

# The Nightmares After Thanksgiving

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Last night, Saint Nicholas brought oranges and chocolate bars for our children and left them in their shoes. Grace is now reading to them about Saint Nicholas:

...while Nicholas was visiting a remote part of his diocese, several citizens from Myra came to him with urgent news: the ruler of the city, Eustathius, had condemned three innocent men to death. Nicholas set out immediately for home. Reaching the outskirts of the city, he asked those he met on the road if they had news of the prisoners. Informed that their execution was to be carried out that morning, he hurried to the executioner's field. Here he found a large crowd of people and the three men kneeling with their arms bound, awaiting the fatal blow. Nicholas passed through the crowd, took the sword from the executioner's hands and threw it to the ground, then ordered that the condemned men be freed from their bonds. His authority was such that the executioner left his sword where it fell.

We don't tell the children about Santa Claus and they don't get mountains of gifts on Christmas; instead, we tell them about Saint Nicholas.

## Keep Neera Tanden Far-a from Power

Political swamp creature Joe Biden has put forward Neera Tanden to head the Office of Management and Budget, as a deliberate expression of the establishment's contempt for Senator Bernie Sanders, the ranking member of the Budget Committee. Tanden, after her nomination was announced, has deleted more than a thousand of her tweets, including many accusing Sanders, and also Mitch McConnell, of serving as useful idiots for Putin.

The Washington Post has described Tanden's record. She is one of the swampiest of all the swamp creatures:

Between 2014 and 2019, CAP received at least \$33 million in donations from firms in the financial sector, private foundations primarily funded by wealth earned on Wall Street and in other investment

firms, and current or former executives at financial firms such as Bain Capital, Blackstone and Evercore, according to a Washington Post analysis of CAP's donor disclosures and some of the foundations' public tax filings. In the same time period, CAP received between \$4.9 million and \$13 million from Silicon Valley companies and foundations, including Facebook and founder Mark Zuckerberg's philanthropic organization.

As head of the OMB, Tanden would be perfectly positioned to *quo* those *quids* with inconceivable largesse, at our expense. But girl power, right? And she's a woman of color! So to hell with any scrutiny or qualms.

The strange thing, in my view, is the mainstream liberal Democratic point of view, that to ask that our appointed bureaucrats ought *not* be amoral lobbyists is to demand some sort of unfair "purity test."

## What To Expect (When We're Expecting a New President)

Back in August, I wrote this series of tweets:

So, I think I'm preaching to the choir here — leftists will know that what I'm going to say is obvious, and libs won't believe me anyway.

Don't expect a Biden administration, assuming there is one, to prosecute anyone in the Trump administration. It's a ridiculous fantasy.

Biden has built his whole career on reaching across the aisle and collaborating with the right, including being buddy-buddy with the worst of them. Remember, this is the guy who eulogized Strom Thurmond.

If he's elected, he will blather about "healing."

He'll spout platitudes about how he needs everyone's shoulder to the wheel to overcome the great challenges facing this nation blah, blah, blah, and the last thing we need now is more division blah, blah, blah.

Then he'll pardon the entire Trump administration.

Search your feelings. You know it to be true.

This is because class solidarity among the wealthy and powerful trumps everything else. It wouldn't be polite to put Trump in jail. People of that class just don't do that sort of thing.

Liberals and Centrists call for civility (except when they hold grudges).

Leftists want restorative justice.

There won't be any justice. There never is, in failed states.

Ready yourself for that reality now and maybe you won't have a nervous breakdown in early 2021.

Another thing to prepare for, Dem voters — all your Dem leaders including the supposedly progressive ones will toe the line on this and agree that we can't go prosecuting anyone in the Trump administration. Watch for it!

Since I wrote that, various pundits have been running variations on this theme up their flagpoles to start the softening-up process. Jill Lepore in a rambling piece argues, essentially, that nothing resembling a "truth and reconciliation committee" is needed, post-Trump, because

Coming to terms with centuries of dispossession, enslavement and racial violence is a very different matter from reckoning with four years of a democratically elected president who, even if he loses, will probably have been the choice of 2 out of 5 American voters.

(In other words, insisting that we reckon with a lawless, kleptocratic administration might hurt the feelings of Trump's supporters). Remember that attempts to reach across the aisle, or in this case, the gulf between non-sociopathy and sociopathy, are never, ever reciprocated.

Lepore actually lays out a strong case for the many reasons that we need such hearings, including this one:

That archival justification for such a commission is worth pondering. In the aftermath of the Trump administration, whenever it ends, the need for a full and accurate historical record will be especially great. There is every reason to fear that the administration will destroy the evidence of its malfeasance and incompetence, especially its abuses of human rights, its violations of the Constitution and its handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Trump routinely tears up notes, papers and other documents — aides call this his "filing system" — in violation of the Presidential Records Act (historians' actions against the administration on this score have so far been unsuccessful).

