

The Free Press Short Story

The Wild Wings of the Wind

ALICE DYAR RUSSELL

NAN KLARKER was like quick-silver, swift, glancing. Small-boned, lightly built, she looked like a doll; yet she was overflowing with vitality, her eyes, with ambition, too. Life to her was not long enough to do all the things she wanted. She had not the patience to wait. "Live to-day!" was her motto. A very good one it might be; but it clashed with Leander's, "Plan for to-morrow!"

Leander Gray was slow as Nan was quick; big and strong while she was slight; tenacious where she was restive; humble before her charm. Sometimes Leander seemed in despair that Nan would ever put up with him; that he might yearn all his days to be allowed to love her and always she would be beyond his reach—a lovely bit of quick-silver, glancing, light.

Nan's father and mother were her adorers, too. Out of their hard-won means they had done for her all they could. No one, not even Nan, mourned more than they that her orbit was so restricted her background so drab and dull.

Dressed in gay prints, her dark hair curling prettily, her brown eyes bright and quick as a bird's, Nan walked expectantly, as if a table d'hôte dinner had stopped to eat in the inviting little lunch room on the desert highway. Her mother cooked in the kitchen while her father dealt in groceries and measured out gas and oil in front, kept the premises neat and the three little cabins called the "Klean and Kory Klarkar Auto Kamp," ready at all hours for occupancy.

Dad Klarkar had the gift of hope. He saw his bit of desert property and this small flourishing business through rose lenses. To him always, "next year" would bring the "big money"; "next year" Nan could have all the pretty clothes and fine trips that she wanted. Mrs. Klarkar, a quiet, capable, sweet-faced woman, had watched so many of her husband's iridescent bubbles break, that all she hoped for now was to keep their home, stay out of debt and live to see Nan secure and happy—married perhaps to that good, steady boy, Leander Gray.

Leander ran the near-by garage; he was a clever mechanic, and more. Like Nan he had a high-school education; like Nan he believed his present job temporary; but unlike Nan he did not waste time in sighing regrets and vain wishes; he worked and planned. His eye was on a beautiful little alfalfa ranch, whose owner wished to sell. Leander saved his money, Nan thought him stingy. At night he pored over government bulletins on alfalfa growing and poultry raising. Nan thought he should spend his evenings oftener with her. She laughed him with not caring.

When trade was slack, Nan would sit on the steps of the narrow street, under the neatly lettered sign, "Good Lunches Here," and watch the dusty road and the passing cars, wildly longing for some contact with the outer world—anything, anything that meant change. She envied the occupants of the big sedans and shiny roadsters and made up stories about them, imagining a part for herself in their glamorous lives.

One day adventure came, on the wings of a wild wind that swooped down from the mountains, scooping up the dust and turning all outdoors into a howling maelstrom. Two men and a woman, with clothes and an air that to Nan cried "city," shoved breathlessly into the room, bringing in dust and wind and shutting the door with a bang. The woman nodded to Nan in a friendly fashion. The younger man exclaimed, "Well, well, the desert bloom!" which Nan did not quite like, but after all it could not be denied that she was very pretty.

They ordered lavishly and when the check came, he drew out a roll of bills that made Nan's eyes widen. He laid down a dollar for a tip. Under the amazed eyes of the woman, Nan pushed it back laughingly. "I don't take tips," she said in her sweet, incisive voice which was not true; but ah, at the moment, how Nan longed to appear different from the ordinary girl who waited in roadside lunch rooms!

room. Mother Klarkar cooked for them and Dad Klarkar became more and more absorbed in their low-toned, mysterious talk.

At night when she lay staring awake on her cot, she still heard the hum of voices, now and then her father's breaking in excitedly, sometimes a sharp ejaculation from one of the other men bringing a sudden hush. Nan would find herself tensely clenching her hands and whispering: "Oh, if he only will, if he only will!" or, "I will make him, I will make him!" They had not at any time been able to talk so low that her quick ears had not gathered the sense of that which they said. She knew her father was being drawn into a scheme that might mean at last the "big money" he was always wistfully talking about; a little capital, that was all that was needed; and that, she was sure, Leander had. Why should not Leander make "big money" too?

