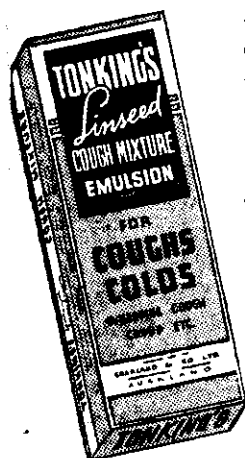


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SHORT STORY

FALSE SPRING

Written for "The Listener"
by E.M.L.

AS soon as Mrs. Bill Edgar opened her eyes she knew Spring was in and a good month too early. By moving over in the rumpled double bed she could see the pink sky behind the plum tree, and in the plum tree four blackbirds preening under their wings, and with contortions down their backs. Hidden along the slim twittery twigs were incipient buds, and Mrs. Edgar thought of sap and roots and the general upsurge of Spring. Then and there she decided that she would leave everything for the day and go into the garden. Everything meant housework and cooking. Gardening too was work, but work with a difference. It was actually creation and an escape into the Unknown. Gardening was full of joy and horrible disappointments like couch grass and mildew and grass grubs, but it seemed more full of hope than any other occupation. If it failed one season, there would soon be another. And having so thought, Mrs. Edgar eased herself over the side of the bed and put on her sandals. She really had to look for her gardening clothes, the khaki drill suit with the bib she had made herself and which was most uncomfortable . . . perhaps the shoulder straps were a bit short because certainly one couldn't bend with ease. On top of the suit she pulled an old sweater and then was ready for breakfast.

Mr. Edgar had left the house before his wife had made the momentous discovery about Spring, and the crumbly remains of his breakfast and empty eggshells greeted her in the kitchen. She tidied up a space for herself at the table and made fresh tea. Breakfast over, Mrs. Edgar laid a firm hand upon herself and went right out without even washing up. The spade was in the tool shed with dried earth thick upon it. She began to dig. When digging became too strenuous, she raked dead grass and leaves under the trees and exposed the pale pointed sheaths of daffodils. She softened round the roots of the flowering cherry trees and noticed, with the joy of a child undoing its birthday parcels, the tiny reddening buds swelling on the graceful branches. Refreshed with that, she went back to digging. So, alternating her hard and easy jobs, she flashed through the early hours with a happy heart.

OF course it would be the morning for her serial in the *For My Lady* session, but she would have a cup of tea while she listened and be fresh again. She ran indoors, dropping mud from her heavy gardening boots, just in time to hear the benediction from the Devotional Service, and then it was the serial. It was about Sam Smith and his family and for such a nice family they got themselves into some dreadful messes, but of course that was the story and that's why you listened to see how they got out of their troubles. Although sometimes she wondered why she bothered.

The sun seemed quite hot when she went out again and what with that and

digging, it was unbearable. She pulled off the sweater and hung it on a currant bush and unhooked the bib of her denims. The next time she ran inside it was to cook Mr. Edgar's dinner, but it was 12.30 and simply too late for anything but sausages. Thank goodness there were sausages and they cooked quickly. Anyhow, what a shame to stay inside cooking on a day like this when she could cook a good dinner late in the afternoon when she couldn't be outside. The sausages were barely cooked when Mr. Edgar walked in.

"What you been up to Lil, your face is pretty red."

"Been gardening," said Lil, holding out the sides of her suit as proof.

"Ha," said Mr. Edgar, "pretty fit, eh Lil?"

"I'm that sorry dear," said Mrs. Edgar, "but I just didn't seem to get in in time to cook real dinner, but I'll make you something extra special to-night."

"Aw, that's all right. What's wrong with a sausage I'd like to know?"

Mrs. Edgar agreed quickly that there certainly was nothing wrong with a good sausage. They ate their sausages with tomato sauce and had bread and butter and tea, and then Mrs. Edgar remembered she might have some pikelets left over from the day before, not stale yet. They chatted amiably of this and that and Mr. Edgar remarked that his wife would probably not remember where her jersey was, but that he could see it from the window, hanging on a bush. Mrs. Edgar knew it was there and would be out again this afternoon in the garden.

"Making a day of it, old girl," said Mr. Edgar.

"Well, you know . . ." said Mrs. Edgar.

Mr. Edgar went to the small mirror behind the kitchen sink and looked at his teeth very seriously. He drew his top lip right up under his nose.

"You won't forget to cook a big pot of spuds for the hens?" he said. Mr. Edgar had grown sick to death of egg shortages and had bought 25 hens at auction and turned his old motor bike shed into a hen house.

"Oh, Lord no, I'll put them on right away," said Mrs. Edgar.

WHEN Mr. Edgar left for work again, his wife thought she would sweep and tidy the sitting room . . . just in case . . . but she went right outside with the broom to sweep some soil off the path first. Then she started to weed, and left the broom resting in a japonica tree. Really, the rununculus were coming up wonderfully well.

Much later, she heard the gate click and saw her old friend Miss Fry coming in. Miss Fry of all people. Mr. Edgar called her Miss Fry. Now she was coming up the path darting her head from side to side in case she missed anything.

(continued on next page)

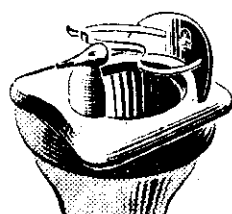
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