But then she comes to the foregone conclusion that civility demands that we do no such thing.

NBC News explains that

President-elect Joe Biden has privately told advisers that he doesn't want his presidency to be consumed by investigations of his predecessor, according to five people familiar with the discussions, despite

pressure from some Democrats who want inquiries into President Donald Trump, his policies and members of his administration.

and

They said he has specifically told advisers that he is wary of federal tax investigations of Trump or of challenging any orders Trump may issue granting immunity to members of his staff before he leaves office. One adviser said Biden has made it clear that he “just wants to move on.”

And now NBC News is telegraphing the establishment’s desires more explicitly. They ran an editorial by Michael Conway, who was counsel for the House Judiciary Committee in Nixon’s impeachment. Conway writes:

If President-elect Joe Biden hopes to fulfill his pledge to unify the nation, he should do the unthinkable and pardon Donald Trump.

Again, the justification is that we need to make nice with Trump supporters who, again, will never, ever reciprocate:

The 73 million Americans who voted to re-elect Trump two weeks ago will be just as angry about a good faith federal investigation of Trump after he has left office as Democrats were angry about Trump’s baseless chant to lock up his former political opponents.

Biden intends to pull a Ford. Ford’s pardon of Nixon set a precedent that led to a Trump administration who felt no hesitation to do — well, everything they’ve done in office. If Biden pardon’s Trump, what message will that send to the next administration?

The Guardian drops some truth:

In the coming two to four years, political moderation might be a particularly alluring siren call to a weak Democratic president who may not control the Senate or have a strong majority in the House of Representatives.

Here’s the problem, however: “working across the aisle” is not an ideal in itself. If we expect politics to look like an impartial pursuit of the common good or think that there will be consensus if we all follow the rules, as the neoconservative writer Anne Applebaum has suggested, then we are bound to be disappointed over and over. Rather, we must learn to distinguish between democratic and undemocratic forms of political conflict – and properly sanction those engaged in the latter.

Meanwhile, Biden is spouting nonsensical platitudes as he’s always done:

My dad used to say, “Joey, I don’t expect the government to solve my problems. But I expect it to understand my problems.”

Folks out there aren't looking for a handout — they just need help. They're in trouble through no fault of their own, and they need us to understand.

An awful lot of Americans are going to need a little bit more than promises that Biden understands their problems.

## **The Nightmares After Thanksgiving**

Our county, Washtenaw County in Michigan, has COVID-19 numbers that are all headed in the wrong direction. Our numbers are not nearly as bad as the numbers in many other parts of the country, but it's getting scarier. I'm starting to have nightmares involving masks, or lack of them, and crowds, and, sometimes, violence, and so is Grace. Some nights, my sleep has been unusually poor. The older kids are having the same experience, sometimes getting up in the middle of the night because they can't sleep. I'd like to be able to say that the anxiety isn't affecting my work, but I can't, and it isn't just me; it's clearly affecting everyone on my team.

Grace and I now know six people personally who have been infected, and I expect that number to go up. So far only one has died.

Millions did not lock down and cancel traveling and gathering for Thanksgiving. I feel no hope whatsoever that they will cancel traveling and gathering for Christmas.

Per CNN,

From Tuesday to Saturday, 1,000,882 new coronavirus cases were reported in the US, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, bringing the totals to more than 14.5 million confirmed cases and 281,199 deaths from the virus.

We still don't know how many people Thanksgiving gatherings killed:

As the impacts of Thanksgiving travel and gatherings begin to reveal themselves, and hospitals fill to capacity, experts say it is likely going to get only worse.

Dr. Sanjay Gupta writes in CNN about the pandemic, referring to the whole of America as "the patient." This brings it into perspective:

This past week has been so bad that, according to one calculation from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, Covid-19 was the leading cause of death in the United States, beating out coronary heart disease.

So despite the best advice, the best care, the patient's condition has continued to deteriorate. And instead of being localized to a few hotspots that required aggressive treatment, as was the case in July,

the infection has now engulfed almost the entire patient.

The reason that's so dangerous is that earlier in the pandemic, and even in July, there were a lot of built-in reserves and redundancies. If one part of the body is in crisis, other parts of the body can take over and do the work to keep the patient relatively stable. For example, we saw how back in the spring and summer, when one location — such as New York City or Houston — was overwhelmed, doctors and nurses came rushing in to help. Alternatively, patients could be transported out of an overwhelmed hospital to a less-strained facility in a nearby region.

