HERE had been a frost that morning, but now it was past noon and the sun, shining strongly, had drawn all sharpness from the clear, still air.

"Hi, Dad, look at the beach. Look at the beach, Dad!" the children shouted from the back seat.

"Dad used to live here once, don't forget," Edith said.

Arnold slowed so that they could see better through gaps in the sprawling pohutukawas at the edge of the road. The autumn had been like this just before he had left here 15 years ago, he remembered. The spell of calm fine weather had not broken by early winter, and the last time he had passed the beach, travelling the other way, the sun had struck sparkles from the sea as it did to-day.

Edith wished the children could have had a run on the sand. But she knew

work. Not that holidays were at all important to her. She was much too happy at home. All the things she most wanted to do she could do best there-quiet, simple things, reading and sewing and gardening and planning for the welfare of Arnold and the children.

THE car climbed a hill and turned a corner and they could see the township below. Funny to think that when Arnold had lived in one of those houses he hadn't even known she existed. . . The winter he had left here she had already been at Green's Corner Drapery, in the town 20 miles from her father's farm, for six months. Her mother had found her the job. "You'll never meet anybody stuck here on the farm. You don't want to be an old maid like Aunt Cissy, do you?" Indeed she didn't. She was too inexperienced and unthinking to realise that there might be more desirable and dignified forms of spinsterbood than Aunt Cissy's. Her aunt was unhappy when she lived alone, and when she stayed with her relations most of them shamelessly made use of her. Her health was poor, her eyes were often red, her manner either aggrieved

But not wanting to be like Aunt Cissy hadn't prevented Edith from hating the

Written for "The Listener" by CARR TAYLOR

drapery job and the boarding-house she had to stay in: even the week-ends at home were spoilt by her mother so obviously hoping to hear she had "met somebody." One stinging winter afternoon she walked from work feeling more miserable than usual. She could feel the hot itch of incipient chilblains on her fingers. There would be shepherd's pie and bottled plums and watery custard for dinner-Monday's menu. Afterwards the three old ladies would pull their armchairs close round the fire and Edith would have to say she was quite warm enough and sit on the sofa with her feet going numb. One of the two old bachelors would sit beside her and tell her stories of old days which grew to him more absorbing and remarkable with each telling, though to her without interest or reality. After she went to bed she would stay cold half the night, because the two kettles on the side of the fire held just enough water for the old ladies' hot-water bags, and she was too much in awe of the landlady to use the gas.

As she reached the boarding-house



gate that afternoon a young man had been walking behind her in the early darkness stepped forward to open it and to introduce himself as a fellowboarder who had arrived during the week-end At dinner he sat next to her, and before the end of the meal asked her if she would go to the pictures with him.

T seemed extraordinary to Edith now to remember that six weeks later, when Arnold proposed to her and she accepted him, she still felt nothing

(continued on next page)



