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Laura as if the wooden cradle had turned into a silver cradle, a shining silver cradle, and, surely—unless her old eyes were playing strange tricks with her—a babe smiled up in her face, a soft, rosy babe.

She clasped her old hands together. This was Christmas Eve, she remembered, a night when it comes easy to see visions. But how brightly the silver cradle gleamed, how sweetly the babe smiled.

She sank on her knees. A proud old woman, but her pride was fast melting within her, and she felt ashamed of the angry feelings she had indulged in during the past year.

She had been too hard on Richard and his little wife. After all, they had only obeyed the natural instincts of love and youth, and was a harsh, tyrannical old lady to dictate to a young man and tell him whom he was to marry? Why, Richard had done well to set his grandmother at defiance and risk the loss of a fortune; he had been true to himself and his manhood.

The moon suddenly went in, hid by a passing cloud, and after the cloud had drifted on—well, the cradle was just mere black oak again, and the rosy, smiling babe had vanished, returned to the land of beautiful dreams.

Lady Laura rubbed her eyes. She felt tired and dazed, but happy, oh, much happier than she had been for months.

She rested her hands on the cradle and gazed down into its emptiness, and a low sob shook her from head to foot. She thought of her children—the children who had all gone Home before her, and then of the little great-grandson, and as she thought of Richard's child, colour bloomed pink in her cheeks again, her lips parted in a dreamy smile.

"Someone shall go up to London to-night," she murmured. "I will send an embassy to Richard—one of my old servants—and I will give this message to be delivered to my grandson and his wife." She paused a second, then added in firm tones: "Yes, Richard shall be told that a cradle waits here—an empty cradle—and his child must sleep in it on Christmas Day—his dear little child."

Betty and Richard took Lady Laura at her word. They came home hand in hand on Christmas Day, to be taken back into an old lady's heart, and to fill a silent house with life and laughter. But they might have found the door barred had there been no empty silver cradle to fill, no warm, rosy babe to smile with clear blue eyes into Lady Laura's face.

## Redcoats of Fort Pitt

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beginning to be certain what must happen before many days when the patience of even cunning redskins had worn out.

Then came the coal-oil siege; grotesque enough for a Dickens. The Crees of Big Bear had looted a barrel of coal-oil from the store at Frog Lake; the new fire-water; bales of hay they had fetched. By night they crawled down the long bank out of the poplars and the glimmering camp; down the long bank to the stockade. Silent as cats under the wooden walls they bundled the hay and soaked it with oil. They slung the blazing wads of prairie hay over the stockade on to the dry wind-blown roofs. And the nights were full of leery devilment. Dickens' thirty men and the white traders—the Fort Pitt fire-fighters—soaking blankets in water and mounting the roofs; flogging out the fires in full view of the camp above and the fire-

fiends below—who, however, shot none of them.

IT was a little touch of ultimate hell. The Crees had been mewed up a long while; muttering against the police. A hundred years they and their fathers had traded skins at old Fort Pitt. But the Great Company was a shadow now, the redcoats were the substance—and Big Bear's crowd didn't care what became of the ancient trading post. Things were going to the devil anyway, ever since the other flare-up in 1871 when their cousins the half-breeds began to kick the new government by law in the shins. Burning a fort and a church and a store was a very small matter now. Likely the busy white man would put up lots more of them when the railway should come. There seemed to be no end of these palefaces from the south and the east; cunning, long-headed people that invented this coal-oil fire-water—but all the coal-oil and hay they had wouldn't burn the fort by night; it was no use to go down the bank by day, with all those loopholes spitting bullets.

So they called a council of war, and the painted-faces decided on a ruse; the red man's craft being yet strong in the land. It was a simple trick. Most Indian tricks are. They carried it out beautifully.

One nippy April morning the garrison bestirred in the fort and the men blinked out over the long bush-clad bank with its grey poplars and its squadrons of coughing crows—to see not a smoke of Big Bear. Not a canvas, not a cart; not a kyuse nor a dog; nor hide nor hair of a thousand Crees visible on the campground. The entire camp had shifted in a single night.

Dickens and his men knew in their bones that it was a trick; but they hoped and waited and whiled away the dreary days, wondering why the redskins had vamoosed. There was no reason; no possibility of Steele's men from Edmonton, along with General Strange and the 65th from Montreal drifting down on the scows—for weeks yet; no hope of the columns from eastward getting up the valley from the railway, past Batoche and Fish Creek and Battleford. The Indians really had Fort Pitt just where they wanted it.

Nevertheless it was decidedly queer to wait for days and see never a smoke of those Crees. The redcoats cooped up—not being used to that—became restless; most of all the young recruit Cowan from Ottawa, a youth of high mettle who implored Dickens to let him and Trooper Loasby and another go scouting after the vanished redskins.

Dickens demurred. He knew there was as much danger in the job as there was curiosity in the garrison. But Cowan and his pals kept up the din day by day—till Dickens gave his consent. And on a crisp April morning when the ice was slamming and barking like packs of seals in the crooked gorge, the rear gate of old Fort Pitt was swung open for the first time in weeks; and the three restive redcoats, guns at the saddles, rode out; up the long bank, cautiously and quickly, glad to be out of the coop, hitting the trail that their horses hadn't hoofed for a moon.

They got to the deserted camp ground; saw the fire spots where the tepees had been; the trampled buttes and the grass nibbled by hundreds of ponies; the grey poplars shivering in a slight wind that crept up from the gorge and caromed away over the long, brown hills; and in a very little while they went walloping northwestward back the main trail that the carts had come, back to Frog Lake, the settlement.

It was about noon when they got



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