

2018 Week 51: The Week Ending Saturday, December 22nd

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

I'm back at home and it's about 10:30 p.m., and it's been another long day. Fortunately I got a full night's sleep last night, so I was pretty well-equipped to handle it. As I was getting ready this morning I bumped into our housemate who was making breakfast for her kids. I gave her a couple of our reusable plastic mousetraps and asked her to put them in the upstairs bathroom with a little peanut butter as bait.

I went to visit Grace and little Malachi this morning, grabbing a small mocha and a tuna sandwich on my way up to her room. Grace was pretty exhausted. She had not been able to get any significant sleep during the night. Malachi did well, though — he's passed his blood sugar screening. So for a couple of hours I held him, and had him suck on my finger while I dribbled the last of the donor milk into his mouth from a plastic syringe, while Grace got a little sleep.

Grace's blood pressure had another "overshoot" back up too high, so there was a lot of back-and-forth with the doctor on call about making small tweaks to her medication schedule. Apparently they are generally more worried about the low numbers she had than the elevated numbers she had this morning.

There's not much to tell about the afternoon. The mother/baby unit doesn't have spare patient meals on hand sometimes the way the labor and delivery unit does, and I missed lunch at the cafeteria downstairs, so I had to make do with snacks from Joe's Java, the cafe and shop. Grace and I had a little time to talk about things. She told me that our housemate wouldn't set the mousetraps. I asked her why she thought that, and her answer was that, basically, she just seems to refuse to do anything we ask her to do, including putting her laundry in the laundry bin instead of on the floor. It seems to be a matter of principle for her, the way it seems to be for some adolescents.

The Haunting of Hill House

I read Grace the rest of chapter 3 of *The Haunting of Hill House*. Our protagonist Eleanor has now met up with the rest of the cast including Dr. Montague and they begin having conversations as a group. There is some hilarious dialogue

in these scenes. Dr. Montague unspools a long story about the history of Hill House. We're about a third of the way through a novel about a haunted house, and nothing supernatural or frightening has actually happened yet. Jackson is taking her time to really create her setting and characters here.

The Concert

At about a quarter to five I left to go pick up Pippin and Joshua, make sure they were dressed for the Christmas concert, and take them there. They at least had their black pants and dress shirts on. Joshua had his dress black shoes and socks on but Pippin did not — he had his Crocs on. I put on both their ties and tied them, cleaned up a few additional spots on Pippin's shirt, and asked Joshua to help Pippin get his dress shoes on. He showed up at the door with his shoes on and I think I just assumed that he had his black socks on too, but I found out later he had no socks on.

I drove them to First Presbyterian. They were supposed to be at the church no later than 6:15. We actually got there at 5:45 and I found a place to park in the church parking lot, which was a lot better than how we had to do it last year, parking in a structure. There was a service going on so the choir folks weren't ready for the kids yet. So I decided to take them for a brief walk, in order to get some food into them, to help make sure no one had a meltdown due to low blood sugar. Unfortunately neither of them had brought a jacket, either. But it was in the forties and we didn't have far to walk. I took them into a Subway, and we split a roast beef sub. I asked the "sandwich artist" to cut it into quarters. I insisted that we couldn't have any kind of sauce on the sub, and could eat only the baked, not fried, chips, and couldn't eat any chips with barbecue flavoring. This was all for the sake of their shirts and ties.

Pippin had agreed to a roast beef sub and I added lettuce and tomato and pickles, but when it came time to eat it, he apparently had a big problem with lettuce and tomato and pickles. I don't know why. He regularly eats those things at other times. He also complained bitterly that there was "too much air" in his small bag of chips. (Pippin always seems to want things that don't exist, like a bag of chips with no air in it. Grace says he's like someone insisting on a kosher ham.) Pippin spent most of the time he had to eat the food complaining about it instead. I pulled all the additions off of Pippin's sub, set the timer on my phone for two minutes, and told them that was the amount of time they had before we had to leave in order to get back to the church on time. Pippin ate most of his quarter of the sub and we got out of there, and made it back to the church in time for Joshua and Pippin to go in and meet up with their group. I bought a ticket and found a seat pretty close to the front.

