

'SWIMMING THRU THE DESERT'
Treatment for a Novel
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An original story
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A man in his late 30's struggles against a raging sea. Battling the crashing surf, he forces himself up thru the dark water. He breaks up into the air, expelling a mouthful of dry dusty sand, gasping for fresh air. The water instantly evaporates, and the man, suddenly left hanging in midair, drops towards a distant desert, landing on his back with a splash, water cascading away from him. MICHAEL jolts awake, belted into his airplane seat. Above him, an 'Air Turbulence' warning is flashing. He looks nervously at a passing stewardess and she reassures him, in a friendly Australian accent. A little turbulence is part of every journey in life.

In an Adelaide hotel bar, MICHAEL stares at a letter. Behind him, a bold, bright American woman in her late 40's is not letting some Australian men get away with something. Michael watches for a moment, then opens his letter. As he does, an engagement ring falls from the envelope. Reaching down, a woman's hand beats him to the ring. Michael looks up to see AMY, the woman, holding out his ring. He takes it back, placing it in the envelope again. "Do you always propose by mail?" Michael, taken aback by her inquisitiveness, evades the question, politely. Michael opens up enough to say he's going to Perth, but he's stuck in Adelaide. He's from Vancouver, she's from St. Louis. They smile at each other, they're both a long way from home.

On Australia's desolate Nullabour Plain, a battered 1973 Valiant races along an endlessly straight highway. The sun sits high in a blistering blue sky. In the car, Amy is driving and Michael is staring out at the featureless surroundings. "I should have just waited for another plane...", Michael moans, but Amy smiles back, "\$1,100 for a one way ticket to Perth!?! Forget it. Besides, you see more of the country." Michael looks out at the nothingness, and sighs. What is he doing here?

Hours later, Michael is now driving as Amy writes in her diary. Michael glances over, trying to see what she's writing. She shuts the covers. "Don't. It's private." Rebuffed, he gives the diary a final look. Amy screams and flings her arms up in front of her face. Michael looks out the front window as the car smashes into a kangaroo, hurling it up and over the front hood. Frantically, Michael skids the car to a halt. As they sit there in complete shock, the kangaroo gets up and limps off.

The engine is destroyed. Accusations quickly fly and they end up leaning against either side of the car, mad at each other and mad they're trapped in the middle of nowhere.

Under the bright moonlight, Michael struggles to get comfortable in the car. But he keeps shifting around in the back, kicking the front seat where Amy's trying to sleep. Ultimately frustrated, Michael drags his sleeping bag outside and climbs onto the front hood. He stares up at the incredible starry sky. He hears the car door open and a groggy, half asleep Amy climbs up beside

him. Together they stare at the panorama of stars. They both sigh, connecting for a moment. Michael calls out, futilely, for help.

Michael is standing on the surface of a dark ocean. He cups his hand to catch the falling rain. But red sand fills his palms. As he stares down at his filled hands, a low heavy rumbling gets louder. And louder. The sand starts to glow, a strong white light, making Michael squint. He jolts awake. A huge wall of light is bearing down on them in a crescendo of noise. With a scream, Michael pushes Amy off the car, diving after her. The massive road train -three semi trailers linked together- clips the corner of their car, spinning it down the highway. The road train barrels off, not even slowing. Shocked beyond experience, Michael and Amy stare at their battered car. It bursts into flame. They scramble away from the wreck as all their stuff is incinerated.

As the midday sun beats down upon them, Amy calmly shades herself in the burnt shell of her car and tries to read a book. Suddenly a car races by. Michael jumps up, trying, futilely to flag it down.

The next morning, Michael wakes up beside the car. As he stands up to stretch, he notices a small, far off dust cloud, slowly moving across the plain. It's a truck! Waking Amy, they frantically flag to the distant vehicle.

In the truck, WARRICK RAND, a true Aussie bloke who's lived in the Outback for all his forty years, spots Michael and Amy in the distance. He reaches over and knocks his best mate, DERREK, awake. "Ah, leave 'em out there, I'm tired. Stupid bloody tourists..." Derrek tries to go back to sleep. Warrick sighs and, spins the wheel, knocking Derrek off his seat.

