



Mom Loved Spring

A Joke on Gardener Steph. By Dr. Steph Burk



Mom loved spring. “There will always be another spring,” she would say. In the gloomy days of January she’d tell me, “Along about Valentine’s Day you’ll begin to hear the birds sing.”

Right on schedule last winter, the cardinals started shouting at each other from the treetops, their territorial pronouncements unfazed by southwest Ohio’s fouler-than-usual weather.

“And then,” I remember Mom saying, “there will come a thaw, and you’ll wake up to hear the water dripping off the eaves and the turtledoves singing.”

Oh, Mom, I wish, but not yet! I said to her in my mind as I slogged back from the barn on those dark, icy mornings. I'm still breaking ice to water the horses!

When I was a child, the playroom was well equipped with bookshelves stocked with treasured volumes, and in the dark time of the year Mom read a lot to me. Our favorite winter story was a Merrie Melodies cartoon book, *A Joke on Farmer Alfalfa*, in which Alfalfa's friends rip a couple of pages off his calendar as an April Fool's prank. Alfalfa (a bit of a dim bulb) thinks it's June and nearly kills himself in the flurry of chores he's convinced—like any gardener—he needs to catch up on.

Then it snows. At last it dawns on poor Alfalfa that something is up. Discovering the missing calendar pages in the trash proves his suspicions. He confronts his friends, they all laugh—including Alfalfa—and everyone in cartoonland goes home happy. Mom was blessed with an ironic sense of humor and probably enjoyed the story as much as I did.

One frigid day last February, huddled up in the living room with the computer in my lap, I indulged in a spree of Internet shopping, with the excuse that I needed this stuff and shopping online would keep me from doing a lot of impulse buying (that's my story and I'm sticking to it). About a week later the first of the packages arrived. I grabbed it off the porch while still bundled up from barn chores and glanced at the label. Was it the DVDs I ordered to help my husband and me couch-surf our way into spring? Nope. Was it the book *Chickens for Dummies* to help me study up before our first-ever chicks arrived in April? Nope. Was it cosmetics for my frosted skin, or that new kitchen gadget I ordered?

Nope. It was my Burpee seed order. In a supreme shot of irony, the package I stood there holding—with the snow blowing around me and another face-slap from Mother Nature in the form of subzero temperatures forecast for later in the week—was most of my 2018 garden.

Somewhere my Mom was laughing. ❖

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