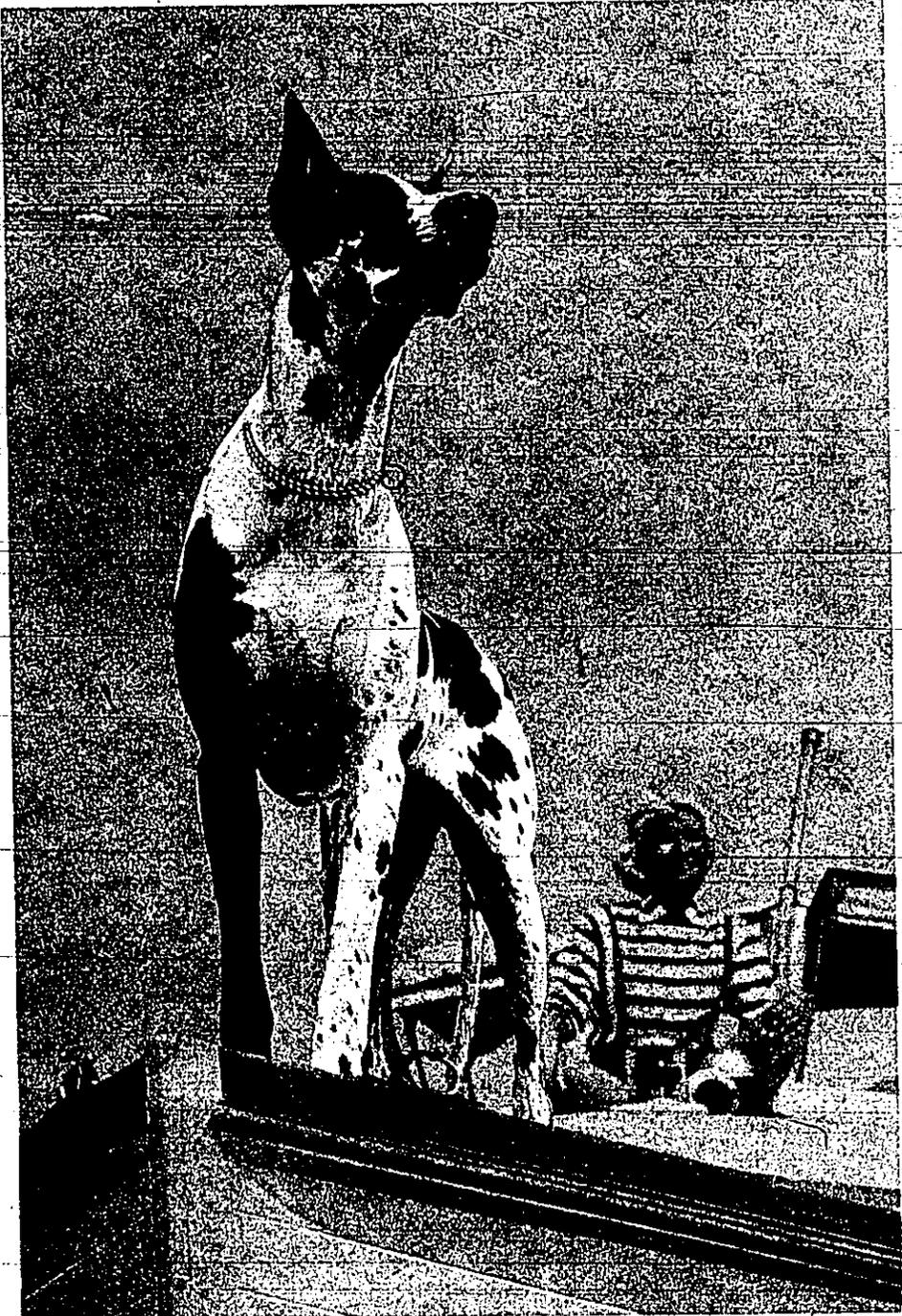


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The Two Faces of April

Continued from preceding page

be trundled over the lumps, before a true lawn is in being. As he wearily goes about this task, the gardener may be allowed his fierce hope that those trout may gulp not only the rest of the rod but the reel and the fisherman, too.

Nor is that all there is to April, not nearly all. Out in the rivers, for example, the shad are openhandedly dispensing roe—and shad roe, bock beer and asparagus spell out spring. That is they should, and do, in some places if not in all. Not here at hand, however, not here in the April-suburbs, April. April. As though the month were not enough gloomy, those people inside the house pick it as the time for spring cleaning. Cleaning means not only that everything is placed away, but also that there are sandwiches instead of meals cooked on stoves. In distant Greenwich Village, poets are dining this night on shad roe, eating more than their share, much more. Roe. Go blow low foe Joe. It is peanut butter here, on crusts.

As noted, April is the month for cleaning, and that brings up the crux of the matter. In April, the gardener just has too many demands on his time. He must tidy up, which is understood. It is also understood that he must correct a little error of his own devising. This was during the winter when, restless on a warm day, he mapped out certain changes in the landscape. No, not a stone wall this time, for building the wall of '56 gave him an allergy to rocks from which he has not yet recovered.

What he did that day was to decide on adding ten feet to one end of the garden, moving some heavy shrubs from another end, and building a gravel path down the middle. On that warm day in January, he was fool enough to map out the whole project with actual stakes, and—worse still—to tell everyone about it. Now those stakes stand like the pointing fingers of destiny, and he is trapped in the labyrinth of his own blueprints. He must landscape now, or never hear the end of it.

To meet these fully understood demands would take all the gardener's time, every hour of it throughout April. Something still is added, from inside the house. Presumably because you can see the garden through the glass, window cleaning is regarded as yard, or outside work. Not just the outer side of the pane, for which a faint shadow of case could be made, but the inside as well. Poet, speaking softly of April's gentle rustle, have you ever heard the house cleaner sunning the gardener to come and do the windows?

HEAR her calling, and well you may—even above the sound of cheering for a home run at the stadium. The windows must be done this minute, on this day already heavy with whitened bones, toys, sticks and bleakly accusing marker stakes. This particularly unwelcome voice of April carries across the yard, rounds the side and goes to the rear of the garage where, in a broken chair in sunlight, the gardener sits thinking. In April, a man can't sit thinking with his eyes closed for more than a minute before they are after him.

April. April in the suburbs. April in the rain. April which means that spring has come, and that May flowers are on the way. Yes, the gardener has heard it all, and much of it he chooses not to believe. One April sound, however, he does recognize as a true sound of spring. This is the telephone, ringing in the evening. On the other end are city people, calling very, very casually, just to see how everyone is. They have been silent since the fall, busy no doubt with such major problems as getting tickets for "Redhead," but now they are thinking of long week-ends in the country. Theirs is the truer sound of spring than the voice of the turtle or the peep of the peeper; theirs is the hopeful chant of April.

Kind friends, here is a message from the suburbs. If you think you are coming out in July, come now also—when it is April. There are extra rakes, hoes and shovels in the garage, and indoors the housecleaner always can use the services of so charming an assistant. Incidentally, after you've cooked it at home, put the shad roe in the thermos so that it will keep warm until dinner time. No, do not forget it, and leave it in your apartment in the city. Some poet would just snatch it up there, and would be inspired to write something more about the illusion that is April.