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farm and they were young, and now he was dead, so you see we were fond of the palm in other ways, too.

THE palm was still there when I went overseas. And sometimes in the prisoner-of-war camp I'd find myself wondering if they'd made up their minds to cut it down, yet.

And when I got back it was still there.

I smiled at that, and thought "Good old palm tree."

But Ron had been married while all this was going on, and he had a wife called Marigold and two children, just learning to talk. And he, very paternal, thought that they might be playing round the roots of the palm tree and there might be some of the hard purple berries there, and his children might pick the berries up and put them into their mouths and choke and have convulsions. And he'd never forgive himself if that happened. Never.

"But you never did, any of you, when you were children," said my mother, looking up at the old palm tree, with the wind stirring the fronds and bending down to play with her hair. Her hair. It had been jet black when I went away. But now some of it was grey . . . grey like some of the fluff round the palm tree's trunk.

(No. That was right enough. We didn't choke. We only spat the berries out at each other's faces, didn't we?)

But Ron would have none of it. So he went and got the axe this time. There was mother and Marigold and I looking on, this time.

And Ron didn't say any more, but he swung the axe, cut the gash we all knew must be cut so it wouldn't fall on to the roses, and then lifted the axe again and again, the blade flashing, until the old palm groaned and swayed and murmured, then fell out to the left and away, slowly at first then swiftly, falling heavily under the scarlet oak as we knew it would, one day.

And we all noticed the gap, and we said, "That lets the light in better now, doesn't it?" to reassure one another. We all agreed it was a good thing, having the old palm out of the way.

But that night we all went to bed before mother. She said she wasn't feeling sleepy just yet, and she wanted to

read a little more. So Ron and Marigold and I all said "Goodnight," and left her there, before the dying fire in the old sitting-room.

And just as I was getting into bed I remembered a book I wanted. I'd left it in the sitting-room. So I went back quietly and opened the door.

Mother wasn't reading. She was looking at an old photograph-album. I knew the photograph on the page she was looking at so steadily. It was a photo of the front of the house, taken years ago, with the palm tree there, not cut down then, you see, but young and brave and strong.

So I didn't say anything. I just closed the door quietly, silently, and went back to bed.

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Maybe in our world of to-morrow the housewife will arrive home at six o'clock, put your meat, vegetables, and sweet in the oven, switch on the current, turn the dial to regulate the heating power of the radio waves according to their frequency and the kind of food in the oven, and at five past six serve up a well-cooked roast dinner to the family.

