

AGAINST THE TIDE.

"No, sir, no fashionable watering place for me; I want rest and comfort during my holidays," said Alick Freeman to his friend, Casper Burns, with whom he was discussing the place where they should spend the two weeks' vacation...

"Well, I don't blame you; she is as rich and pretty and heartless as you find them," said Casper Burns, adding, with a shy laugh, "but you are afraid of meeting Miss Julia Fletcher there again; well, I don't blame you; she is as rich and pretty and heartless as you find them."

"No, confound it, Casper, Miss Fletcher is all right, it is I who was the fool, and a presumptuous one at that, for thinking she looked more favorably on me than she did on the score of fellows who danced her like midgets in the sun. I hate fashion. Why, only the strongest constitution can stand the dressing, the driving, the dining, and dancing of those fashionable watering places. We want rest, or, rather, change. Now, what do you say to White's Inlet?"

"White's Inlet? Never heard of such a place," replied Casper.

"Then I'll enlighten you," said Alick Freeman, stopping in the midst of packing his trunk and turning to his friend. "White's Inlet is near Barnegat."

"Down on the Jersey coast?"

"Certainly; the fishing is good, the shooting tip-top, and there is no such place for boating and bathing. And then it is pretty well out of the world, and the chances are we'll be the only visitors within miles."

"And we can wear out our old clothes," interrupted Casper Burns. "Of course, no one would think of wearing anything but old clothes down at White's Inlet. Oh, we'll have a splendid time, free as the winds, and almost like being in a state of nature."

"I know, Alick, but people in a state of nature are sleeping; how are we to obtain those necessary comforts?"

"The point is well taken," said Alick, slamming down the lid of his trunk and facing his friend. "Right near the mouth of the Inlet there lives a fisherman named White."

"The inlet takes its name from him?"

"Just so; and he has all accommodations necessary. I sent him word we'd be down next week, and he's expecting us."

"Got any pretty daughters?"

"No; that's the beauty of it; has no one but his wife, and the only neighbor is a mile and a half away across the inlet. Oh, we'll have peace and the end of a good time," said Alick Freeman, rubbing his hands in anticipation of the pleasure in store for them.

The result of this interview was that the young men found themselves at White's Inlet within a week. After leaving the cars they had to go in a wagon some twenty miles over a sandy road that ran through a forest of funeral pines and distorted scrub oaks, on which the sun beat with tropical intensity and along which the mosquitoes provided in fierce, bloodthirsty bands.

The fisherman's house was perched on a verdureless bluff of white sand, with a view in the background and a stormy expanse of blue ocean in front.

One end of the cabin was the stern section of a wrecked schooner, with the name "Eliza Jane" still visible; the chimney of a rusty iron had done duty as a tugboat, and the Gothic doorway was the underjaw of a whale which Sam White had killed on the bar, about a mile from his cabin.

"It doesn't look promising, I must confess," said Alick Freeman, as they got out of the wagon which they had hired at a round price to fetch them over. "but it looks as if we might have all the quiet here that heart could wish for." This was Alick's first visit to the place, which had been recommended to him by a bachelor friend, and though he pretended to like it he felt in his bones that it was a splendid place for fish.

"It must be a splendid place for fish," said Casper, with a grim smile.

"Oh, it is! Why, there's no end of fish out there," said Alick, waving his hands at the water.

"If it isn't a good place for fish," continued Alick, "then it's about the most worthless place I ever set eyes on."

Sam White, a weather-beaten man of 50, came out of the cabin to welcome his guests, and help them in with their "traps," as he called the gaudy array of baggage they had brought with them.

Mrs. White looked enough like her husband to be a twin, but she was a clean, wholesome, hearty woman, as unconventional as the most ardent admirer of nature could wish.

The young men were given a room—there were only four apartments in the house—in the annex made of the section of the wrecked "Eliza Jane." The windows had once admitted light to the captain's cabin, and it required no stretch of the imagination to picture themselves on shipboard. The very decorations of the chamber had a very marine aspect, from the highly-colored print of a naval battle to the shell that answered for a soup cup.

The young men were hungry and dusty and in no good humor, so that while washing and changing their traveling dress for natty sailor costumes they did not exchange many words, though Alick ventured to say:

"I'm sure, old fellow, we'll like it hugely after we get used to it."

"You're sure, old fellow, we'll like it hugely after we get used to it, but is it worth while acquiring the habit?" said Casper Burns, with a shade of sarcasm in his voice.

Alick was about to respond at a venture, but at that moment Mrs. White, without the formality of knocking, put in her head to say that dinner was ready and to add that in her opinion they "was purty nigh starved."

There was roast duck, two or three kinds of fish, potatoes like snowballs, hot biscuit and yellow butter, and a pot of steaming coffee, all served on a clean crash tablecloth.

Sam White asked a long, old-fashioned blessing, to the great amazement of the young men, who expected to find him a profane old sea dog, and then he said:

"You must make a long arms, boys, and help yourselves."

"Well," said Casper, as they strolled down to the beach after dinner, "I must confess I haven't enjoyed a meal so much for years. I was hungry and it went to the right spot."

"Oh, this is just the place for an appetite. You can find one here sooner than in any other part of the country," said Alick, handing Casper a cigar, and feeling that there was something to redeem the place in the eyes of his friend.