Redundancies, escape hatches, reserves — call them what you will, but they no longer exist for the patient, the country. Now, state after state reports hospital systems reaching their breaking points. It's not just that there are fewer hospital beds available, but front line health care workers and support staff — from doctors and nurses to orderlies to the hospital cleaning crews — are getting fatigued, worn out and sick themselves in ever-growing numbers. And there is no one to replace them.

For how long can the patient hang on?

Usually, when the human body is faced with a crisis situation — be it an out-of-control infection, widespread bleeding or something equally catastrophic — there are all these biological defensive mechanisms that kick into gear, tricks that the body pulls to compensate for the systems that are out of balance. These self-preservation instincts are part of the reflexive nature of our biology.

But this patient, our country, instead of compensating and trying to maintain balance at all cost, is decompensating and has shown little inclination to do what it can to keep itself from getting worse.

Things are grim. One way we're trying to make them less grim is to continue to get the kids more and more involved in the day-to-day running of our household. They weren't all that into the bread-baking, early on, and wouldn't do it consistently, but now some of them have really taken to it, and we've worked with them to provide them with some recipes that are so simple, they can easily memorize the recipe.

We have been going through almost 50 pounds of bread flour a month, and Friday night I brought home 35 pounds of pasta from Costco, along with a lot of canned tomato sauce. I'm preparing to go back on Monday night to buy more reserves. Joy has filled up our stocks of alcohol, sanitizer, wipes, and masks. We've also been given venison from several folks who have hunters in the family, so we've got twenty pounds of ground venison and other cuts in our freezer.

We're preparing for, essentially, a siege, and working to minimize our contacts. Grace is arranging to get meats and vegetables from bulk suppliers that will do curbside pickup so that we don't have to go into stores. Our local food co-op has closed temporarily after an employee tested positive, so we're having to look further afield. Ideally, we would be able to stop going into stores altogether through the rest of December and January and perhaps longer. Ideally, I'd be able to stop going into the office altogether, too, but can't quite do that and get my work done, because of the specialized hardware I need, although so many people are working from home now that I only see a couple of people on a typical day in the office, and we are all taking our precautions quite seriously.

Our heat was out, for a while, but we finally got someone out from Hutzel and he fixed it. I was happy to hear that it wasn't going to be a terribly expensive repair. But now, a few days later, it's leaking a lot of water every time the heat comes on. So now I'm just hoping that we can get the company back out to look at this problem. And I'm hoping that it won't be hard to schedule the work. We do have space heaters we can use temporarily, and they work reasonably well because the house is well-insulated.

I was harvesting and freezing parsley up until a couple of weeks ago, and we still have leeks in our garden that are alive and well. They really are quite cold-tolerant. They've been covered up with ice, and snowed on a couple of times, and still look and taste perfect. I will probably harvest the last of them for Christmas and New Year's. I've been slicing them up fine and frying them, then putting them in egg dishes. Yesterday I made a frittatta with a dozen eggs, leftover salmon, one whole large leek, some roasted garlic, and a bunch of frozen parsley, chopped up. I topped it with some lumps of goat cheese and finished it under the broiler to melt and brown the goat cheese. It was a little homely-looking, like much of my cooking, but tasted fantastic.

Besides cooking, I've been taking solace in a few books. A couple of weeks ago I had to mail a package on my way to work — returning that defective CD — and the UPS store in Westgate Shopping Center is right next to Nicola's Books. I noticed that the bookstore had just opened and the store was empty, and there I was, all masked up already, so I went in, for only the second time since we started restricting our activities in March. I was very happy to find a few books I had known were due to arrive in stores, and a few I didn't. I'll review just one today, since I am pressed for time, and do my best to get through at least one more next time.

### ***Dead Lies Dreaming* by Charles Stross**

I follow Charles Stross on Twitter and he's been having a rough year, like many of us — actually a rough few years. He's gone through the deaths of both his parents. He writes about that, briefly condensing several hellish years, in his blog. He also describes the genesis of *Dead Lies Dreaming*:

As of March 2019 I had been writing the Laundry Files for 20 years.

Bob and the other protagonists have aged about 18 years in that time, and the world around them has changed enormously. Spies in 2019 do not mean what they meant in 1999. The political landscape in 2019 is different, and not in a good way, from 1999. *The Delirium Brief* and *The Labyrinth Index* attempted to keep the Laundry Files relevant, but it's a losing game. I really need to end the Laundry Files: I think they've got at most two books left to run

But while I don't want to go on writing about the Laundry, I have other stories to tell in the same setting.