Mrs. George Ritter—Belle Ritter; "Call me Belle!" she said to Nan, laughing—knew all about Nan now. Knew about Leander, too. "Bring on your boy friend," she urged the second evening. "I want to see if he's good enough for you, you wonderful little girl! He'll have to be pretty good, I'll say, to suit me. You know, don't you, that you've made another conquest? Steve is mad about you!" Again the brittle laughter that held a note that Nan did not recognize.

Like a flying tumbledweed pursued by the wind, head down and covered tightly with a shawl, skirts whipping, she driven and singing her face, Nan ran the half mile down to Leander's garage. The room she left behind was hot, noisy, feverish with talk. She opened the door into Leander's little office and found the young man in a sweater reading by a green-shaded electric bulb. The room was plain; it contained only an ancient walnut desk, a shelf for books and two straight chairs. A large calendar and a picture of a Minerva head adorned the walls. Leander looked up with his grave, slow smile, his eyes lighting at the picture wind-tossed Nan made in the doorway. He seated her in the chair that had a cushion in it and listened with full attention to the words that tumbled out in haste and urgency.

"I see," he said at last. "These two men, George Ritter and Steve Blum, say they've discovered oil in some land they've bought up toward the mountains. They're bringing in a crew to drill and contract for shanty houses. They've agreed to make a down payment, so Daddy can finance it—Nan informed him, cheeks glowing. "Fine. That part of it is. Don't see, though," he frowned. "Never mind, we'll go on. They offer your father a share in the company if he can produce the money to buy in. Well, that's all right, too, if they're on the square and he had any to risk—but he hasn't." "Daddy's going to try to raise money on the place!" Nan cried. "It's a big chance—the chance of a lifetime! He says if he holds back now, it'll never come again. Mother's afraid, of course—she would be! But if you go into it, too, Lee," she paused pleadingly, her luminous eyes on his sober gray ones. "Mother thinks the world of your judgment. If you went in with Father, if you invested what money you had—well, that's Nan's honey," he said, gently; "the money I have I want for an entirely different purpose—you know! I don't want to speculate with it; this sounds to me like speculation."

"Oh, it isn't!" glowing. "It's a sure thing. They have the engineer's reports—everything. You can see them. Mrs. Ritter is planning to go abroad on the money that will come in on her share the first six months. Oh—Lee, maybe we could go abroad too—our honeymoon! Wouldn't that be wonderful?" Her voice sank; when Leander said nothing, but remained gloomily looking down, chewing his lower lip, she went on in more difficult tones. "It's just happened—like opportunity knocking—the storm, and their staying, and liking Daddy—and me—and wanting to give us this chance!"

Leander frowned and uncrossed his long legs, he thought of saying "Apple sauce!" but knew inexorably that it would not be well received, and so said nothing. "You will at least come over and talk to them?" Nan inquired. "No, Nan," Leander spoke with decision. "I don't want to do this and I don't want to be persuaded into it. Just count me out."

The wind hummed. Nan stood up. "I think I'll go back," she said, her voice trembling, her fingers jerkily rearranging her shawl. "I thought you might be interested, because it would mean so much to me; but you're not. You care more about alfalfa—and hens—than me. It isn't me you want—it's that old ranch. Well, you can have it. But let me tell you, I despise a ranch! I don't intend to live on one. Certainly not with you, Leander Gray! I won't live with you anywhere—ever! Good-bye!"

Nan slipped in the back way. She found her mother sitting alone in the

kitchen, her hands in her lap, her face quiescent and sad. She looked at the hot-cheeked girl questioningly. "I went out for some fresh air," Nan answered her. "The wind is dreadful; it just tears you to pieces. Mother, what's happened? What's Father going to do?"