Benner place for the summer. It's more homelier over there than it is here, but when ole Cap'n Benner he was a-livin', there was no end of company over there, but that's years and years ago."

"I suppose there's no danger of any of the strangers coming over here?" asked Alick Freeman, with the slight hope that the old fisherman would say there was a great deal of danger.

"Not the least bit," replied Sam White, "but as there's two young ladies over there and two young men over here, why, the chances is that somehow they'll get together afore long."

"That's human nature," said Mrs. White, looking up from the potatoes she was peeling; "the boys'll seek out the gals just as ducks goes barefooted to the water."

Alick hinted that he was an exception, and that while he did not positively hate the other sex, their presence was essential to his misery, and that more to the same effect, all of which Mrs. White heard with a strange twinkle in her gray eyes that plainly told she had her doubts, not of the young man's sincerity, but of his reasoning.

The friends slept in the cabin that night, as they had not slept for years. Through the little windows the cool sea breeze poured in, laden with health and the balmy odor that brings sleep.

When they awoke the sun was flashing on the sea and transforming into a snow bank the bar about two miles out, where a great, black buoy rose and fell on the waves.

They had a dip in the ocean that sharpened their appetites, and after breakfast they started off with Sam White to fish outside the bar over a spot known to the fishermen of that coast as the "wreck," though there was no wreck on the surface to indicate that ever a wreck had taken place there.

The fishing was all that it had been represented—indeed, the fish bit so fast as to change the sport into hard work and rob it of much of its pleasure. On their return they caught a glimpse of the two female figures beyond the inlet and far up the beach, and Casper Burns waved his hat to them, and the two white handkerchiefs were waved back in reply.

The friends soon grew to like this strange life, and they began to feel that the earth had lots much less desirable than that of a fisherman—but so far they had only played with the ocean in sleep.

They frequently saw the ladies up the beach, and they made an effort to learn who they were, but Sam White either could not or would not gratify them.

Three days before the expiration of their leave of absence Sam White proposed to take them up the shore to a point from which they could get a good view of the New York yacant regatta, which was to have a race.

Alick Freeman, still declaring he wanted to see nothing that might remind him of the world he had left until he returned to it, decided to remain back.

Alick did not long enjoy the part of hermit which he volunteered to play. He strolled along the shore with his fishing pole on his shoulder and cast many an anxious glance in the direction where he had often seen the young ladies, but they did not gladden his sight. No doubt they had gone off to look at the regatta.

About three o'clock in the afternoon Alick Freeman put on his bathing dress and went down the beach. He was a good swimmer, although until this summer all his practice had been in tideless, fresh-water lakes or streams.

He boldly plunged through the rim of surf and swam out for a hundred yards, rising and falling on the swells that rolled in and broke on white shingle.

"I'll lie on my back and let the waves wash me in," said the action to the thought, Alick threw himself on his back—he could float without moving a muscle—and, closing his eyes, he was rocked by the swells, which he imagined were bearing him nearer and nearer to the shore.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and, wondering why he was not thrown among the breakers, as he expected, Alick Freeman turned over on his face and rubbed the water from his eyes.

Instead of being near the shore he was a half mile out, and the tide, on which he had not counted, was bearing him rapidly to sea.

He took in the situation in an instant, and, though realizing the danger, he did not lose his presence of mind. His safety depended on his coolness.

He struck out for the shore, half throwing himself from the water by his powerful strokes, but all in vain. The tide still dragged him out farther and farther toward the foaming bar, on whose white crest tossed the black buoy.

He took off his wide-brimmed straw bathing hat and waved it in the hope that some one might see him; then, anxious to reserve his strength, he again threw himself on his back and drifted with the tide in the line of the buoy. "If I can reach that," he thought, "I can cling to the chains till help comes—if it ever does."

Before entering the line of breakers that marked the bar, he again waved his hat, then threw it away.

He reached the buoy, but the chains that kept it anchored were slimy and covered with seaweed, yet he so placed his body across the chains that he kept his body from drifting farther to sea, and there he hung for what seemed an age.

The sun was setting, and he was losing heart, as well as all strength, when he heard a shrill voice above the thunder of the breakers.

He tried to reply.

The next moment a boat with a single occupant—a girl—at the oars, shot past him and turned toward the buoy.

"Where are you?" she shouted.

"Here! Here!"

Alick let go his hold, and, with a new strength, made for the boat.

The young heroine caught him and helped him on board, and the moment he was safe he fainted.

When he came to he was back on the shore, and Sam White and Casper Burns, who had come up, were chatting him with the aid of a gentleman whom Alick recognized as Julia Fletcher's father.

"Take him up to the house," said Mr. Fletcher, "and then go to your cabin for his clothes. Poor fellow, he had a hard tussle for life."

But the heroine? Well, as the fates would have it, Mr. Fletcher, his wife and his niece, Dora Weldon, had gone off to see the regatta, and Julia, acting under a whim, as the others supposed, remained at home. She saw the swimmer in distress, and interpreted his signals, though she knew not at the time who he was. She ran to the inlet, got a boat and boldly started out with the result already shown.

Next day Alick was himself, and he sent word to the bank about his accident, the result being that he and Casper had an extension of another week. How the time was spent we need not say. Alick owed it to his fair preserver to become her servant, and so he was with her nearly all the time, strolling on the sandy roads and salt-marshy by-ways.

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