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"Well, this is a pleasant surprise," said Mrs. Edgar, brushing her knees. "and such a lovely day."

"That's why I came," said Miss Fry. "Too lovely to stay inside . . . I just said to Father . . . Father I said . . ."

Mrs. Edgar was wondering how she could keep Miss Fry out of the kitchen, and if the sitting room was as messy as she thought it was. Miss Fry was busy unwrapping a huge newspaper parcel and disclosed four minute lupin plants.

"Beautiful, beautiful," said Mrs. Edgar, and without a moment's hesitation knew exactly where they would look best. They had to walk round the garden and see everything. Mrs. Edgar pointed out the daffodils just poking through, but Miss Fry saw the moss in the lawn. She was like that. She saw the lemon trees were frosted and would die, and that the grubs were eating the winter roses. She even swept far enough afield to see that the clothes post had almost rotted off at the ground and

last Spring. When they parted at Miss Fry's gate it was on the cry of "Do come again soon," and "Oh, but it's your turn next time."

MRS. EDGAR almost ran home in her anxiety to think up something extra special for dinner, and it was so late.

Without taking off her hat or coat, she hurried up a scratch dinner and just had it cooked by 6.30. Then she took off her outdoor things, fluffed up her hair and relaxed with a copy of Modern Masterpieces and a cigarette. She heard Mr. Edgar upon the path and put a nice bright look on her face.

The door opened and Mr. Edgar came in.

"You've let the fire go out," he said. "Oh, so I have. I really lit it this afternoon for my visitor and it went out while I was taking her home."

"So you had a visitor?"

"Yes, just Miss Fry."

"Miss Fry . . . when'd she come?"

"It's a wonder you didn't meet her on the street. Just after you left."



"Mrs. Edgar pointed out the daffodils, but Miss Fry saw the moss in the lawn"

soon Mrs. Edgar's wash would fall in the mud. She ran her eyes all over the place and made it feel shabby.

"You must be tired," said Mrs. Edgar, "Do come right in and I'll light the fire and make some tea."

Miss Fry wasn't cold and she hadn't really come for tea, but it did get chilly after a walk and a fire was always so friendly, and she always thought tea was really more of a social habit than a need.

Mrs. Edgar furtively pushed as many sheets of newspaper as she could under the sofa, and swept up the worst mess in the hearth while coaxing the fire to burn. Miss Fry stayed on talking about her family, her neighbours, the tradespeople, the rationing and the cost of everything, until it was really time she must go. Mrs. Edgar said she would just tidy herself and come along for a walk too, as she had to change her books at the Regent. While Mrs. Edgar was tidying, Miss Fry saw all the things she had to miss whilst talking. The brass tray hadn't been polished for months by the look of it.

"Ready, dear?" she asked brightly.

They walked along the streets, looking over fences at gardens and remembering how the trees flowered so well

"Well, you needn't have let the fire out."

"And it's just a wonder there's any dinner for you. I had such a rush last thing . . . walking home with Miss Fry. . . ."

"Did you have to?"

"You know how nervous she is."

"I never knew she had any nerves . . . nerves be blown."

"That's what makes her so irritating."

"Do I smell those brussels sprouts again for dinner . . . you know I hate the things."

"Oh, Bill, you don't really, you just feel in a bad mood."

"I've said before I don't like them and I don't. You could surely have put a log on and kept the fire going."

"Come on, let's have dinner and you'll feel better," said Mrs. Edgar brightly, going into the kitchen. Mr. Edgar followed and lifted a lid off a pot and peered in.

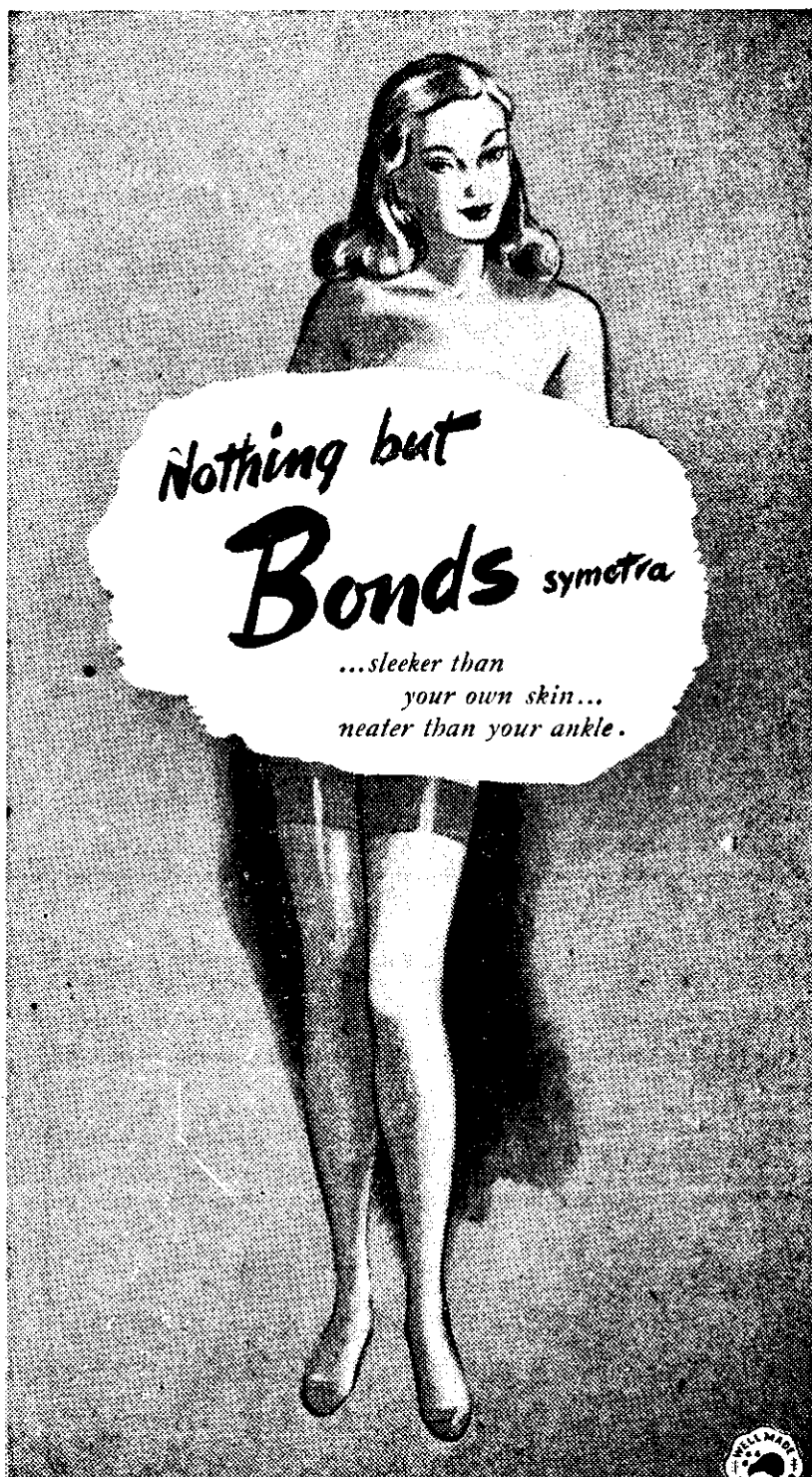
"Not blanchmange."

"Well I had a few prunes over from yesterday and thought it would be nice to go with them."

"Of all things, blanchmange . . . blanchmange. . ."

"Well, I think the ham is nice."

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