The concert went very smoothly from my perspective. My boys were in the first choir, for younger kids. There are three choirs. The music got gradually more complex. Then for the last few songs, they brought all three choirs together, which made for a huge crowd of kids. Pippin was on the far left edge of the

group and unfortunately I couldn't see him very clearly from where I was sitting. During the first song of the full choir he was turning around and seemed to be bumping into or shoving a girl in front of him. I couldn't tell exactly what was happening or who started it, but there was some kind of altercation going on between the two of them. He got some kind of a warning hand sign from the choir director and I thought he had settled down. But then as the group was doing a kind of spoken-word introduction for the second song, the choir director had to gesture for one of her assistant directors to come and remove him from the group. So Pippin had to spend the rest of the show standing next to the assistant choir director not with the group, but against the far left wall of the sanctuary.

After the show ended and we could turn our phones back on, I explained to Grace what had happened via text message. She was not pleased. There was a reception afterwards. I spoke to the choir director and apologized for Pippin's behavior. I asked her if she knew what exactly had happened. She didn't, but Pippin was definitely being disruptive and not focusing on his performance. I didn't know the girl or her parents and didn't see her at the reception. Pippin really should apologize to her, and to them.

I drove the boys back to St. Joe's to say goodnight to Grace and baby Malachi. They've already taken to calling him — "Chi." It's part of "Malachi," but it also sounds like Kai, a character in *Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu*.

As I drove, I told Pippin and Joshua a few of my thoughts. I told them that there were different ways that a child could wind up disrupting a performance and the audience (containing a lot of parents, of course) would be more sympathetic to some of them, and less sympathetic to others. If a child throws up from nerves, or passes out, the choir directors and parents would take care of that child and everyone would feel considerable sympathy. I don't think any of the audience members would *blame* the child for an attack of nerves, or for getting dizzy after standing too long packed into an overheated sanctuary. But if a child gets into a fight of some kind, like Pippin did, and gets a warning, and then continues to disrupt the performance, most people will tend to think badly of the parents.

I wasn't sure what we were going to do with Pippin. If the choir director wanted to give him some kind of disciplinary measure like making him sit out the next concert, or putting him on some kind of probation, I would fully support that decision — Pippin had earned it. But after Grace grilled Pippin for a while about his behavior, she decided that he really just isn't ready for this. So we will pull him out of choir. Joshua, who was actually old enough to move on to the next-older group of kids, but who stayed behind to support Pippin, might be able to move up now. Pippin needs some time to work on his self-discipline and interpersonal skills. It's disappointing. But he's my son, and I can't really say that *I* matured quickly, because that would be a big lie. Pippin might be the one who is most like I was as a child, mild autism and all.

Grace's blood pressure hadn't really settled down yet, so the medical staff added

a second medication. She's not having the lows and highs she had Friday, but her system definitely hasn't become stable yet. She managed to get a shower, to wash her incision. It's not bleeding or leaking any fluid but she had lost a tape strip and apparently it had separated a bit. So I'm not entirely convinced that she'll be ready to come home tomorrow, although Malachi is cleared to go.

I hope she can get a good night's sleep. I'll get back over there tomorrow morning to check on everyone.

When I got home the house wasn't too much of a mess. An no, our housemate had not set the mousetraps I asked her to set. They were still sitting on the kitchen counter. And the stove is crusted with grease and spills, and the bottom of the oven is full of burned-on spills.

I only took two more days off this week and it looks like I'll have to spend a part of at least one of them deep-cleaning the stove and oven again, hopefully before someone starts a fire. If I need to, I'll take another day or two, but taking more days now will mean I'll have to go into work during the week of Christmas.

It's about 11:30. Goodnight!

Monday

I'm writing this at about 6:45 Tuesday morning, as I didn't get a chance to write last night.

