

FEBRUARY MEDITATION

WHAT DOES THE MONTH HAVE TO OFFER? NOT MUCH, BUT THAT'S WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT IT

February, the gray sheet over our collective skull, the nameless shade of brown sludge beneath our tires, the startling chill in our bone marrow, nonetheless has its charms.

It seems a senseless month at first thought, just as certain bugs seem senseless unless you know where exactly they are in the food chain – say, 40 separate mouthfuls away from your dinner.

Yet February and primordial bugs must mean something, because without them, nothing follows. And that result would be hunger and the end of time, neither being desirable.

February means a lot to those with birthdays in the month. But to the rest of us, it's simply a month to get through.

Still, it fascinates me in the way of unobtrusive, in-between things, like a simple melody by Erik Satie or a Japanese haiku. It is simplicity itself, unlike May, which is pregnant with natural life and human excitement, or December, that anxious, sentimental month marching toward solstice, a day so short it hardly matters, and holidays, which become their own bizarre entities.

Nor is February anything like its cocky predecessor, January, the biceps-flexing month of Resolution and Repentance, whose strength lies in its intentions, not its being.

No, February, more than any other month, is the month of real reflection, and that is far different from resolution. Resolutions, whether they have come, gone or stayed, are the past. Reflection,



with its gift of present-ness, in its most effective form involves hope. And in February, even on one of those doldrums days, it becomes apparent that the days really are getting longer, and the light, however diffused, stays later.

The word “doldrums,” at least when used with “February,” is full of anticipation, for the doldrums are always temporary, always escapable. “I’m in the February doldrums” isn’t so bad, really; there is spring to think about, and, if you’re lucky, love in the middle of the doldrums.

I have terribly mixed emotions about St. Valentine’s Day. It’s a sad day for many of us, likely as sad as it is fun for the young and the In Love. For those without a lover, it’s a day that needs to pass by quickly. It’s not a day to read *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* by Pablo Neruda, say, nor rent *Sleepless in Seattle*, nor drown one’s solitary sorrows. Best to exercise, sweat, meditate, write, play a sport or go to bed early after work. Look on the bright side: no more solo holidays until St. Patrick’s Day, which is optional, after all, and easily ignored by many.

For those with a significant other, Valentine’s Day is significant, but in that quiet, unobtrusive way of February. It is, at best, a behind-closed-door holiday that follows a dinner.

One of the things I admire about February is that it’s a month that seems to listen more than speak, like some enlightened soul. There’s nothing boastful about it – it’s the gentle monk compared to the blowhard politician of, say, June. I like June, but can hardly get a word in edgewise; too much going on. But February: That’s a month I can talk to, and it listens, with fireplace sounds and Chopin or Coltrane, and those are answers I can live with.

If you’re waiting for the big payoff here, think of this meditation on February as a foreign movie that realizes that life, like February, doesn’t need to pay off, but to segue to the next thing with humility and loss, hope and anticipation.

And if none of the above makes you feel better about February, there’s always its most charming aspect, something it has in common with a simple, clean sentence, one that’s easy to understand.

It’s short. ■

