long day. I got a full night's sleep, which was a big help, although I can't say I was fully recharged this morning.

I got to the hospital about 10:00 this morning. I was not quite sure where to go, because Grace had told me she was being moved to the mother/baby unit, and I wanted to park in the correct lot and go in the correct entrance to avoid a lot of extra wandering around looking for her. So I parked in lot B instead of lot Q. I still wasn't sure where she was, so I went to the café for a small mocha and an egg-salad sandwich and sent her a text. She told me she was still in the old room, so I took the long walk through the lower-level maze of hallways. After six previous births at St. Joe's, I know the way pretty well.

She hadn't been moved to the mother/baby unit yet because just as her blood pressure had "overshot" before the delivery, this morning after extra labetalol, the magnesium sulfate, and her celery juice, it "undershot" and so was extremely low. So they dropped one of her doses of labetalol and added more IV saline and fortunately it gradually came up. But they had not wanted to move her until they were sure she could stand and walk safely. They also wanted to make sure

she could urinate without any difficulty after getting her catheter out, and she hadn't done that yet. Her test results had all been good and there were no signs of excess bleeding either externally or internally. It really seemed like just an over-correction due to the medications. They are trying to make changes only gradually to avoid another overshoot, but I don't think that will actually be a problem now that the baby is nursing securely.

Little Malachi had a better night than we feared. He was able to settle down and get some sleep in the nursery, and they brought him back several times during the night to nurse. Nevertheless, his blood sugar did drop again to the point where it was *just* below the acceptable range. When this happens they restart the clock. He needs to pass twelve hours of tests. So they're going to continue to take heel sticks until past midnight.

I brought Grace some vials of breast milk this morning, donated by one of our family friends, and so she was able to squirt this in Malachi's mouth while he nursed. After adding just a few cc's of milk, his blood sugar came up noticeably. Grace has colostrum but no milk yet, although it's on its way, and little Malachi will soon have more milk than he can possibly handle... but he will also grow very rapidly!

I brought my copy of *The Haunting of Hill House* to Grace's room so that I could read some more of that story to Grace. I was able to read a bit to her, although when I read to her it always tends to put her to sleep. We only got through a few pages. Staying in a hospital means constant interruptions. And then after a while, when Grace's diastolic blood pressure was pretty solidly over 100, they moved us to the mother/baby unit.

About 2:00 I ran an errand to go get us pho from the Pho House. I actually drove by it the first time without seeing it. It is right next to Tim Horton's on Washtenaw just east of Hewitt. But next to Tim Horton's, the building actually looks like an abandoned property. It's a real hole-in-the-wall, but their pho is to die for. When you get it to go, they give you a huge and very full container of their beef broth, and a box with all the stuff to mix into it: fresh basil leaves, bean sprouts, whatever meats you ordered, rice noodles, jalapeño lime wedges, and hot sauce. Open it all up, drink down some of the broth to make room, and throw in a little bit of everything. The result is something that kisses every part of your tongue with flavor all at once. It's so good.

I also got a half-dozen donuts from Tim Horton's, even though I only really wanted one Boston Cream for myself, and wasn't sure if Grace would even eat one plain old-fashioned. I just had a feeling I'd need them, and that I'd need a half-dozen, not a dozen.

When I got back and we had just started eating our pho, Grace went through text messages and realized that the person who had arranged to take Joshua and Pippin to their choir concert dress rehearsal today and concert tomorrow had backed out, but apparently did this by sending Grace an e-mail Thursday night, rather than calling or sending a text message. So we did not know this. So I

hurriedly scarfed down half my pho, grabbed my one donut to eat on the way to the car, and drove back home, where Joshua and Pippin were dressed and ready to go and had been waiting for some time. I drove them to First Presbyterian Church in downtown Ann Arbor. The trip from the hospital to our home and back to First Presbyterian just can't be done that quickly. There are a lot of surface streets involved.

When we got there we found the building empty. Grace when she handed off the task of getting the boys to these two events, today and tomorrow, had lost track of the correct times for them. So it turned out the dress rehearsal had already ended. In fact, by the time we found out that they weren't getting a ride, it was already too late for us to get them there.

Since they were quite literally all dressed up with nowhere to go, I brought them with me back to Grace's room. They got to meet little Malachi and hang out with mom and watch cartoons. And that's when I realized that I had bought those extra donuts for two of my sons to eat. Sometimes it seems like I can see dimly into the future. Not that clearly — I didn't know who was going to eat the donuts or when, but I knew that I needed to get a half-dozen instead of two and I needed to leave them in Grace's hospital room instead of taking them home.

Meanwhile I got a text message from my boss about the Thorlabs holiday party, and realized that I had also made a mistake. I had thought that it was actually on Friday, because our other holiday parties had generally been on workdays. With all that happened yesterday I didn't even try to go. But I realized that it was actually today, and that it actually ran until 8:00 with a dinner from 6:00 to 7:00, and it was only 5:30 or so. Grace was content with the baby and two sons, so I decided to try to go for part of it.

