

Alec and the Stream of Words and Ideas

for Molly on her 21st birthday

Way back in the woods, a little farther than you are allowed to go, there is a fast moving stream. No one knows where this stream starts, since no one has ever walked backwards to its beginning. Looking upstream, however, you can see mountains that reach into the clouds. On the side of the tallest mountain, there is a thin waterfall, which, you expect, becomes this stream. But you cannot be sure. And though I know almost everything there is to know, even I do not know if that waterfall becomes this stream.

What I do know, however, is that this stream isn't full of fish like most streams. This stream is full of words and ideas.

One day, Alec (who is famous for only ever eating clams), took a new path and ended up not at the lake in the woods, but at this stream. The water looked very refreshing, so Alec decided to fill up his bucket with water. He dipped the bucket into the stream, but the water avoided going into the bucket, so when Alec removed the bucket it was as empty as it was when he started.

Alec said to himself, "That is odd."

He tried again, but, as last time, the water ran around the bucket as if the bucket had an invisible lid.

Alec again spoke to himself, "Very odd."

Alec put the bucket down on the ground and reached his hand into the stream. He could not feel the water at all! When he withdrew his hand, it was as dry as it was before he dipped it into the stream.

Speaking to himself some more, Alec said, "Normally hands get wet when dipped into water."



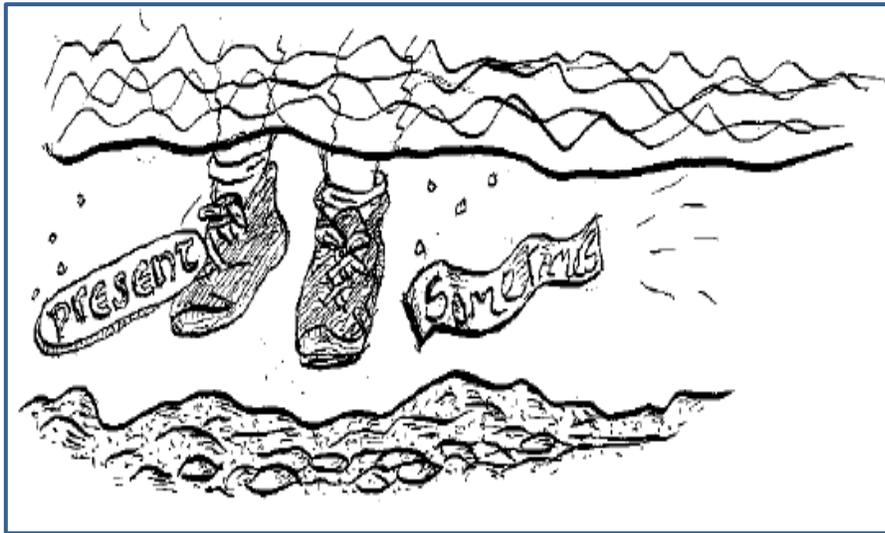
Alec took a stick from the ground and dipped that into the water. While it looked normal, that is, it looked just like a stick being stuck into a stream, when he pulled the stick out, it was as dry as it was before he put it into the stream.

He stuck the stick back into the stream and watched carefully to

see how the water was avoiding the stick, but he saw something ever more interesting: Alec saw the word “fish” swim by the stick.

It swam around the stick just like an actual fish would, but this was the *word* fish and not an actual fish.

“Now *that* is truly odd,” Alec said aloud to no one.



Alec sat on the edge of the stream and, without taking off his shoes or socks, dangled his feet into the stream. As he expected (and as you also expect, I expect) his socks and shoes did not get wet.

However, by sitting on the edge of the stream with his feet in the water, he could watch

the stream carefully to see if any more fish swam by.

Another word swam by. It was not fish. It was tangible. Alec didn't know what that word meant. He decided to look it up when he got home.