I slept fairly late again Monday morning — apparently I was still catching up on sleep. I made it to Grace's room sometime after 10:00 with a double mocha and a couple of sandwiches in hand. I brought in the baby car seat with me, expecting that all three of us would be going home about 3:00. But when I got in, I learned that Grace had been cleared to go home. So, we got packed up, and went through the process of readjusting the straps in the car seat to hold a baby smaller than Eleanor. We had Grace in her wheelchair out in the hall, and we were on our way down to the lobby, where I was going to get the car warmed up, loaded with bags, and then bring it up to the front driveway to load Grace and the baby in his car seat.

On our way out the door one of the nurses took another blood pressure reading. This one was actually apparently a mistake — she wasn't scheduled for any more readings. But it was very high. So they took more readings, including one with a manual sphygmomanometer. (I got second place in a college spelling be with that word.) Her numbers were very bad. I think the highest reading was around 190 over 120.

So, it was back into bed for Grace while various doctors tried to figure out what to do with her medications. The gave her another long-acting procordia, and more labetalol. Then another short-acting procordia on top of that. Her pressures came down a little, but not nearly enough. I spent several extremely pleasant hours, on and off, holding baby Malachi on my lap and on my chest,

whenever he was done nursing with Grace. Pleasant hours, except of course for the fear that my wife and companion and the mother of my children was going to blow a gasket.

Grace was not able to see her regular gynecologist and apparently it was a very busy afternoon and evening for births. So, mostly, we waited. Towards evening they took her back to the labor and delivery unit, because they are set up there with equipment that can do automatic monitoring of blood pressure at whatever interval they want. So we were getting readings every 15 minutes.

Her diastolic gradually came down to 150s and then to 140s, but her systolic was then down into the 60s or so. I wasn't writing these down. The procardia gave her diarrhea and a headache, which is her usual reaction to procardia. Her pain level started to creep up, so she asked for tylenol and, later, percocet. We are wondering if some of her blood pressure problem might be in response to pain.

I read Grace another part of a chapter of *The Haunting of Hill House*, with many interruptions. We are into some parts with very funny dialog, and getting more details about the strange geometry and furnishings of Hill House.

Malachi continued to want to be held all the time, whether he was nursing or sleeping. When I left we were trying to get him to accept being swaddled and sleeping in the bin. I asked a nurse to track down a pacifier. We very rarely use them but it seemed like it was time to try one, because I had to take my pinky finger home.

We made some arrangements for a couple of people to drop in and check on the kids Tuesday. Our friend Joy is planning to come visit on Wednesday.

I had left my bag at home because I thought we were coming home, and I didn't want to have an extra bag to carry. This meant I had also accidentally left my blood pressure medication at home. I normally take it about 1:30 in the afternoon, but I didn't get a dose, so towards evening I was getting a bit of a headache, too. I did not want to complicate matters by asking if they would take *my* blood pressure, so resolved to just take all my pills when I got home.

When I left at about a quarter to 11, Grace hadn't actually seen a physician for almost twelve hours, although we were told that the resident and intern were being kept in the loop, and had been asking to see whoever was available. Grace was planning to see if her old obstetrician, Dr. Fleming, might be able to come for a second opinion this morning.

When I got home, the kids had not taken the trash or recycling out, and everyone was in bed. So I had to roust a couple of kids and get them to finish that chore. The kitchen wasn't in great shape, but I was not prepared to do anything about it. So I took my own pills and went on to bed. My last couple of text messages from Grace indicated that she still hadn't been able to see a doctor.

Tuesday

I woke up a bit after 6:00 and could not fall back asleep for a little more rest, so I went downstairs to get my laptop and wrote the above entry for Monday. It's about 7:15 now. I'm going to put my laptop away, get washed up and dressed, grab some kind of breakfast and coffee, and go see how Grace and the baby are doing.

Later

OK! So, it is now Friday afternoon and I have some catching up to do.

Tuesday morning I got myself back to the hospital, and shortly after I arrived the nursing staff wheeled baby Malachi back from the nursery. There was a lot of waiting around and a number of pieces of paperwork to complete. Grace had finally gotten to consult with her obstetrician and she came up with a medication plan that seemed reasonable, involving two blood pressure medications. The first one is her usual labetalol. The second one, nefedipine, is effective but the side effects are bad: dizziness and an unpleasant headache. She also continued to take Percocet, which is oxycodone with acetaminophen (*aka* paracetamol) and it seems as if the pain reliever may also have helped reduce her blood pressure.

