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**The Mountain and the Sea.**



## THE MOUNTAIN AND THE SEA.

Once upon a time the air, the mountain, and the sea lived undisturbed upon all the earth. The mountain alone was immovable; he stood always here upon his rocky foundation, and the sea rippled and foamed at his feet, while the air danced freely over his head and about his grim face. It came to pass that both the sea and the air loved the mountain, but the mountain loved the sea.

"Dance on forever, O air," said the mountain; "dance on and sing your merry songs. But I love the gentle sea, who in sweet humility crouches at my feet or playfully dashes her white spray against my brown bosom."

Now the sea was full of joy when she heard these words, and her thousand voices sang softly with delight. But the air was filled with rage and jealousy, and she swore a terrible revenge.

"The mountain shall not wed the sea," muttered the envious air. "Enjoy your triumph while you may, O slumberous sister; I will steal you from your haughty lover!"

And it came to pass that ever after that the air each day caught up huge parts of the sea and sent them floating forever through the air in the shape of clouds. So each day the sea receded from the feet of the mountain, and her tuneful waves played no more around his majestic base.

"Whither art thou going, my love?" cried the mountain, in dismay.

"She is false to thee," laughed the air, mockingly. "She is going to another love far away."

But the mountain would not believe it. He towered his head aloft and cried more beseechingly than before: "Oh, whither art thou going, my beloved? I do not hear thy sweet voice, nor do thy soft white arms compass me about."

Then the sea cried out in an agony of helpless love. But the mountain heard her not, for the air refused to bring the words she said.

"She is false!" whispered the air. "I alone am true to thee."

But the mountain believed her not. Day after day he reared his massive head aloft and turned his honest face to the receding sea and begged her to return; day after day the sea threw up her snowy arms and uttered the wildest lamentations, but the mountain heard her not; and day by day the sea receded farther and farther from the mountain's base. Where she once had spread her fair surface appeared fertile plains and verdant groves all peopled with living things, whose voices the air brought to the mountain's ears in the hope that they might distract the mountain from his mourning.

But the mountain would not be comforted; he lifted his sturdy head aloft, and his sorrowing face was turned ever toward the fleeting object of his love. Hills, valleys, forests, plains, and other mountains separated them now, but over and beyond them all he could see her fair face lifted pleadingly toward him, while her white arms tossed wildly to and fro. But he did not know what words she said, for the envious air would not bear her messages to him.

Then many ages came and went, until now the sea was far distant, so very distant that the mountain could not behold her,—nay, had he been ten thousand times as lofty he could not have seen her, she was so far away. But still, as of old, the mountain stood with his majestic head high in the sky, and his face turned whither he had seen her fading like a dream away.

"Come back, come back, O my beloved!" he cried and cried.

And the sea, a thousand miles or more away, still thought forever of the mountain. Vainly she peered over the western horizon for a glimpse of his proud head and honest face. The horizon was dark. Her lover was far beyond; forests, plains, hills, valleys, rivers, and other mountains intervened. Her watching was as hopeless as her love.

"She is false!" whispered the air to the mountain. "She is false, and she has gone to another lover. I alone am true!"

But the mountain believed her not. And one day clouds came floating through the sky and hovered around the mountain's crest.

"Who art thou," cried the mountain,— "who art thou that thou fill'st me with such a subtle consolation? Thy breath is like

my beloved's, and thy kisses are like her kisses."

"We come from the sea," answered the clouds. "She loves thee, and she has sent us to bid thee be courageous, for she will come back to thee."

Then the clouds covered the mountain and bathed him with the glory of the sea's true love. The air raged furiously, but all in vain. Ever after that the clouds came each day with love-messages from the sea, and oftentimes the clouds bore back to the distant sea the tender words the mountain spoke.

And so the ages come and go, the mountain rearing his giant head aloft, and his brown, honest face turned whither the sea departed; the sea stretching forth her arms to the distant mountain and repeating his dear name with her thousand voices.

Stand on the beach and look upon the sea's majestic calm and hear her murmurings; or see her when, in the frenzy of her hopeless love, she surges wildly and tosses her white arms and shrieks,—then you shall know how the sea loves the distant mountain.

The mountain is old and sear; the storms have beaten upon his breast, and great scars and seams and wrinkles are on his sturdy head and honest face. But he towers majestically aloft, and he looks always toward the distant sea and waits for her promised coming.

And so the ages come and go, but love is eternal.

1886.

[End of *The Mountain and the Sea* by Eugene Field]