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Letter from John Muir to Alice [Mc Chesney], 1874 Nov 8.

John Muir

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[Original letter returned to Mrs. J. B. McChesney]

To Alice McChesney

Sisson Station,

Foot of Mount Shasta,

November 8th, 1874.

My dear Highland lassie Alice; [McChesney]

It is a stormy day here at the foot of the big snowy Shasta and so I am in Sisson's house where it is cosy and warm. There are four lassies here — one is bonnie, one is bonnier, and one is far bonniest, but I don't know them yet and I am a little lonesome and wish Alice McChesney were here. I can never help thinking that you were a little unkind in sending me off to the mountains without a kiss and you must make that up when I get back.

I was up on the top of Mt. Shasta, and it is very high and all deep buried in snow, and I am tired with the hard climbing and wading and wallowing. When I was coming up here on purpose to climb Mt. Shasta people would often say to me, 'Where are you going?' and I would say, 'To Shasta,' and they would say, 'Shasta City?' And I would say, 'Oh, no, I mean Mt. Shasta,' ~~and~~ Then they would laugh and say, 'Mt. Shasta!!' Why man, you can't go on Mt. Shasta now. You're two months too late. The snow is ten feet deep on it, and you would be all buried up in the snow, and freeze to death. And then I would say, 'But I like snow, and I like frost and ice, and I'm used to climbing and wallowing in it.' And they would say, 'Oh, that's all right enough to talk about or sing about, but I'm a mountaineer myself, and know all about that Shasta Butte and you just can't go noway and nohow.' But I did go, because I loved snow and mountains better than they did. Some places I had to creep, and some places to slide, and some places to scramble, but most places I had to climb, climb, climb deep in the frosty snow.

I started at half past two in the morning, all alone, and it stormed wildly and beautifully before I got back here and they thought, that poor, crazy mountain climber must be frozen solid and lost below the drifts, but I found a place at the foot of a low hunch of trees and made a hollow and gathered wood and built a cheery fire and soon was warm; and though the wind and the snow swept wildly past, I was snug, bug, rug, and in three days I came down here. But I liked the storm and wanted to stay longer.

The weather is stormy yet, and most of the robins are getting ready to go away to a warmer place, and so they are gathering into big flocks. I saw them getting their breakfast this morning on cherries. Some hunters are here and so we get plenty ~~of~~ wild venison to eat, and they killed two bears and nailed their skins on the side of the barn to dry. There are lots of both bears and deer on Shasta, and three kinds of squirrels.

Shasta snowflakes are very beautiful, and ~~I~~ saw them finely under my magnifying glass.

~~Here are some bonnie Crataegus leaves I gathered for you.~~

~~Fare ye well, my lassie. I'm going tomorrow with some hunters to see if I can find out something more about bears or wild sheep.~~

Give my love to your mother and father and Carrie, and tell your mother to keep my letters until I come back, for I don't want to know anything just now except mountains. But I want your papa to write to me, for I will be up here hanging about the snowy skirts of Shasta for one or two or three weeks.

It is a dark wild night, and the Shasta squirrels are curled up cosily in their nests, and the grouse have feather pantlets on and are all roosting under the broad shaggy branches of the fir trees. Goodnight, my lassie, and may you nest well and sleep well as the Shasta squirrels and grouse.

John Muir

Address J. Muir, Berryvale, Siskiyou Co., Cal.