Little Malachi at some point had another measurement of his bilirubin taken, which was the last test that might have delayed his discharge. It was normal, meaning that he showed no sign of jaundice. So he was entirely ready to come home.

We finally got out the door about 3:00 after some complicated maneuvers involving putting some bags in the car, walking to the pharmacy via a staff-only shortcut, finding out that Grace's five prescriptions weren't ready to pick up yet, then walking back the long way around to get back to the labor and delivery unit, walking to parking lot Q to bring my car up to the Family Birthing Center entrance, waiting for Grace to come down in a wheelchair, bringing in the car seat and getting Malachi trussed up and into the warmed-up car, then driving back to the pharmacy and leaving Grace and the baby at the main entrance, finding out that Grace's prescriptions *still* weren't ready because apparently a pill-counting machine was malfunctioning, pacing around for another half-hour, looking at compression socks in the gift shop and discovering they cost over thirty dollars, declaring "fuck that," and, finally, getting the prescriptions and driving Grace and little Chi home.

I had a text message from my boss that my annual bonus check was at the office, and I wanted to get that into my checking account right away to avoid hitting the line of credit for any more money. So I took Veronica and Sam with me and drove out to my office, picked up my check, told my boss I needed to take Wednesday off, then drove to Meijer on Jackson to deposit the check.

As soon as I walked into Meijer, I smelled an *Iron Man* DVD for \$9.99 — I have wanted for some time to pick up a copy of *Iron Man*, the first movie, but had not

yet seen it on sale. There it was, back with the DVDs — for \$9.99. So I bought it. Veronica also asked for a copy of the *Trolls* movie soundtrack, so I bought that for her too, and then unfortunately we had to listen to it in the car while we ran the rest of our errands. Then we went looking for compression socks. I found a couple of pairs for Grace to try, and none of them were anywhere near thirty dollars.

After those errands we ran out to King Shing on Carpenter and put in a big order for Chinese takeout, including several previously forbidden dishes, now that Veronica and Joshua no longer seem to have their allergies to peanuts and shrimp, respectively. We ordered dumplings, sesame balls, Ma Po tofu (my personal favorite), pad thai with chicken, beef with broccoli, orange chicken, and a fried shrimp dish. The shrimp dish was not actually very good but no one cared — and Joshua was just excited to be eating a shrimp dish again. While King Shing was cooking our order we ran to CVS pharmacy and I found another pair of compression socks for Grace to try — these were more expensive, but they were an actual medical-device brand, so I felt slightly better about spending the money on them. Then we hauled all our spoils home.

For the rest of the evening we gorged ourselves on Chinese food and new-baby appreciation, while the kids watched *Iron Man*, then went to bed. Everyone was excited to meet little Chi.

Wednesday

I got up and started working on overdue kitchen cleaning, first cleaning the stovetop, then reheating the leftover shrimp dish in the oven for Grace, who asked to eat it, then sprayed the oven with oven cleaner and turned on the fan and timer, thinking that I was going to get back to finishing the oven cleaning in about twenty minutes. I was then planning to run Grace and Chi to Domino's Farms for his first pediatric appointment.

While I was doing more cleaning our housemate asked me to help her go pick up her baby son at her boyfriend's mother's apartment, so I ran her out there.

On the way she realized that she needed to get some more baby formula, but she didn't have her WIC card with her. So I ran back to our house so she could get her WIC card, then drove her and her son up to Kroger. She had wanted to go to the Stony Creek Road Kroger, but I didn't feel we had time for that, so I took her to the closer one on Carpenter Road.

