

# ODE TO FEBRUARY

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*By Judith Goldberg*

*“The sun was shining by the sea  
shining with all his might...  
And this was odd because it was  
the middle of the night.”*

*The Walrus and the Carpenter from “Through the Looking Glass” by Lewis Carroll*

*Through the Looking Glass*, penned in 1872 by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson under the nom de plume of “Lewis Carroll”, while nonsensical on the surface, is well known to conceal a plethora of sarcastic political commentary. So extensive are Carroll’s social and political references, that in 1960 Martin Garder produced a complete volume explicating the symbolism in this and the companion *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* under the title *The Annotated Alice*. In the saga of *The Walrus and the Carpenter*, Carroll targets shady political fat-cats growing flush through corruption and the duping of a naïve electorate. Symbolically, in the opening quatrain, the illuminating property of the Sun, shining its light in dark places, directs us to peer into the shadows for that which is hidden from view. In his bid to raise consciousness, the chiaroscuro play on light and shadow, in metaphor and parable, dominates much of Carroll’s work. We are now in the dark, the nighttime part of the year, awaiting the return of the life-giving power of the sun. Winter is traditionally a time for turning inward. Perhaps activating our inner searchlight will yield clues to the deeper rhythms of life.

## **The Walrus Speaks**

*“The time has come”, the Walrus said,  
to talk of many things:  
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing wax—  
Of cabbages—and kings...”*

’Tis February, when talk turns once more to groundhogs, hearts, flowers, Hallmark cards, dead Presidents, cherry pies (“Father, I cannot tell a lie.”), Super Bowls, super sales, and leap days. February, originally 30 days in length, was given short shrift when the Roman Caesars, Julius and Augustus, raided it to tack extra days onto their namesake months. February 29th, occurring this year of 2012, and every four years, rectifies the secular calendar with the solar year. The hodgepodge of seemingly unrelated items on February’s schedule is due to the juxtaposition of secular, cultural, national, religious and quasi-religious celebrations. Perhaps, beneath the surface of this annual mid-winter smorgasbord, we can uncover a unifying theme. And, while we’re at it, in this bleakest time of year, a little lightness—some comic relief—would be most welcome.

## **Month of Aquarius**

February is the month the Sun transits the zodiacal sign of Aquarius. Our great Aquarian President, Honest Abe Lincoln, the humanitarian who freed the slaves, was born on February 12th. The passing of

Coretta Scott King in February of 2006 drew renewed attention to the Aquarian issue of civil rights in America. George Washington, born on Feb 22nd is actually a Pisces. However, an excellent case could be made for his Aquarian image as the face of the American Revolution. In fact, GW's Pisces Sun is in the Aquarian-ruled eleventh house of his natal chart, along with his Venus and Presidential Saturn in Aries. In 1971, an act of Congress created Presidents Day on the third Monday of February. The date, falling alternately during the Aquarian and Piscean parts the month gives equal time for both precedents...and presidents.

### Cabbage and Kings

Throughout the month Leo, Aquarius's alter ego, shadows Aquarius, as evidenced by myriad symbols and circumstances. Democracy, the first system of government on the planet based on Aquarian ideals, was a truly radical idea in 1776. Washington helped create it; Abe Lincoln defended it. We fought a Civil War so that it *"government of, by and for the people shall not perish from the earth"*. Our country was birthed as a reaction against monarchical (Leo) excesses (all that cabbage) and abuses of power. It was a beacon of light in a dark world. As a cosmic reflection, the Leo full moon, occurring this year on February 7<sup>th</sup>, opposes the Aquarian Sun (representing the people). Carroll's quatrain echoes the Leo/Aquarius territorial dispute:

*"The moon was shining sulkily,  
Because she thought the sun  
Had got no business to be there  
After the day was done..."*

### Eyes on the Skies

Our earliest ancestors looked to the heavens, tracking the movements of the moon and the sun which many cultures worshipped as deities. The roots of astrology lie in man's ancient preoccupation with heavenly influences. The cycles of the moon gave man his first sense of passing time as ancient cave drawings and notched bones counting the lunar phases reveal. Predictable passages of the sun throughout the solar year were crucial to the lives of early agrarian cultures. Many monuments scattered throughout Europe and the British Isles, the most famous of which is Stonehenge, are large solar clocks. Sacred celebrations were based on quarter points of the sun's annual cycle, interspersed with lunar holidays. Best known are the Equinoxes and Solstices. However, the intermediate cross quarter days were also significant. The inner chamber at the Mound of Hostages in Tara, Ireland is perfectly aligned with the rising sun of the Pagan festivals of Imbolc (February 1st) and Samhain (November 1st).