Michael and Amy watch the sudden course adjustment. Michael realizes whoever is out there may mean to kill them. You never know. Soon a huge, battered 4x4 rumbles to a halt beside them. Michael gets in front of Amy, holding up a burnt piece of car to protect her. Everyone looks at each other as Warrick steps down out of the cab, holding a shotgun. "Forget 'em, Warrick, let the fools suffer. Beer's gettin' warm.", Derrek calls out, unseen. Amy yells back, angry. What right does he have to leave them? Derrek steps out of the cab, ready for a fight, only to be instantly smitten by Amy.

Quickly reassessing his position, Derrek offers to take Amy back to their town, where she can call for help. But Michael had better stay with their car. Michael timidly agrees, the three hop into the truck and drive off, leaving him completely alone in the middle of nowhere. After a few minutes, the truck returns. Derrek sullenly opens the cab door. He was making a joke. Amy calls for Michael to get into the cab. He does so, with relief.

As Michael tries to get comfortable in the back seat with three unruly cattle dogs, Derrek scowls back at him. What a wimp... Warrick guns the engine and takes off across the desert.

They're late. A massive, blinding sheet of lightning flashes across the sky. Amy is amazed; Michael doesn't see it; but Warrick and Derrek react strongly - lightning is a portent of things to come. As they drive off, an ancient aboriginal man sits away in the distance, watching them.

At a dusty small hotel in the middle of the Outback, a few old men nurse their beers. One old codger wanders in, "Just seen a swarm of mice, dancing out in the street." No one is very surprised by this pronouncement. Very strange things are happening.

Out in the truck, it starts to rain, building quickly to a deluge. Warrick and Derrek are totally astounded. Michael and Amy don't think much about it, rain is just rain. "But rain only happens here once every 75 years." This is a major life-effecting event.

At the hotel, as the rain pounds on the tin roof, families are flowing in with their essential belongings. No one knows what's going to happen, but everyone is congregating at the pub.

The truck struggles up an embankment, slipping and sliding in the new mud. Michael glances out the window and screams. Warrick, seeing a wall of water rushing towards them, guns the truck, freeing it from the mud and launching it up onto the bank, just ahead of the water. "Bloody stupid place for a river..", Derrek says, opening another beer. Michael looks down at his white knuckles. Maybe he should have stayed with the car...

SHEILA, Warrick's wife, after getting dozens of families settled into her hotel, looks out into the storm. Where is Warrick? A look of relief rolls across her face as his truck barrels out of the thick rain and slides to a stop in front of her. Sheila takes Amy to get some dry clothes as Michael sits down at the bar, looking nervously around the completely packed pub; families setting up camp; kids running around screaming and men trying to watch cricket on the television.

Derrek joins his cronies and is busy making Michael the butt of his jokes. 'The fool who tried to drive a burnt-out car across the desert.' Michael calls out, angry, trying to get them to stop, but that's the wrong approach. The mean side of Derrek comes quickly to the surface but Warrick stops things before Sheila and Amy get back. Amy lets it slip that she and Michael are a couple, much to Michael's surprise.

Hours later, the rain is still battering down on the tin roof. The kids are curled up under the pool table as a huge party rages on. Although Amy is having a great time, confident and comfortable in the crowd, Michael is staying back, watching from the bar. A two-way radio behind the bar starts to crackle. Warrick frowns and answers it.

As the rains thunder down, a woman, holding a young child, yells into her radio. A Jeep struggles to stay on a sandbank in the middle of the river. As the banks erode under the surging

water, the jeep shudders and slips forward. Her husband tries to back it up but he's running out of room in all directions.

At the edge of the new river, the townies gaze, impotently, at the Jeep on the shrinking sandbank. No one from the town knows how to swim. Amy quickly grabs a strong rope and starts down into the rushing river. Michael grits his teeth and follows. They swim across and hook the rope onto the Jeep. Warrick quickly starts up his winch. With Michael and Amy hanging on to the back, the Jeep is slowly dragged across the river and up to safety.