"He says, soon's the storm lets up—tomorrow, maybe—he's going into town and try to arrange with the bank for a loan. I don't know's he'll get it, even if I agree. I hope not," she ended, quietly. "This roof's ours now child; if we lose it, it's not likely we'll ever have another."

"Oh, Mother, don't talk that way! Dad is sure to make money, you'll see." Nan let her hand rest lightly on her mother's shoulder; but her face was turned with eagerness toward the inner door. She heard Mrs. Ritter's brittle laugh and a man's deep, nonchalant drawl. She brushed out her curls before the glass and went in. To-night she did not turn away from Steve Blum's bold glances, but smiled.

The third day brought no let-up in the storm. The wind roared more savagely; the endless dust billowed in the house, was gritty. Mrs. Ritter's nerves were on edge; her laughter grew shrill. Restless, the men snarled at each other. Dad, alarmed, tried to pacify them; he promised the storm was passing.

"Always dark and miserable, like this, when it's near blown out. By sun-down it'll be quieting down and tomorrow'll be the prettiest day you ever laid eyes on. Let's have a look at that chart of yours again, Ritter."

Mrs. Klarkar, the lines deepened in her face; her lips bitterly compressed, went about her work in silence. Nan was a flashing sprite; nothing dimmed her radiance. Steve Blum followed her every movement with his eyes. When she dashed out into the wind to do the cabin work, he went after her. "You are the bravest, staunchest little girl I ever saw," Mrs. Ritter said in a caressing voice. "I knew the minute I met you that fate had something better marked out for you. I'm psychic. I knew."

"But I haven't quite decided," the girl said, flushing, smiling, looking half pleased, half frightened. "Steve should not have said anything. It seems dreadful to go away without telling them."

"It's the best way," Mrs. Ritter told her. "You can leave a note. When you come back, Mrs. Steve Blum, your father will be all ready to go in with us. He can't do a thing else. Even your mother will see that!" A triumphant little laugh clipped her speech. "She'll sign then."

"I must go now," Nan pulled away. "They mustn't suspect." "Dad Klarkar was right. By sundown the wind dropped, the skies cleared, a full moon rose, orange with dust on the horizon; but as it mounted shining forth gloriously, "What'd I tell you?" Dad exulted. "To-morrow I'll go far as town with you; then when you come back next week, I'll have Mother agreeing and be ready to do business with you." He clapped Ritter's knee. Nan's eyes met Mrs. Ritter's; the woman looked away.

Weekly Garden-Graph Written by DEAN HALLIDAY for Central Press Canadian. A WELL AROUND A TREE AFTER GRADE HAS BEEN RAISED. "Wells" to keep trees well.

Frequently when building, it becomes necessary to change the grade line about a healthy, well-established tree. When the fill is less than 12 inches higher than the original soil level, the tree can be protected by putting a layer of coarse gravel over the soil surface holding the tree. This layer of gravel should extend just beyond the branch spread. Topsoil can then be spread over the gravel as a soil blanket on which to grow grass. This layer of soil, however, should be kept at least 15 inches away from the tree trunk.

When the fill about a tree is more than a foot deep, a well should be built around the tree's trunk, as shown in the accompanying Garden-Graph. The well should be as large as possible in diameter in order to permit air to circulate about the trunk of the tree. In a few years the roots of the tree will come to the surface and then it will be possible to fill the well with soil up to the desired grade level.

der. The dust was white in the moonlight; the air sweet and clear. She wanted to plunge into it like a purifying bath; to cleanse herself of the folly and the fever of the past few days. Lights shone on everything. For the last time Belle Ritter's laugh sounded in her ears; she knew its brittle note now for falsity.

She reached the little room, quiet, dim, cool, where Leander sat reading, heavy-hearted, by the green-shaded light. Leander glanced up to see her in the doorway, and his eyes lighted.

Everything Ordered From Teeth to Anchors. Department of Munitions and Supply Extends Scope and Number of Its Requirements.