### Oimelc—or Oy, Milk!

The Celtic festival of Imbolc is a mid-winter festival of light, reflecting the lengthening of the day and the hope of spring. It begins in early February, on the evening when the Sun reaches the exact midpoint between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox—15 degrees of Aquarius. Light and shadow are inextricably bound up in its celebration. To dispel the darkness, all the lamps of the house were lit and rituals involved a great deal of candles. Imbolc was also called Oimelc or "ewe's milk", because it corresponds with the onset of lactation by pregnant sheep that would soon give birth to spring lambs-- a much anticipated event.

## Candlemas

With the advent of Christianity, Imbolc evolved into Candlemas, celebrated on February 2nd. This date coincides with the presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple and the purification of Mary (exactly forty days after Christmas). As the name implies, Candlemas is the day on which believers traditionally bring candles into the church to be blessed. On Candlemas Day, animals such as badgers, bears and wolves would emerge from hibernation. According to an old European tradition, if the sun shone and caused the beasts to cast a shadow, six more weeks of winter were in the forecast. Clouds meant an early spring.

## Groundhog Day

Punxsutawney Phil, forever immortalized in Bill Murray's 1993 Groundhog Day film odyssey, is the most recent representative of these messengers from the underground. The Delaware Indians, who plunked down the first campsite in Punxsutawney in 1723, revered the groundhog as an honorable ancestor. Later, German settlers to the area, who brought the traditions of Candlemas with them, claimed the sacred groundhog as their surrogate beastly weatherman. Pennsylvania's official celebration of Groundhog Day began in 1886 when Phil was given his name and title: "Seer of Seers...Prognosticator of Prognosticators and Weather Prophet Extraordinaire". Phil is now placed in a simulated burrow and pulled out at exactly 7:25 am. Since the release of the movie, attendance at the event has skyrocketed. Following the ceremony, folks line up to have a picture taken with Phil. Phil has an on-line souvenir shop and even his own Pennsylvania State Lottery scratch-off game. Our Pagan ancestors would be proud that we are once again milking the sacred cow...Uh, sheep?... oh, groundhog--for all its worth. Yep, Phil has seen his shadow!

## Roman Holiday

The mid-February Roman holiday of Lupercalia was one of many fertility rites that peppered the pagan calendar. Common practices, such as mating rituals and orgies, were meant to assure both good crops and plenty of offspring. Celebrants of Lupercalia were limited to single men and women. The Roman Lupercal Priests would sacrifice a goat and dip strips of its hide into the sacred blood. The (male) youth of the town would then go about whipping up a frenzy with the bloody thongs—first beating the fields and then (gently) slapping the women—who were said to be pleased with the attention. (Is this the origin of the term "slap happy"?) A sort of lottery was then implemented which paired each bachelor with a female consort for the coming year (pun intended).

## The Crackdown

All this merrymaking came to an abrupt conclusion when a newly powerful Christian clergy began casting a long shadow over the pagan world. In 498 AD, Pope Gelasius outlawed the 'lottery', ending what the church considered to be the (s)excesses of Lupercalia. However, true to form, he offered up a substitute. Most conveniently, the church had a martyred saint with just the right credentials waiting in the wings to assume duty as patron of the newly created feast. St. Valentine had been a 3rd century priest during a time when the Emperor Claudius, in order to protect his assets—conscripts for the army— outlawed marriage for young men. Performing secret marriages would earn the offending priest a one way ticket to jail (without passing "Go" or collecting a single gold shekel) and ultimately a death sentence. Valentine's transgression earned him both martyrdom and sainthood. However, it was

Valentine's last sentence that sealed his immortality. As legend goes, while in prison, Valentine fell in love. He penned his last love note *"from your Valentine"*.