Now there's a real reason to celebrate. Amy is working at the bar with Sheila and Derrek is flirting with her. Amy unwittingly gets in the middle of the segregation of sexes in the pub. Men are on one side, women on the other. Amy doesn't notice and joins the men with her beer. But the women, sipping their wine, do notice.

After finishing her beer, Amy grabs Michael's arm, time to dance! She drags him up to the only space for dancing. They are having a great time until Derrek comes up and cuts in. Michael shies back, intimidated by Derrek's vibrancy and charm.

Later, Amy is still dancing and laughing with Derrek but the party is dying down. Families are starting to get their bedding together. Warrick and Michael are moving chairs and tables out of the way. Michael keeps looking over at Amy and Derrek having fun. Finally the old man playing the piano falls onto the floor, snoring. Warrick sighs, "It's official, the party is over."

Wiping her brow, Sheila leads Michael and Amy upstairs to sleep. They react to the double bed offered and start saying quickly that they're fine on the floor, that they'll sleep downstairs, whatever. But Sheila won't hear of it and pushes them into her bedroom with a smile, saying good night.

The door shuts. Amy and Michael stare at each other. Downstairs, Sheila comments to Warrick about what a nice couple Amy and Michael are. Warrick agrees. Amy and Michael lie under the covers as far apart as you can be in a bed. As the rain pummels the tin roof, Amy tells Michael, "We're not a couple." "You said we were." "But we're not. So no nookie, no nothing." Confused, Michael agrees.

Michael is in the middle of the desert in the rain. Amy steps up and hands him a clear glass full of water. He smiles and sips. Sand pours into his mouth. Amy sighs, he doesn't understand. She turns and walks away. Michael wakes up. He slowly turns over and stares at Amy in the faint light. She sighs, like in his dream.

Michael wakes to a bright sunny day, like the rains were just a dream. He is curled up beside Amy. She's awake, writing away in her diary, oblivious. Michael watches her, she is quite intent on what she's writing, to the point of tears. Michael shuts his eyes quickly as the door suddenly opens and Sheila

barges in. Time for a surprise! Moments later, they're on a ridge where all the townies are gathered. In front of them is a massive lake, stretching all the way to horizon, glistening in the sun. A lake that hasn't existed for 75 years.

Everyone stares out at the great mass of water. Suddenly, an unspoken idea comes to everyone, they whoop and go rushing down the hill, towards the shore. In they go, leaping into the water and frolicking like kids. Michael and Amy just watch, astounded, from the top of the ridge. The old aboriginal man wanders up and watches with amusement as the town splashes around. The old man leans over to Michael, "Water in the desert changes things, but this much water.... many, many changes coming..."

Soaking wet and laughing, after a fun time in their ocean, everyone returns to the pub. Michael, desperate to get to Perth, buys an old car from Derrek, for way too much money. It's time to leave, to get on their way, he's lost three days already. After some quick goodbyes, Michael and Amy head off, with Warrick leading them back to the highway in his truck.

They run into more ocean. They go another way and run into more water. Michael is getting really upset. Finally they come to an area where Michael figures they can get across a shallow channel. It seems low enough. Against the recommendations of Warrick and Amy, he drives into the river. All is fine until he's about halfway across. The front of the car drops down, disappearing from sight. Totally stuck. Michael pounds his head against the steering wheel in complete frustration.

Arriving back at the town, with Warrick towing the car, they find that everyone else has left. Parking outside the pub, Michael opens the car door. Water pours out, flowing all over the street. As they try to explain what happened to Sheila and Derrek, the families return. The town is on an island in the middle of the desert!?! Michael freaks out. He's trapped!!

"How long till the water goes down?" No one really knows for sure. Two weeks, two months.... Michael rolls his eyes. At the bar, as Derrek grins at Amy, Warrick warns him to stay away from her, she's Michael's. Derrek laughs at him, "When have I done anything you've asked?" Warrick sighs, it's going to be a long time until everyone is able to go home. Crammed together, they have a tension filled evening, worrying. Amy is content, writing in her diary.