I thought that maybe I should just take the regular route that I knew well to get to I-94, but decided to put my trust in Google Maps. It came up with a convoluted route using some roads and freeway ramps that I was not very familiar with. So... I tried it. I probably would have been able to make this route work if I had been able to print out a full set of directions, but I had to settle for trying to read the route off my phone. I screwed it up, confused Huron River Drive with Huron Parkway, and missed the freeway entrance Google directed me to. So I had to drive to a different entrance, but that meant I wound up driving through the medical complex in downtown Ann Arbor to get on M-14. Then in my distraction, I took the wrong branch of M-14. I quickly realized my mistake, but still had to drive until I got to an exit with an overpass and matching entrance ramp so that I could turn around and backtrack to get onto M-14 going the right way. That took a while. And I still had a long way to go on M-14 and I-94. There was an uncleared accident on I-94. It must have happened just minutes before I got there. It didn't look like a serious accident, but a car with some dents and blown tires was partially blocking both lanes. Traffic slowed to a complete stop for a while while everyone merged to creep around on the shoulder. When I got to my exit in Jackson, I was able to follow

the route, but it was quite slow, because it was on dark single-lane roads, and it was quite hard to see some of the turns.

Anyway, the upshot is that it took me an hour and ten minutes to go forty miles. I had been hoping to get there by 6:30 but didn't make it until about 7:00. Fortunately they had saved me a plate. I wasn't all that hungry after the pho at 3:00 or so, but I ate a bit of the dinner and had a glass of Sandhill Crane Vineyards Pinot Noir. I think it was a 2016 bottling. Michigan red wines are still developing in quality. This one had a somewhat undistinguished and muddy-looking color, but it wasn't bad. I'd say that it is a bit sweet for my taste and had a slight syrupy, medicinal flavor, but there were some pleasant notes in there, and the flavors grew on me as I finished the glass.

So I didn't get to spend very much time at the Christmas party, but I am glad that I went, even though it took an awful lot of driving. I greeted a few folks and showed people pictures of the new baby on my phone and received many congratulations. My boss made a few remarks about how well our business unit, and Thorlabs in general, has done in 2018, which is encouraging, and we played some silly party games with white-elephant gifts. We even played musical chairs. There were also wineglasses and jackets with the Thorlabs logo to take home.

On the way out, I tried to find my way back to I-94, but passed my turn, and put my flashers on and pulled out my phone to try to stare at the map on my phone and determine which way I needed to go. Fortunately one of my co-workers drove right past me and asked me if I needed help. *She* had also just missed the same turn. So I asked her if I could follow her back to the freeway entrance. She turned around, in a driveway, and then I turned around. I thought that in my smaller car, driving onto the right shoulder, I could manage a U-turn, but the road was just a touch too narrow, so I needed to turn it into a 3-point turn. I saw a truck coming towards me, so instead of backing up to make the second point in the turn, I pulled forward as far as I could onto the shoulder to give him room to pass behind me. That driver passed by yelling "are you stupid, or what?"

So, that's Jackson, Michigan.

I'm still debating whether I should have replied "no, but you're an asshole!" or just wished him Merry Christmas. I opted to say nothing.

Fortunately my co-worker was waiting for me to follow here, and we were actually only a short distance from the freeway on-ramp. The drive back was uneventful because I took a route that I was familiar with. Even so, it took about fifty minutes, so it was about nine when I got back to Grace's room.

I hung out for a few more minutes and packed up my bag and caught up on the news with Grace — fortunately, there wasn't any bad news. Little Malachi's blood sugar had gone up well. She is going to continue to nurse him while supplementing with donor milk until she has to send him to the nursery to sleep. They will continue to bring him back for feedings. With his blood sugar higher

at the start of the night, he should be able to get through it without dropping out of the acceptable range.

The boys have their concert tomorrow. They were supposed to have to attend the dress rehearsal to be allowed to attend the concert, but Grace spoke to their choir director and she is going to make an exception due to our circumstances. So I will need to take them to their concert tomorrow evening — hopefully *not* at the same time they decide to discharge Grace and the baby. This meant that I needed to get some cash out to buy a concert ticket.

The boys hadn't actually eaten dinner, so I needed to get them fed. So all told I had three more errands to run before I could go home: I had to feed the boys, I had to get some cash out, and I had to fill up the tank, even though I filled it up Thursday night. I took them to Happy's Pizza and fed them an order of fried shrimp and fries. I got myself a vegetarian sub, and ate about half of it, but my heart wasn't in it. Then I went right next door to Huntington bank and got some cash out of their ATM. Then, finally I was able to drive back to our neighborhood, and go to the gas station I usually go to, and then go on home.

The house wasn't too terribly trashed, although our housemate had brought three bags of trash down by the front door and left them there. So I had our kids take them out to the bins. The floors needed to be swept, but apparently the brooms were missing. I think our housemate took them upstairs and didn't bring them back down. So I will have the kids check with her in the morning.

I had one more thing to do: I had to clean up their dress shirts and pants a bit. So I used a damp washcloth to scrub off dirt, lint, and bits of food. Fortunately they are black, so they hide stains well. I didn't actually need to run them through the washer. Our choir director knows a thing or two about how to best work with kids.

Then all that was left to do was convince the kids to quiet down, get the videos turned off and put away, brush their teeth, quiet down, and get to bed, and quiet down, and then quiet down again.

They're very quiet now. It's about 1:00 a.m. Now it's time for me to get on to sleep.

## **Books, Music, Movies, and TV Shows Discussed This Week**

*This list does not include books, chapters of books, or other works that I only mentioned briefly in the text above.*

- Luke (Revised New American Bible, 1986-1990 edition)
- *Moderan* by David R. Bunch (New York Review Books Classics 2018 edition) (finished)
- *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien (bedtime reading in progress)
- *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood (finished)

- *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson (Penguin Deluxe Illustrated Trade Paperback Edition)

*Pittsfield Township, Michigan*

*The Week Ending Saturday, December 15th, 2018*

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