

**Country Real Estate, #221: FOR RELEASE on February 9, 2012**

**I mean no regression on Valentine's Day**

**By Curtis Seltzer**

**BLUE GRASS, Va.**—Local sugar maples were opened in the first week of February and are “running like crazy,” according to my sticky-fingered sources.

The tree-tapping this year started three or four weeks early, because this winter has been the warmest in memory. A black snake was seen sunning itself during the last week of January. Is this the new normal?

While all of us like a mild January and February, the consensus opinion is that “we will pay for it down the road.”

No one says exactly what the come-uppance will be, though implied, I think, is a three-foot-snow dump on July 4<sup>th</sup> or, more likely, a summer-long drought.

Farmers around Blue Grass don't trust mysterious prosperity. Some believe that we don't deserve a break.

Most of us expect the weather, like everything else, will regress to the mean, which is what we're used to, which is what we think is about the best we can hope for. That, and no more.

If we try for nothing higher than the mean, nothing will ever be better. On the other hand, things are not likely to get worse. This is a recipe for staying in place, which is, at least, familiar.

Regression to my mean leads directly, of course, into a review of my perennial Valentine's Day Dilemma.

In the past, I've been known to pooh-pooh Valentine's Day as just a contrivance by the flower-and-chocolate-industrial complex to scrounge up sales in a very slow month.

This year, however, I decided to lift my mean. I would neither pooh the flowers nor pooh the chocolate. I would fully embrace the celebration and even feign a little sincerity for good measure.

The totally fabricated verbatim conversation that follows never happened with the Party of One who has parked her car in my front yard since 1983.

Me: What would you like to do on Valentine's Day?

Party: Nothing.

Me: Well, that's a switch.

Party: You don't believe in Valentine's Day. You say it's a Madison Avenue trick to get you to spend money on nonsense.

Me: You're confusing me with Scrooge McDuck. And, furthermore, I am not responsible for anything I once said when emerging from general anesthesia.

Party: You weren't coming out of anything. You were going into our first Valentine's Day.

Me: People say all kinds of things in the stress of combat. How about some nice flowers?

Party: Aren't you the one who says it makes no sense to give a present that dies in a couple of days?

Me: I think it's the guy running around here who looks a lot like me. A twin, maybe. Long-lost relations pop up all the time.

Party: You could give me something practical like you did last year.

Me: Do you need a new sledge hammer already? Did you break the unbreakable handle?

Party: Not yet.

Me: Good. You can never have too many sledge hammers near at hand and around the house. But this year, I want to give you something more romantic than a high-quality sledge hammer.

Party: Why change? I only have 28.

Me: Has it been that long?

Party: You're losing ground, not gaining.

Me: How about a box of fancy chocolates?

Party: Too fattening.

Me: Well, don't eat them.

Party: Oh, great. Every morning and every evening, I'll have to walk by and hear them calling in three-part harmony.

Me: So throw them away.

Party: Another great idea. You buy a present that I'm supposed to pitch in the trash.

Me: It's the thought that counts.

Party: What thought is that exactly? If I eat your unhealthy present, I'll start to oink and my teeth will rot. If I ignore your present, I'll feel bad.

Me: How about cash?

Party: Some sentiment. Some romance.

Me: I'm trying to rise above my mean.

Party: Fat chance.

Me: I... "I want to hold your hand."

Party: So now you're a corn Beetle.

Me: Well? What about it?

Party: Oh, all right.

Me: See. That's not so bad.

Party: It's fine.

Me: Be My Valentine.

Party: Of course.

Me: By the way, I like dark chocolate better than milk.

This Valentine's Day, the sugar water ran, and my mean rose a little. I'll stick a new sledge hammer underneath to keep it propped up.

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