The next morning, Michael goes out and places a rock at the edge of the ocean, tracking the slow, steady decline in the water level. High overhead, a plane crosses the sky. As Michael watches, an idea forms and he runs back to the pub. Using the radio, Michael gets the plane to land. But there's no runway, it's underwater. Michael begs the pilot to try. Outside, the plane comes in, touches down briefly, but there isn't enough flat ground for a runway. Michael runs after the plane as it flies off. "Take me to another town, with a runway!" Derrek suggests he start swimming. Michael HAS to be in Perth in five days.

In bed that night, Amy gets Michael to open up a bit more, he tells her he's got to get to Perth or his fiance will leave without him. Forever. But he can't tell the townies that, because Amy said they were a couple.... Their talk is stopped by the nearby sounds of sex on a squeaky bed. Embarrassed, they can't help but listen.

At breakfast the next morning, Derrek offers to fix Warrick and Sheila's bed, much to their embarrassment. As everyone eats another plain meal whipped up by all the wives, a fax comes in. The aerial view of their ocean with all their homes visible on slight hills. Michael struggles thru the day along with everyone else. Spats flare up all day long. These are people who should spend most of their lives apart.

That night in the pub, as everyone sits around getting on each others nerves, Amy is insulted by the women about her consorting with the men. Amy fights back telling everyone to join the emancipated 20th centry. Michael tries to calm Amy, but she's really angry. Husbands leap to the defense of their wives. Amy turns and storms upstairs. Warrick pushes Michael out the front door before his pub is destroyed.

Later, Warrick finds Michael sitting on the shore. Warrick tries to explain how the women reacted to Amy's different ways of doing things. But it's hard for him as he doesn't really know anything different. They end up sitting in silence.

The next morning, at breakfast, Michael can't get served. No one will talk to him. The men keep knocking into Michael as they pass him. Warrick suggests, strongly, that he eat elsewhere, there's a lot of anger in the pub right now. Frustrated, Michael takes some food from Sheila and goes back up to Amy. They spend the day, Amy writing in her diary, Michael moping around, totally frustrated that nothing can get him out of this awful town.

That night, Michael dreams. Trying to keep the ocean from washing away his sand castle. The old Aboriginal man tells him to wake up and look out the window. Michael wakes up. Amy's still asleep. He goes to the window to look. It is almost dawn. Nothing is happening. Sighing, he tries to make sense of his dream.

Amy's diary is lying on the desk, open. She forgot to close it. Impulsively, Michael reads, watching her cautiously to see if she'll wake up. But as he reads, he becomes oblivious to her, so intent he is on reading what she's written.

Amy stirs, rolls over. Michael ignores her now. He finishes reading and just stares at the page. "Michael?" He turns around, still holding the open diary. Amy is sitting up in bed. He's reading her diary. The one thing she told him not to do. Michael tries to appologize and to sympathize with what Amy has been writing about. But that just makes it worse and after a furious fight, about trust and betrayal, she kicks him out of the room.

Sitting on the pub stairs in the darkness, sipping from a bottle of scotch, Michael stares at the ocean map, taped on the wall. An idea comes to him. He sneaks back into the bedroom, packs his things but stops at the desk. After some introspection, he quickly writes something in Amy's diary, then leaves. Michael walks to the ocean and along the shore till he's out of sight.

The town wakes up. Amy, still angry, joins Sheila and Warrick for breakfast. No one notices Michael is gone. Life continues. Michael keeps walking thru the scorching heat. Occasionally, he stops and checks the map. One wrong turn and he will die.

That night, Amy finds Michael's comment in her diary. Michael has walked off on his own! What a bloody fool. She sits there, trying to decide what to do. As the sun starts to go down, Michael realizes he's in for a pretty big walk. But he continues along the shore.

Amy stands at the edge of the river, looking across at Michael's footprints continuing along the water. Cursing, she strips down into her swimsuit and dives in, swimming along the shore rather than walking.