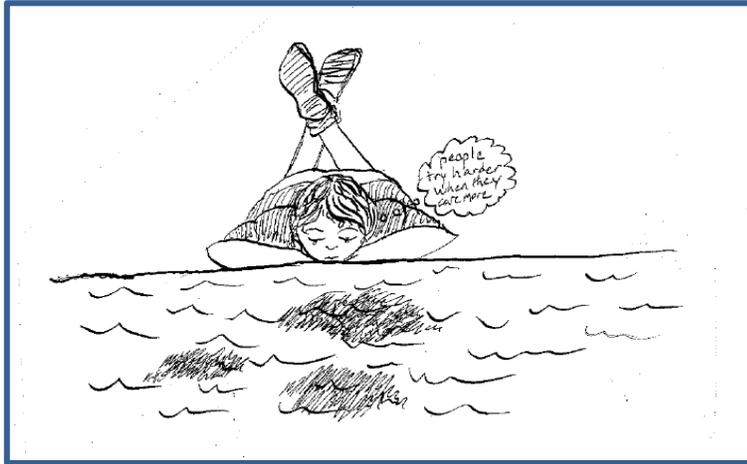
The next word was free, which he did know, though he didn't know which meaning of the word “free” it was supposed to be. The next word was present which also had more than one meaning. The next word was sometimes, which made Alec laugh.

While laughing, he declared, “That's the perfect word to swim by in a stream!”

The next three words were pluck, love, and nobly.

Alec said them aloud as he read them, “Pluck ... love ... nobly.” He smiled. “That could be a sentence.” Alec was excited to see not only which words would swim by, but also their colors, since they were all different colors, as well.

He leaned so close to the stream that, if it were a normal stream, his eyelashes would have gotten wet. Towards the bottom of the stream were not words, but small white and grey blotches that could only be described as “stream clouds.”



Alec looked carefully at one of these stream clouds and had an idea. The idea was: **“People try harder when they care more.”**

He looked at another stream cloud and had another idea: **“Because everyone is different, you should treat everyone differently.”**

Alec said the idea aloud, “Because everyone is different, you should treat everyone differently.” He

agreed. “That’s a great idea.”

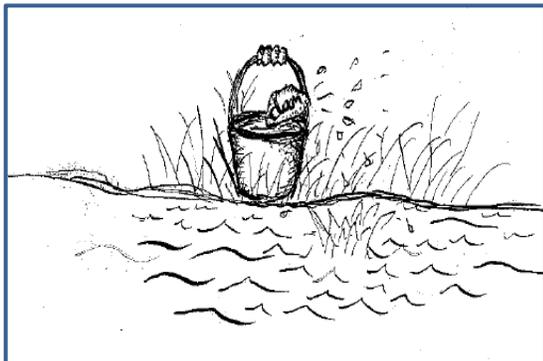
Suddenly, **desist** swam by. He didn’t know what that word meant, but he quickly reached for it. He felt his hand touch it, but he could not grab it. Had he known what the word meant, he likely would not have tried to catch it.

A larger stream cloud floated by and Alec had another idea, one of his best ideas ever: **“Think very hard about what you plan to do next.”**

At this point, Alec’s head was full of ideas, so he decided to focus on catching a word or two, though he hoped it was a word he understood.

appropriate swam past. Alec reached for it without much enthusiasm, since he had no idea what it meant.

He tried harder to catch **deep**, since he knew what that meant, but he missed it.



The next three words he managed to *almost* catch. They were **not**, **deftly** and **pleasing**. He had **pleasing** in his grasp, but it wiggled free. Still, though, it made him happy to *almost* catch that word.

The next word was **clam**, but before he could even reach for it, the word leapt out of the stream and right into his bucket!

Since that wasn’t the same as catching a word by himself, Alec tried again and again and again, missing, but *almost* catching **pinet**, **truth** and **misfortune**. Since he knew what the last word meant, he was very glad he didn’t manage to catch that one.

After *almost* catching **the**, **is** and **askew**, Alec finally caught a word, but he didn't have a chance to read it before he had his hand around it.



He pulled his hand (which was clenched into a fist and, as you expect, completely dry) from the water. When he slowly opened his hand he saw the most beautiful word he had seen in his life: **ever**. It was a color even more beautiful than turquoise and iridescent like mother-of-pearl.

He stood up, walked over to his bucket and dropped **ever** into the bucket next to **clam**.

Then he suddenly felt really sad. These two words were too beautiful to take home. They needed to be in the stream.

So Alec tipped his bucket over the stream. **clam** and **ever** dropped into the stream and quickly swam away. This made Alec very happy and he expected (as you also expect, I expect) that **clam** and **ever** were very happy, too.

Alec picked up his bucket and started walking down the path away from the stream of words and ideas. As he walked, Alec thought very hard about what he would do next. He didn't know what that would be, but he knew he needed to think very hard about it.

the and end