### Cents and Sentiments

Popular celebration of St. Valentine's Day began in 17th century Great Britain and the custom spread to the colonies. Within a hundred years, the traditional exchange of hand written notes and tokens of affection was augmented by the appearance of printed greeting cards. From these humble beginnings, this celebration of love has become America's second largest retail bonanza with sales expected to increase 5% in 2012, topping last year's 18 billion and leaving retailers feeling the love. Valentine's Day gift giving still places behind the December festivals that (according to reports from the National Retail Federation) netted combined sales in 2011 of a record 400 billion, and just in front of Mothers Day at 16 billion. Do we now need to curb the excesses of Valentines' Day? Along with the traditional candy, flowers, jewelry and romantic dinners, the newest, trendiest and by far costliest gift is cosmetic surgery—primarily liposuction and breast implants. The planet Venus in her Libran persona may be the Goddess of Love, but as ruler of Taurus she rules purse strings as well as heart strings. She is very much a *"material girl"*. Valentine's Day, Tuesday, February 14<sup>th</sup> 2012, is not the most romantic of days under the emotionally distant Aquarius Sun. The Scorpio moon goes void-of-course at noon, making relationships challenging. And if you're planning dinner at eight, it will be under the non-committal energy of a Sagittarius Moon. Traditionally a popular day for marriage proposals, I wouldn't bet on setting a record this year. There is an exciting but independence-seeking tone to this day which reads more like *"Gone hiking--Have a great day!"* than *"Be mine."*

### Super-Size Me!

Professional athletics in general and the Super Bowl in particular have super-sized every negative aspect of sports—gambling, killer competition, superstar (Leo) athletes whose salaries are out of all proportionate to any contribution they make to society, obscene ticket pricing and scalping--all in a country where the gap between poverty and privilege is growing--America's (Leo) shadow. The Occupy movement has raised consciousness about financial inequality which is on the minds of many voters in this election year. Super Tuesday, with Republican primaries or caucuses in 10 states, falls this year on March 6<sup>th</sup>, escaping February by a week. However, the entire month will be dominated by political gamesmanship, with the billions of dollars spent on campaigns beating all previous records. Like the Walrus who conned the oysters, our politicians spin their hypocrisy:

*"I weep for you, the Walrus said:  
I deeply sympathize,  
With sobs and tear he sorted out,  
Those of the largest size..."*

### Under the Sea

While we are digging around in the oyster beds, let us not fail to observe that Neptune, God of the Seas, is making a major change of residence this month-- an important milestone in this transformational year of 2012. The planet Neptune will be moving into its own sign of Pisces on February 3rd. has Neptune has

not been in its home sign of Pisces since two years after its discovery in 1846. This is the first time in its known history, that more than a handful of astrologers will be aware of this transit. Pisces and the planet Neptune rule a whole host of concepts and activities ranging from spirituality, mysticism, poetry, art, music, film, compassion, confusion, political chaos and dissolution, infectious diseases, petroleum oil and clairvoyance and clairaudience to imprisonment, large institutions such as prisons and hospitals, sycophants, Christ energy, large animals, victimization, faith and the water of our oceans. Over the next 14 years that Neptune will be in the sign of Pisces, many of the above-mentioned subjects will change in major ways as the Earth goes through a major cleansing in preparation for the next stage of our planet's evolution.

### Sundance

The eternal dance of the sun and moon reflects their symbiotic partnership--one in which each party is occasionally eclipsed. Symbolically, this sun-dance calls on us to create balance. The point of greatest balance is always at the center, just as the sun at noon casts no shadow. This month's Leo full moon, illuminated by the Aquarian sun, challenges us to reconcile these polarities, modify extremes (excesses) and honor the best values in each. As Carl Jung said, *"One cannot find enlightenment by chasing figures of light, but by plumbing the darkness"*. Leo is the natural ruler of the sun. Never is the absence of light more keenly felt, or its presence more passionately sought after than in the bleak middle of winter. The quest for light (however we understand it) drives the creation of culture, literature, ritual and celebration. Acknowledging the shadow gives us the opportunity to transform it. In this cool Aquarian season, let us look for the warm Leo sun inside our hearts. Go for the gold, let your heart be light and remember the lyrics from the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, *"Let the sunshine in..."*

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