I thought she was going to just run in and get formula, and calculated that I would have just enough time to get home to pick up Grace and Chi and get them to his first pediatric appointment on time. But she turned it into a big shopping trip, and apparently had trouble figuring out what was covered and what wasn't covered by WIC. It is confusing, so I can't entirely blame her, even though she's had many months on WIC to figure out how to look for the WIC tags on the shelves, but somehow she wound up in the checkout line with a lot

of items that weren't approved for WIC, and so a stranger in line wound up paying for her extra items.

All this took some time. I got her back to the house about the time that Grace was supposed to be at her appointment. I had her call and tell the practice that we were going to be late, and got Chi trussed up into his car seat, and managed to get him to the appointment only ten or fifteen minutes late.

After Chi's appointment Grace and I took the opportunity to have a quick date, and had a late lunch at Umi Sushi. I had a wonderful bowl of tonkotsu ramen. I didn't think it was wise for Grace to have that much sodium, so she had a less-salty dish of yakisoba with beef and reported that it was excellent.

When I got home, I wound up taking a long nap while our housemate used the kitchen. Then I finished cleaning out the oven, got a breakfast-for-dinner meal together, making a batch of chocolate chip paleo pancakes and a big batch of scrambled eggs, while Veronica assembled one of our Costco salad kits. So that was dinner. The kids screwed around wasting time for some time — about two hours. I read them a bedtime story — a few more pages from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the start of the company's journey into Moria. Again, there are more strange details in this part of the story than I remember. The "watcher" is described in positively Lovecraftian terms:

Out from the water a long sinuous tentacle had crawled; it was pale-green and luminous and wet. Its fingered end had hold of Frodo's foot, and was dragging him into the water. Sam on his knees was now slashing at it with a knife.

When Jackson and his team developed this into a visual, the monster they portrayed has a lot of tentacles, but I don't think they are "fingered" at the end. That's an unnerving and weird detail! Tolkien makes it stranger by describing the tentacles as "arms" in some passages:

The arm let go of Frodo, and Sam pulled him away, crying out for help. Twenty other arms came rippling out. The dark water boiled, and there was a hideous stench.

And Gandalf gives us some more to think about:

'I felt that something horrible was near from the moment that my foot first touched the water,' said Frodo. 'What was the thing, or were there many of them?'

'I do not know,' answered Gandalf; 'but the arms were all guided by one purpose. Something has crept, or has been driven out of dark waters under the mountains. There are older and fouler things than Orcs in the deep places of the world.' He did not speak aloud his thought that whatever it was that dwelt in the lake, it had seized on Frodo first among all the Company.

This is a very suggestive passage: it makes the Watcher in the Water's back-story feel a little bit like Gollum's back-story; Gollum also "crept... out of dark waters under the mountains." And both were apparently drawn to the One Ring. In the Peter Jackson film, Gandalf's statement, that "[t]here are older and fouler things than Orcs in the deep places of the world," is moved just a bit — Gandalf speaks these words after the Fellowship has left the Watcher behind, saying "We now have but one choice. We must face the long dark of Moria. Be on your guard — there are older and fouler things than Orcs in the deep places of the world." In this slightly altered context, the words now foreshadow Gandalf's encounter with the Balrog.

Thursday

Thursday morning I got myself up and out relatively early. Our friend Joy had told us that unfortunately she couldn't make it out to visit. I had originally been hoping to work Wednesday through Friday, so that I could take the 27th, 28th, and 31st off. But it was clear that Grace needed more help. Between the nifedipene and the painkillers and the post-surgical pain itself, she wasn't well enough to drive, or to cook meals, or to walk more than a few feet. So I had a lot to do on Thursday, because there were lots of things on the schedule.

My first errand was to go out to my office and meet with my boss. I put vacation day requests into the timekeeping system for Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and used my single "floating holiday" for the 24th, and my last vacation day for the 26th. I told my boss that I might need to take the last three work days of the year as some kind of unpaid leave, possibly under the auspices of the FMLA. There is no standard way to request that in the timekeeping system, so he agreed to inquire about that on my behalf. So I asked him to prepare the unpaid leave scenario as a backup plan; if Grace is able to manage without me, I will plan to work those last few days.

