

Spring came. Did ya' notice? Good grief. What a goofy year. Makes one wide-eyed-curious about what the next months might bring, weatherwise. My calf nursery sink spigots froze up for the first time. Last week. That usually happens at least once or twice during winter's worst, normally through some mid-January, week-long stretch of near-zero nights, with a hefty wind blowing. The sink is in the northwest corner of the calf nursery, where the wind roars between the barns with all the subtlety of a wind tunnel. But, it's rarely a problem in March. Normally — meaning most years, but not this one — we keep a poultry-brooder type light under there all winter. A single, hundred-watt bulb gives off enough heat in that confined, met-

al and concrete space to keep the pipes from freezing. On really, really cold nights, with heavy winds, I'll lay a couple of heavy paper calf-feed bags over the top of the sink as additional insulation. So when I bumped the light and the bulb died several weeks ago, it was no big deal. Why waste the electric when it was so naturally warm and no danger of the pipes freezing? All it was accomplish-

ing was to keep my bottle of liquid detergent from getting too chilled and thick to squirt out easily when I squeezed the bottle. Diluting the stuff with water accomplished the same purpose. After having to haul hot water up from the dairy barn to toss around the underside of the sink to thaw pipes last week, a new light bulb went under the sink that every day. The same night the calf nursery spigot froze, so did the daffodils. (And the fruit tree buds.) It was nearly bedtime when I remembered the clump of daffodils at the corner of the house that had opened blooms a day earlier, creamy-white blossoms with ruffly, pale-yellow centers. Snagging a paring knife from the kitchen, I made a hasty dish from the edge of the porch into the bitter night. Too late. The stems and some of the blossoms were already rigid with internal ice. I lopped off the blooms and carried them inside anyway, plunking them into a small vase filled with room-

temperature water. By morning, some had perked up. Two mornings later, most of them looked as fresh as if they had just opened. Apparently hypothermia hadn't quite set in completely. A few remaining outside, which I missed in the shadowy dark (and being in a big hurry), didn't fare so well and looked plenty droopy in the sunshine a few days later. None of these extremes, however, has bothered the potted bulbs for forcing, tucked safely into boxes filled with insulating leaves and left to chill out. Or in the case of a box or two, left out to chill. Hyacinths, daffodils, tulips, all have been recently unearthed from hibernation and relocated to the cool greenhouse floor to green-up their foliage and push buds. And, once again, some of 'em got ahead

of me. A couple of pots of tulips were uncovered sporting spindly, yellowed foliage poked up through the leaf-insulation in desperate search of daylight. They knew it was spring. Even if we aren't so sure. In a year which has seen New England's electrical grid crashed under ice, houses on both coasts slip-sliding into the oceans, dairy barns in New Mexico's deserts collapsing under snow, cattle dead in feedlots behind Plains states blizzards, and Florida about to float away, a frozen pipe in March and droopy daffodils are just no big deal. Come to think about it, how many months of March do we get that aren't goofy? And, would that make El Nino currently normal? Now there's a sobering thought.

make it Milk


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