

crimsoned, faded and fell. The wild cherries ripened and withered on the trees. Light frosts whitened the ground. Winter comes late in the Grande Ronde valley. All through December the nights are cool, but the days soft and delightful.

"We shall have no winter this year," Lida said, joyfully, on New Year's day. But when she looked out the following morning she found that winter was there. At the close of the third day snow lay six feet deep over the level ground. It was piled up over the windows, and Lida did not dare to open the doors, so she sat all day, shivering, before the little fire place, with her hands idly clasped in her lap. Jack fancied she was not quite so gay and joyous of late. His great heart ached for her lonely, uneventful life, and he longed—for her dear sake—for the opening of spring.

She was sitting, as usual, one evening in her low rattan chair, idly rocking back and forth, when he came in, cold and tired. A violent, west wind was drifting the snow, and piling it to the tops of all the houses. She looked up with a little smile that only lingered a second on her sweet lips. As he stooped down to kiss her, the door opened and Jim entered. He cast one glance at the tableau in the rosy firelight, and passed through the room without a word. He came back presently, and ate his supper in silence. When they arose from the table, Jack walked to the hearth, and rested one muscular arm upon the rude shelf that his wife had hidden with pretty embroidery.

"Jim," he said, while his eyes rested with deep tenderness upon the slight form of Lida. "I have to go to Telocaset tonight to meet the freight. Will you stay with 'Lida? I cannot get back before morning, and I fear she is not well." As he spoke, the girl's eyes

—wide open now—cast a quick glance at her husband, and she shivered a little beneath that tender, trustful gaze.

"No, no," she said, hurriedly, "I am quite well, dear."

An exacting lover might have questioned the hesitation over the last word; but to Jack it was sweetest music. She had never before used an endearing expression to him. That one little word gave him courage to face the terrible storm without, and he went, stumbling and fighting his way, through the drifted, drifting snow. When he reached the station he found that his orders had been changed, and he was not to take the snow plow out for an hour.

"You can go back if you like," said the dispatcher. "I will have the fireman whistle for you five minutes before starting-time, and if you hurry, you can get here. I 'spose," he added, with true railroad slang, "your wife 'kicks' terribly about your running the snow plow! They all do. It is dangerous work."

He went into the office and closed the door. Jack stood alone in the storm. He shivered. Was the wind colder, sharper? he asked himself. Or could it be that the man's careless words had sent that sudden, deep chill to his heart? Pshaw! how fanciful he was getting about her, all because she was growing more deeply into his heart every day. Had she not called him "*dear*?" Because she had not worried about the snow plow, was that any reason she did not love him? Besides, Lida was not one to borrow trouble.

So he argued with himself as he hastened home, caring nothing for the terrific storm, in his eager longing to have her call him by a tender name. When he came in sight of the house he was surprised to see a gleam of light across the snow. But, upon approaching nearer, he discovered that the latter had