After that I had a whole series of errands. I needed to run our housemate and two of her children up to the parking lot of a nearby school to meet her boyfriend, so I did that, then came back and picked up Sam, and ran him back out to Plymouth Road for a speech therapy session. Since we were right next to Umi Sushi, afterwards I got Sam a bowl of the same ramen that I had enjoyed so much the previous day. Meanwhile I tried their bibimbap. Sam enjoyed the ramen and actually finished the entire bowl. I was impressed, and told him "today, you are a man, my son." The bibimbap at Umi Sushi was not offensively bad, but not something I would ever order again — it didn't hold a candle to the dish as I've had it at some wonderful hole-in-the-wall Korean restaurants, or even at the late and much-lamented Eastern Accents.

My day of errands wasn't done yet. I had to take Joshua to Saline for a small performance of just the Brio choir (a sub-group of the Viva Voce youth choirs) at a nursing home in Saline. His sister Veronica came along to hear him perform. That was a nice low-key event, but the residents seemed to appreciate it.

From there, I ran up to Costco and bought a relatively large load of groceries including two boxes of Duraflame logs, more red meat for Grace, fruit, shrimp for Friday's dinner, and a few extra treats including a pecan pie and some Nutella. Then we got that all home, and put away, and had a dinner of burgers, salad, leftover pasta and beans, and the pie. After dinner, again, no one seemed to be able to manage their usual evening chores. It seems like they have completely forgotten how the evening routine of cleanup, teeth-brushing, and dressing for bed goes. So we didn't manage a story.

I have to take a brief time-out to run our housemate back up to the school parking lot to pick up her kids. I'll do that, then try to remember what happened today.

Friday

Well, forty minutes later, I'm still waiting to give our housemate a ride, and she's still on the phone arguing with the person she is supposed to meet, so I'll try to finish Friday. It's about 6:00 p.m.

Little Malachi is a pretty good sleeper, as babies go, but our night's sleep is still slightly disrupted as he wakes up and fusses briefly a few times during the night. So I wound up sleeping fairly late this morning. When I got up, I had a bath and made a large coffee with coconut milk, to share with Grace. I'm trying a type of Starbucks instant coffee to see if that tastes better, and is easier on my stomach, than the Trader Joe's instant coffee. (Spoiler: it doesn't, and isn't.)

Then I drove Grace to Brighton for her first postpartum appointment in Brighton, which wound up being just a blood pressure check — so we drove all the way to Brighton with Chi just so Grace could have her blood pressure checked, something we could have done at home. That's an annoyance — Grace thought she'd be seeing her obstetrician, but apparently the practice is short-staffed as we get close to Christmas. Anyway, the upshot is that Grace will go off the nifedipine, and monitor her blood pressure herself. That might help get rid of her dizziness and headache. Fortunately Chi seems to tolerate the car seat very well — he falls asleep shortly after the car gets moving.

Also, she will soon run out of Percoset, but they declined to give her more because it contains an opioid. They only gave her twenty pills, with an indication to take two every four hours as needed. She's been taking them less often than that, and so they've lasted since Tuesday, but I'm scratching my head a bit about that, because I'm not sure it's reasonable to expect her pain to be gone the seventh day after major abdominal surgery. I'm also worried that going off the painkiller will cause her blood pressure to increase. But I guess she'll try some combination of acetaminophen and ibuprofen for the pain, and see if that is sufficient. If her blood pressure spikes dramatically she'll go back on the nifedipine.

While I was getting ready to take Grace to her appointment, our housemate was

trying to arrange to meet her boyfriend again, and I was ready to give her a quick ride up the school parking lot. But that turned into some sort of extended argument over the phone, and so they didn't agree to meet. Now this evening apparently they are still negotiating. Meanwhile, we're having the kids get the fireplace cleaned out, put away a batch of broth that Grace cooked in the Instant Pot last night, and heat a pot of leftover rice to eat with our shrimp and salad for dinner.

The Bloody Chamber

I'm not sure exactly *when* I managed to read some more stories in Angela Carter's collection *The Bloody Chamber*, but in some bits of down time over the last few days, I read a couple more of them: "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride." These are both really terrific stories — heavily symbolic, erotic, earthy, and visceral. I'm hoping that maybe I'll be able to finish this collection before the end of 2018!