Orders being placed are increasing, both in number and in quantities involved, said an announcement by the Department of Munitions and Supply. While the rapidly expanding munitions program involves purchases of the greatest magnitude, the growth of the operations of the Department is also exemplified by some of the smaller items required in expansion of Canadian defence program.

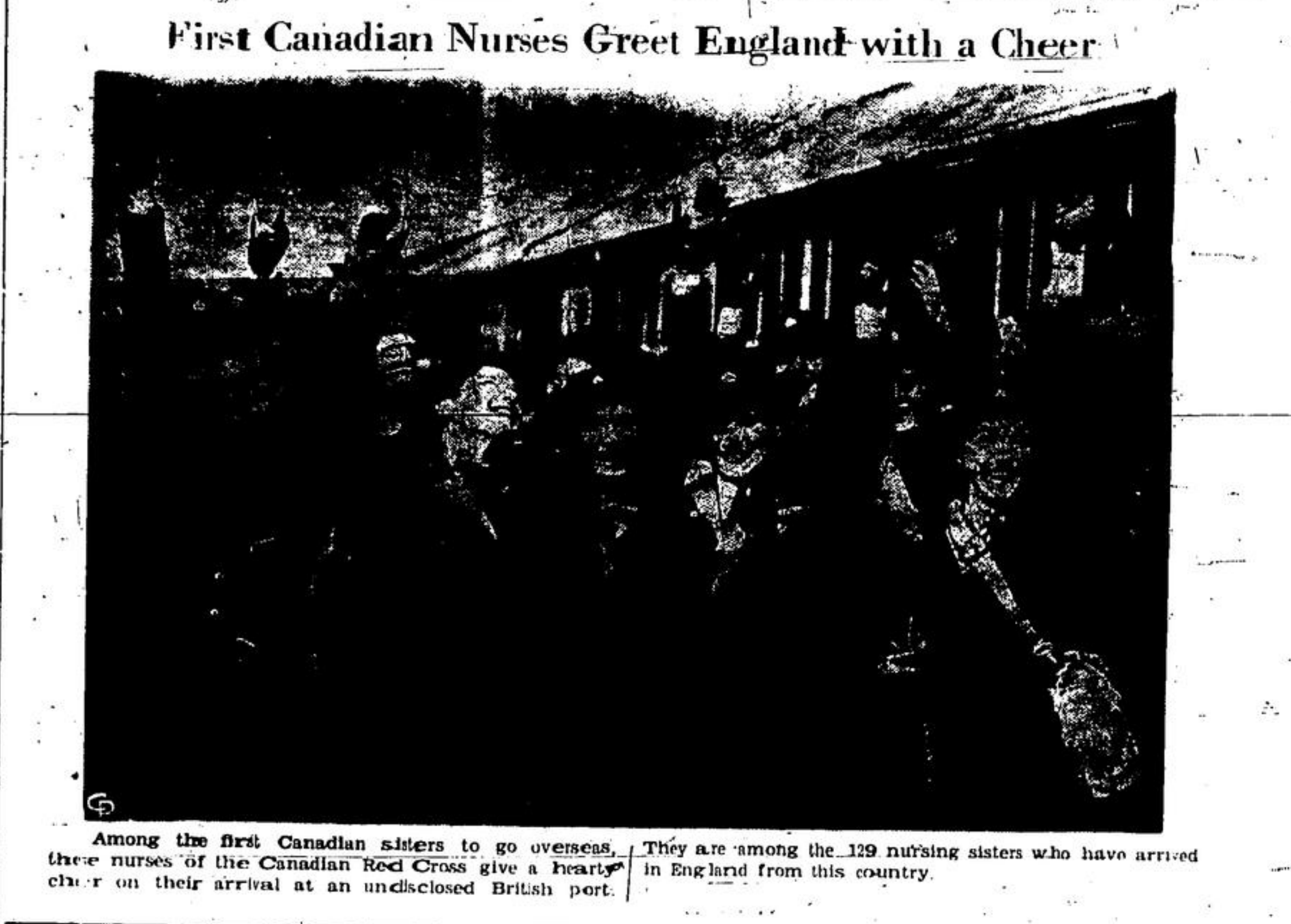
For example, purchases of this nature include 300,000 R.C.A.F. buttons and 100,000 disinfecting cloths for use with gas masks.

