



NOVEMBER IN THREE PARTS

A TOUGH MONTH IS BEST TAKEN IN SMALL DOSES

1. Weather

“Now in November nearer comes the sun down the abandoned heaven,” wrote D.H. Lawrence in his poem “November by the Sea.” I doubt that the author of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* ever spent the month in northeast Ohio, but he was English – surely he understood gray skies shrouding a low-slung sun.

Who in northeast Ohio hasn’t felt abandoned in November? Should you wish this experience, try walking up Prospect Avenue to Playhouse Square by yourself on a Sunday afternoon after a Browns game in November. Heaven, if not the homeless, can seem awfully far away.

November, though, is nothing if not interesting, the way a brooding artist is interesting. Gorgeous October ends, kindly or cruelly; but invariably it has moved from a full watercolor palette to stark landscapes of tree branches filled only with gray space, the sun wan and diminished through the branches. November enters like a stage villain: arrogant, brusque, menacing.

Raw winds arrive from the Arctic and Lake Erie sends its excess to the clouds and dumps rain, then snow, though neither holds a candle to sleet or freezing rain. The payoffs inside can be a fireplace, a blanket, a hug, a hot drink or simply the view of November outside.

No tropic-dweller can understand that pleasure. Watching November weather and its colors – or rather lack of them – from the inside of a home is a primal pleasure, like hibernation.



The outside is uninviting, the inside the reverse.

Cleveland Browns games in November are brutal and feel like a real sport, played with a minimum of the sensory overload of music, lights and gimmickry. Just chill, and bones crunching. I seem to remember that the late coach and founder of the Browns, Paul Brown, once said, “I like a November team,” although I can’t find the quote. If he didn’t say it, he should have. He was one for mud, ice, snow and rain; for the stoicism November requires.

2. Work

The autumn after I graduated high school, I worked for my usual summertime boss, Hugo. The draft lottery was on the following summer’s horizon. For me, it was outside in the cold air, under gray skies, in weather that felt like the era – and not in a college classroom – where I wanted to wait out my fate. November was a harsh professor, but one who taught me lifelong respect for those who toil outdoors through Northern winters. Even though I ran a Christmas tree farm during a snowy December a couple of years later, it’s those bitter days of November that still chill me just by thinking of them.

Hugo’s late-autumn crew wasn’t made up of the usual boys of summer. Fall workers were older workers, the ones who would soon be cleaning factories with Hugo during the winter months. This was no summer job before high school football training camp. The

pace in the cold was slower, the talk quieter and more serious – like November.

We cut some errant autumn grass, planted trees and did fall clean-ups until the day before Thanksgiving. It was usually damp and chilly, and it was bleak, and the grudging sun moved toward winter solstice like an old draft horse laboring slowly uphill. The days were short and we often worked into the evening darkness.

And I loved it irrationally. In those days of national confusion, hard outdoor work in November exhausted my body and soothed my mind.

3. Wonder

Mixed like a good cocktail from a skilled bartender, November goes down chilled and ends up warming the insides. The buildup to Thanksgiving, a gentle holiday, has virtually vanished, given way to what’s become a post- (and sometimes pre-) Halloween mania of consumerism.

So it is, and so we each choose to make our holidays personal. Many eschew the frenzy, and November becomes a good time to bask in the warm, uncommercial lights of the days that frame Thanksgiving. We all have our rituals. Mine is sleeping through the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. I love Christmas most before Christmas, between Thanksgiving and December 1st, when I put up the tree and decorations, watch *Miracle on 34th Street*, and realize that November isn’t such an arrogant villain after all, but modest, full of wonder, and wholly underrated. ■

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