It's going to be a strange, isolated Christmas. We're trying to make plans to celebrate as best we can. But with one car, with only four seats, we won't be able to take everyone to dinner at Aunt Shelley's house, or go out to a restaurant, or even to Mass. We are planning to make egg rolls, but if Grace can't manage to cook them, even with help, I'll run to King Shing and we'll get a big order of egg rolls to go.

It's time for dinner! After dinner, the kids want to watch *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, so that's the tentative plan.

Saturday

It's 6:00 in the evening. It's pitch black out now, but we've made it past the shortest day of the year! Also, there's a partial government shutdown just in time for Christmas.

Today was "consciously wasted" — Grace and I did next to nothing. We directed the kids to do the kitchen cleanup they didn't do, last night. I had Veronica make a pan full of bacon. I made some peanut butter and nutella sandwiches, tea, and coffee, and then later some prosciutto and butter sandwiches. Shortly I'll get moving and make some lamb chops for dinner. I gave my housemate a ride up to the school to meet her boyfriend and pick up her baby son, then drove her up to a convenience store to get some soda. Her boyfriend gave her a waffle maker, so she's been making waffles.

One of my co-workers had given me a bag of Christmas cookies. I left the bag sitting on one of the little side counters in the kitchen. It had my name on it. There was a spare pastry from Joe and Rosie Creamery and a bag of homemade biscotti that I was looking forward to eating this morning with my coffee. This morning the pastry and bag of biscotti were gone. We interviewed

all our kids and no one would cop to talking these items. I guess it was the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.

For most of the rest of the day, Grace and I just chatted and lounged around and napped while the kids watched videos. Grace got some much-needed extra sleep to aid her recovery, in between many rounds of nursing Malachi and changing his diaper. He's blown through an astonishing number of diapers today. His little tiny baby fingers are already plumping up. You can practically see him growing. No doubt he's already gotten back to his birth weight, and probably passed it. His little umbilical cord stump fell off. As I type this on my laptop in the dark, he's giggling in his sleep.

For some reason my seasonal allergies are back. It's been so warm — well above freezing every day recently — that it seems maybe I'm getting the brunt of leaf mold. I thought I might be getting a virus, but I think it's the allergy problem I had this past summer, returning. So today I dosed myself with Claritin, Flonase, and my albuterol inhaler, and I'll try that for a few days. I thought I could stay off it for the winter — the general advice that I've heard is to stop after the first hard freeze. But what do you do when the hard freeze is followed by weeks and weeks of thaws?

As the Starks don't say in the *Game of Thrones* books, "winter is going."

We got an interesting Christmas card last night from a Saginaw resident who is interested in buying our old house. He included his phone number, so I gave him a call, and we spoke for some time. Apparently he's been watching the house for a long time. He actually approached our former realtor earlier in the year, but this was right after we had accepted the offer from the woman who eventually had to back out (after keeping the house under contract for more than a month) because her financing fell apart when she was unable to sell her home. Then apparently he also approached our second realtor a couple of months ago, but this was after we had sent our second realtor a lease with purchase option agreement to look over, and so apparently our second realtor told him it wasn't available. Then, after leaving us hanging for a month, our second realtor decided not to take the lease, but mentioned that there was a guy who was interested. At that point, we no longer wanted to pursue any arrangement that involved that realtor, so we did not pursue it. Having been rebuffed twice, he continued to keep an eye on the house, and noticed that it had still not sold, and so looked up our contact information via public records, and sent us the card.

Could this be the Christmas Miracle we've become too exhausted to hope for — that we can finally sell our house? It's too early to know yet. He's going to look into his finance options and we're going to see where we are with respect to our agreement with the aforementioned second realtor. If our agreement with that individual is expired, I think we could probably move ahead and accept an offer without a seller's agent, just using an attorney to handle the closing paperwork. But — it's very tentative right now. Still, a ray of hope on the horizon is better than no ray of hope on the horizon.