Some of the other orders for small items to date include 700 sets of false teeth, 456 anchors, 90 gallons of mosquito oil and 10,000 units each of small-pox vaccine and meningitis antidote. Other orders include such things as 20,000 cubic feet of acetylene, 20,000 cubic feet of oxygen, 25,000 ebonk aprons, 90,000 flannel shirts, 144 old car wheels.

HISTORIC SITES ALONG THE RICHELIEU. Visitors motoring to Canada via the Lake Champlain and Richelieu route through Quebec traverse a region abounding in historical associations, which date back to 1535 when Champlain promised to assist the Montagnais Indians make war on their ancient enemy, the Iroquois. Many thrilling exploits, following Champlain's journey up the Richelieu to keep his promise, are recalled by historic sites marked or preserved by the National Parks Bureau of the Department of Mines and Resources in co-operation with the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

At the mouth of the Richelieu, then known as the Iroquois River, Champlain's adventurous journey was begun in 1609. The thriving town of Sorel now stands at this point, and a cairn and bronze tablet mark it as the site of Fort Richelieu, built by Pierre de Saurel in 1665 as a defence post against the Iroquois. Champlain's progress was arrested by the rapids at Chambly, at which point Fort Chambly was also erected in 1665 and rebuilt in 1709. The old walls of this fort have been preserved, and a museum containing many interesting relics is maintained.

Although many of Champlain's followers turned back at Chambly, he continued with two French companions and sixty Indians in twenty-four canoes, pausing six miles up the river to explore the Ste. Therese. Another fort, being of the island, was erected here, the site of which is marked by a boulder and tablet.



Among the first Canadian sisters to go overseas, they are among the 129 nursing sisters who have arrived in England from this country.

CARROLL'S Wagstaffe's New Strawberry Jam (with pectin) 32-oz. jar 25c. Silver Crest Red SALMON 1/2-lb. tin 15c. AYLMER CHERRIES RED FITTED 2 18-oz. tins 25c. PINEAPPLE AYLMER SLICED 2 12-oz. tins 25c. GRAPEFRUIT JUICE 3 20-oz. tins 25c. CORNFLAKES QUAKER 4 pkgs. 25c. LIBBY'S CATCHUP 12-oz. tin 12c. BLUE RIBBON TEA 1/2-lb. tin 32c. COFFEE BLUE RIBBON 1/2-lb. tin 26c. Aylmer Irish STEW 2 15-oz. tins 23c. Newport FLUFFS (CEREAL) Jumbo pkg. 25c. Dew Kist White CORN 2 16-oz. tins 15c. SLICED BEETS SMART'S 3 No. 2 tins 25c. CHATEAU CHEESE PLAIN ONLY 1/2-lb. pkg. 15c. WALNUT DUNDEE CAKE Each 15c. CHRISTIE'S ANGEL FOOD Each 20c. McCORMICK'S ELIZABETH CREAM SANDWICH BISCUITS lb. 15c. LIFEBUOY SOAP Bar 7c. CARROLL'S CLEANSER 2 tins 9c. FREE—One package Handy Ammonia with each purchase of Pearl White NAPHTHA Soap 5 bars 20c. Fresh Ripe Texas TOMATOES 2 lbs. for 25c. Large Home Grown HEAD LETTUCE, each 5c. New Large Size POTATOES 5 lbs. for 22c. Juicy Seedless GRAPEFRUIT 5 for 27c. Also Beets, Carrots, Cauliflower, Cucumbers, Radishes, Strawberries, Onions, Cabbage. Fruit and Vegetable Specials Until Saturday Night Only.