

WHEN SPRING SPRINGS.

Barbara Woolner

As the dandelions clock and frothy clematis cascades over wall and fence; before the woodland floor is flooded with an undulating mass of purple and blue; whilst the blue tits flutter and fuss amongst the fragile apple blossom, the robin issues his tuneful challenge to redbreast intruders and the strutting magpie searches grass and gutters for unwary spiders and unguarded nestlings, then, and only then do I watch for *my* first signs of spring, the affirmation of growing continuity.

At first there is a flash from the corner of my eye as I stand at the sink with a bowlful of bubbles washing my dishes, an unending chore. Unexpected I hesitate; was it a flash, a white tipped tail, not a cat? I pause, and there is a rustle, a disturbance, not the wind. The sun warms the decking, and there, just there, is a hustle, a jostle and suddenly a springing, an eruption of russet and white. The cubs have arrived! Two this year, prancing and pouncing, still chubby and fluffy, alert to the sounds and the signs in the shrouding shrubs. They tumble and wrestle, joyfully I might say. Their brushes still scant, but their energy bursting in spurts. They pant, rest and scratch; they stop and stare intently, alert to the passing bird; then they pounce and they wrestle again.

Soon they vanish. Playtime is over. My new fox cubs have brought with them the affirmation of spring.