Luke

Last night we tried to catch up on Luke — we're hopelessly behind, since we missed a week of bedtime chapters. I read a couple of chapters last night and we got somewhat bogged down trying to explain the Parable of the Unjust Steward. In trying to explain this parable, I realized that perhaps I didn't understand it as well as I thought I did. It doesn't seem entirely clear whether Jesus is holding the Steward up as a model, or not, and what behavior of the steward's he is or isn't commending. I think some historical context has been lost. Was the steward doing his master's debtors a favor, in the hopes that they might hire him in the future, since he was losing his job? And was this shrewd, or corrupt?

Wikipedia says:

The parable on the face of it, appears to be commending dishonest behaviour. This issue is sometimes addressed by suggesting that the manager is forgoing a commission due to him personally, but some scholars disagree with this interpretation. However, although the master has "a certain grudging admiration" for the manager's "shrewdness," Jesus labels the manager "dishonest." To add to the interpretations, several different sayings about money were attached to the parable here.

And also:

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the parable is about an agent who, knowing he is about to be fired for usury, repents of his sin, asking the debtors to only pay what they owe his master — rather than pay him as well.

In other words, he is forgoing his interest or agent's fees for managing the loan. I'm not sure that I'm convinced by that argument.

I remember the added sayings about money better than I do the parable itself — the lines about being unable to serve two masters are well-known and easy to explain. Some other lines are not so easy:

And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.

I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

I'm going to have to read some interpretive texts, I think. It makes me feel like Billy Bob Thornton in *Sling Blade*:

I've learned to read some. Took me four years to read the Bible. I reckon I understand a great deal of it. Wasn't what I expected in some places.

The Fellowship of the Ring

We didn't make a lot of progress, because Elanor was starting to fuss, but we read a few pages about the Fellowship's progress into Moria. There were only a few passages that jumped out at me. Aragorn reassures the party that Gandalf knows what he is doing:

‘He has led us in here against our fears, but he will lead us out again, at whatever cost to himself. He is surer of finding the way home in a blind night than the cats of Queen Berúthiel.’

That's a throwaway reference that Tolkien never expanded on, in *The Lord of the Rings*, but it also contains a little more foreshadowing of Gandalf's fate, in the phrase “at whatever cost to himself.” Tolkien *did* write more about this queen, though, and what he wrote has been published in *Unfinished Tales*.

There's a brief mention in passing of the party's traversal of a chasm more than seven feet across:

There were fissures and chasms in the walls and floor, and every now and then a crack would open right before their feet. The widest was more than seven feet across, and it was long before Pippin could summon enough courage to leap over the dreadful gap.

I asked my kids to tell me whether they thought they could leap across a seven-foot gap and to a child, they said that they certainly could. So I think we're going to half to do an experiment, in the driveway, with a measuring tape and some chalk marks. I'm finding it hard to convince myself that the three foot six inch hobbits could jump the gap, especially the middle-aged and somewhat portly Frodo. We'll have to do the experiment.

And, finally, in last night's reading we were reintroduced to Gollum, who somehow managed to slip inside Moria before the Watcher slammed the doors — or perhaps he found his way in via a different route? In any case, he's following them, just out of view:

Yet Frodo began to hear, or to imagine that he heard, something else: like the faint fall of soft bare feet. It was never loud enough, or near enough, for him to feel certain that he heard it; but once it had started it never stopped, while the Company was moving.

That's where we stopped last night, so I'm going to stop, and go make dinner. I think I'll pan-fry the small lamb steaks and we'll eat those with salad and whatever leftovers look good. Maybe we'll watch an episode of *Doctor Who*.

This is the 51st weekly post of 2018; I've only got one more full week to write about, and then a couple of extra days, and I'll be done with 2018! I'm not quite sure what I'm going to do then, except that it will probably involve a break from writing this kind of a journal.

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)
- *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson (Penguin Deluxe Trade Paperback Edition)
- *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter (in progress)
- *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien (bedtime reading in progress)

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, December 22nd, 2018

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