In full darkness, Michael stops walking, climbs into his sleeping bag and quickly falls asleep. But Amy continues swimming, trying to catch up to him before it's too late.

Michael suddenly wakes up. The old man is squatting beside him, pointing up. The stars are all blurry. Michael looks around. He is underwater. But he can breathe. Fish swim by. Michael is actually at peace. His soul has been wandering for a long time trying to find him. That is why he was brought here.

"Time to breathe..", the old man says. But Michael doesn't want to. Above him, something is agitating the water. "One breath and you will see what it is." Curious, Michael inhales and slowly floats up. His head gently breaks the surface, without making a ripple. Amy swims by, focused, driven. Michael watches her go by. Then he shuts his eyes.

Finishing another drink, Derrek continues expressing his anger at not being able to go with Amy; at not being able to swim; and at Michael for being a complete idiot. Someone says, "Maybe Amy's the fool..." and Derrek lashes out. He drags the guy outside and, before anyone can stop him, beats on the guy furiously. The rest of the town shuffle out to watch, unwilling to get in the middle of Derrek and his temper.

On a desolate beach, Amy wakes up. She stretches, loosening up her muscles. She calls for Michael. Silence. "Doing it again, Amy.", she mutters to herself, gets into the water and swims off.

That same morning, Michael wakes up on a different beach. He sits up, whacking his head on the bow of a strange boat in the sand. A boat in the middle of the desert?! Just then the door to a battered old shack swings open and three mangy, mean cattle

dogs race out, teeth bared, snarling. Michael scrambles up onto the boat to escape the dogs. After a moment, a wizened old man comes out of the shack waving a shotgun. "You've better got a good story or you're lunch for the pups..."

Back at the town, Derrek is sitting on the shore, waiting for Amy to return. One by one, everyone joins him.

Michael sits on the edge of the boat. His fiance is leaving him. She's found someone else. If he can get to Perth, he can see her, prove how much he loves her and get her back. He doesn't know what else to do. Finished, Michael looks down at the old man.

Lowering the shotgun, the old man gruffly demands Michael come down off his boat and come inside. Unsure of what else to do, Michael does. Over a cup of tea, the old man tells the story of his boat. He was stranded with his mother during the last flood and they almost died. He's been building his boat ever since. But he couldn't launch it because he can't sail. Both are trapped by the flood. Michael looks at his map. There's no way he can walk around the ocean in time to get to Perth. He's stuck again.

Meanwhile, as Amy still swims along, she is suddenly caught by a painful cramp. Cursing, she turns over onto her back, floating and trying to massage out the pain while staying afloat. She's pretty far away from shore. She's in trouble.

The old man and Michael knock out the bracing blocks and the boat slides into the ocean, and starts floating off. Michael quickly swims out to the boat and climbs aboard. Looking back, he calls to the old man join him. But the old man can't swim. "Do what you have to do, mate, get to your girl!" Michael waves back then pulls up a battered old sail, catching the slight breeze.

As Amy continues to massage her cramp, a shadow falls over her. Confused, Amy looks up at the bow of Michael's boat. Michael grins down at her. Amy flips out, yelling up at Michael, furious he ran off, forcing her to almost die trying to find him. Chastised, Michael reaches down and pulls her up onto the deck. Amy sits, massaging her cramp, still yelling at Michael. She suddenly breaks down crying, angry and frustrated that she came after him, conflicted because he's all right until she realizes she's on a boat in an ocean in the middle of the desert.

Michael tries to apologize, confessing that leaving was all he could think of to get to Perth in time. He can't lose his fiance, what other choice did he have? Amy frowns, what he did was stupid...she knows he's still under the illusion which is all the more frustrating for her..

As they get close to the town, Michael hears a sickening creaking and groaning. He looks down to see the floor boards splitting open and water gushing in. The boat suddenly shudders and starts to list. On shore, everyone watches as Amy and

Michael leap clear and swim to shore. The old aboriginal man walks up and they all stare out at the sinking boat together. Michael screams out in frustration, he's trapped back where he started!