*Dead Lies Dreaming* was never meant to exist. I was blowing off steam and doing therapy-writing for stress relief while dealing with unpleasant real-life stuff. But it does exist (and worse, so does the first half of the second book in the trilogy), and it's coming out on October 27th, from Orbit in the UK and Tor.com in the USA. They're calling it book 10 in the Laundry Files. Reader, *Dead Lies Dreaming* is not book 10 in the Laundry Files. The real book 10 hasn't been written yet (it's on my to-do list for 2020 or 2021: if I stick to current plans, it'll be the story of Mike Armstrong, the Senior Auditor).

Having read it, I'm happy to report that whether it is a "real" Laundry Files novel or not, I found *Dead Lies Dreaming* to be very enjoyable — in fact, it is as good as the best of the Laundry Files novels, and I have enjoyed those a great deal over the last twenty years.

The only hint that its author had gone through such dark times is that the novel itself is quite dark — this is one of the darkest in the series, because even though the young cast of characters find hope and companionship and success, the world around them is grimmer than ever, reflecting the author's view of the real London. But it's also very energetic, and the plot is amazingly intricate. It's like a puzzle that you've been playing with for days, and are wondering how it is going to fit together, but then, suddenly, you give it a particular twist and the whole thing snaps together wonderfully. It's snapped into a beautiful but slightly unnerving non-Euclidean shape, a shape that makes your eyes cross if you stare at it too hard, and then it begins to glow with an eerie, green pulsating light. You feel the need to put it down, and back away, slowly. But, wow, solving the puzzle was fun. Time just flew by.

*Dead Lies Dreaming* features a new cast of characters in a world that has been forever changed by the realignment of the stars, such that magic has broken into the mundane world, and not in a hidden way, but in a way that the whole society must confront, as it is undeniable. We follow a group of young London residents squatting in a flat in the Kensington Gardens neighborhood. One of them grew up in the home, but his parents lost it, and the homes are now some of the most expensive pieces of real estate in the world, far too expensive to actually



live in, and so they sit empty, decaying homes that continue appreciating in value, investment properties for overseas billionaires. The young people lead a very marginal existence as squatters, but they've been given strange gifts by the rupture of reality: they have various magical powers. It's dangerous to use these powers, because for humans, using magic invites severe and progressive brain damage as well as possible possession. The group makes a living by robbing banks and shoplifting. One day they get curious about a strange door in their flat, a door that is between two bedrooms and doesn't seem like it possibly open to anywhere at all. But it does — it opens to a hallway that can't possibly exist, filled with rooms that seem to go back in time, which leads to a stairwell, which leads to another hallway, and it goes on and on, past Victorian kitchens and into London in centuries past.

It's a creepy and fascinating and satisfying scenario, and it's only one of several of the plot lines that go into the novel. There's an evil codex, because of course there is. There's a billionaire hedge fund manager. And somehow, there's a deeply frightening twist on the story of Peter Pan and Wendy.

I agree with Stross that the Laundry Files does need to end, because the world has changed out from under it. The characters I've loved so much, especially Bob, have become hard and unloveable in response to the challenges of a hardened, devastated world. I'm really pleased that this is a sort of off-ramp from that cast of characters into a new set. But I do really hope that Stross will get a chance to wrap up the Laundry Files world and characters and tie them off neatly. I'm guessing that the story he mentioned will do that, as it will be set in the Laundry again, and likely feature Bob and Mo as characters, even if they aren't the point-of-view characters.

## The Costco Wine Advent Calendar

A while back I picked up a "wine advent calendar" from Costco. It's a box containing 24 half-bottles of wine, in numbered compartments. The idea is that starting on December first, you can drink a half-bottle a day until Christmas Eve. So we've been doing just that. This year's "calendar" has a web site here. For the first few days, we weren't drinking them in the proper order, because the babies had gotten into the box and pulled out some bottles. But I finally took some time and rearranged them to match the original order.

YYou can follow along on Twitter here. I've been posting pictures of each bottle and writing very short reviews. The first tweet in the thread reads:

Tonight! Grace and I bust open the Costco wine Advent calendar to help us surf through the last few weeks of this hell-year on a soothing tide of hopefully-drinkable half-bottles. Night 1: Pasarica Malbec from Argentina.

So far, the wines have been decent, but I haven't come across anything remarkably good. I say "mostly" because last night's bottle, a French Merlot, was actually

off: corky, or moldy, or something, actually undrinkable — it tasted rotten and made us gag. But hope springs eternal.

Tonight, we're having a Sunday Gravy — some of our tomatoes from the freezer, with sausage, venison, bacon, and ox tails, slow-cooked, over tagliatelle pasta. The wine for tonight was supposed to be a Pino Grigio from Moldova, but I'm going to pull out a red to go with this dinner and we'll drink the Pino Grigio another time.

Have a great week, and please stay safe!

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