

March's Tender Promise

By JANE BAILEY

I look out at the field and realize for the first time in three months that the ground is green. Yes, there's still lingering snow and mud oozing across the field, but overwhelmingly there's green. Green grass, green tennis courts, and green shoots poking through the garden debris.

The sun lingers longer and there are more birds at the feeder. Next week the boarding school students will be back from their spring break and the sounds of balls—tennis balls, baseballs, softballs—will be filling the afternoon air. Thump, crack, pop as bats and rackets connect, releasing the tension of a winter of indoor sports, academics in steam-heated rooms, and too many

dorm-bound nights stuck inside by cold or snow.

Today my own tensions of winter boredom snapped as I pried open the back door and resurrected the deck with broom, Windex, and paper towels. Cleaning the table and chairs, sweeping the seed kernels, and refitting the bird feeder on its metal hangers gave me joy that a new spring is here once again. New seed brought cardinals, tufted titmice, and chickadees, as well as sneaky squirrels, quite happy to see their food once again.

What is it about green that refreshes my soul? Is it because it's "God's Color," as Mom always said? Is it the hint of leprechaun? St. Patrick's Day and the wearin' of the green, even for

those of us not Irish, brings the wink of a smile that life doesn't have to be so serious. That we can dance a jig, toast with some ale, and know that life isn't so bad if we face it together.

And then there's Mom curled up in her fetal ball, living for her three meals a day. Waiting to be changed, and rolled, dependent on her caretaker, Dimple, and my sister, as her other daughters dutifully arrive in Florida every few months to check in, though keeping a safe distance from the reality that Mom has retreated into a netherworld--the twilight between life and death; living, but not really living any kind of a life. Dying, but not yet leaving. Just suspended day-to-day by the care of Dimple so willing to change

and wipe and feed and preen.

Mom hangs in the balance between two worlds: the here and now and the there and hereafter. The birds hang in the balance of the feeder as it swings on its hanger, dependent on the seed being dumped in day by day. My own balance is caught off guard by the delicate tug of winter's discontent lingering in my bones, reminding me of daily failures or regrets.

Blessedly, just as I'm over the edge with all that I'm not, the green of March opens my sensibilities to possibilities ahead. There's hope in tomorrow. Hope for being a better grandmother than I was mother. Hope for being a better old wife than young wife. Hope for being a truer old friend than new friend. March simply brings hope.

What a happy thought as the March of hope begins again. Hope

of new babies, and hope of redemption. Is that why Lent lingers in March, to remind us that redemption is nigh? The oozing mud of life threatens to suck us in, but the green, green grass soaks it all up for us; and people like Dimple perform the little daily miracles that keep life in balance for people like Mom and me—people who need to be balanced.

That's what March is all about. It's the balance-beam month; a pivot from winter to spring. My soul awakens to the melting snow, the green carpet, the roaring brook, and the hope of tomorrow. Now the clocks spring forward like leprechauns jumping over the stones of life, leaving tomorrow filled with the sunshine of new chances, and new opportunities. Quite simply: a new season.

Jane Bailey lives in Washington.