As everyone starts up to the pub, Derrek comes over to Michael and gives him shit for walking off and making Amy come after him. Michael forgot he's part of a couple when he walked off, and has to apologize. Michael defends his actions and Amy, much to his surprise, almost standing up to Derrek. "Don't mess with Amy, or else I'll drag your heart out thru your mouth.", Derrek snarls and walks off. Intimidated, Michael stares after him. An idea hits him. They can drag the boat out of the water and repair it! He tells everyone his plan. They all think it's a stupid idea, involving physical labour, and head off to the pub. Michael is stuck, again.

Amy goes up to the pub and convinces everyone that the boat will enable them to get to their farms, to check on their livestock. Everyone realizes she's right. Michael is still sitting on the beach when all the towns truck roll over the ridge. Quickly, ropes are attached to the boat and it is pulled up onto the beach and braced. Quickly, Michael takes stock of the boat. It's in really bad shape. A lot of work is needed to fix it. The men don't like this idea. Work?

While the men are working on the boat, the town women sit up on the ridge and talk to Amy about what her life is like in St. Louis. The town women realize they're really taken advantage of by their men. So is Michael at the moment as the men mostly stand around playing foreman to his worker, but he doesn't care, the sooner the boat's fixed, the sooner he's out of there.

One day, Michael overhears Derrek telling someone how gorgeous Amy's long curly hair is. Michael looks up at Amy, chatting with the women. But when Derrek poses the question to Michael, he dismisses it, hair is hair. But as Derrek continues to talk, Michael looks over. Derrek's right, she does have gorgeous hair, he'd never noticed before.

Although the boat is being repaired quickly, Michael realizes they've run out of good wood. It's over, finished, they've failed. But the townies realize one guy has just finished a new shed, his pride and joy. They ask him nicely to take his shed apart to fix the boat. He's horrified, forget it! One by one, everybody tries to convince him to give up his shed. During the delay, Michael gets Amy to let him cut her hair off, convincing her that it's time for a change, for everyone. Her doubts about her great hair are dismissed - it's not the hair, it's the person within. Not knowing Michael's true motivation, Amy believe him. He really does a number on Amy's hair, cutting it even shorter than his. But it backfires when the town men see her. They are all knocked over by her new look. Meanwhile, Derrek finally get the guy to give up his shed, with only minor threats of major violence.

Work continues on the boat now that there is a new supply of wood. Amy's haircut is an instant trend. Michael is forced to

cut Sheila's hair, just like Amy's. At night, as Michael literally collapses into bed, Amy watches with subtle pride, he's cute when he likes what he's doing.

After a few hard days work, the boat is almost ready, but the sails are in ruins. The men tell their wives to make new sails. Quick. But the women suddenly decide changes are needed in their town before any sails are made. Equality, liberation, the works. The men are stunned by this development. Michael is again frustrated, why can't anything just go smoothly for him?

That night at the pub, the men end up in a huge fight. The old codgers don't want to make any concessions to the women. The status quo will remain. Michael is desperately trying to get a consensus. The women just relax across the pub, enjoying the dinner they made for themselves. Michael begs the women to make his sails, but they're not interested. There is no resolution by midnight and everyone settles down to a tension filled sleep.

Michael and Amy lie in bed, as Michael expresses is continuing frustration. Amy tries to get him to relax with a back rub, but he's got too much pent up energy. He's got to get to Perth! But is that the right thing to do? He's a mental mess and Amy won't help him, she can't because he won't let go of his past.

The next day, as Michael waits in nervous anticipation, the men - except for the old codgers - agree. Michael is thrilled. The women head off up the dune, victorious, to make the sails. One calls back that the men better get started on dinner as the women will be busy all night on the sails. The men remain on the shore as the laughter fades away. They all look at each other, just what have we agreed to?

The men and the women working together. Men helping with the sewing and women helping Amy with the final boat repairs. Michael is doing more haircuts, as all the women decide it's time for more changes. Not that the men have anything to say about it.

That night, Warrick and Sheila attempt to have sex but their squeaky bed wakes everyone up and they have to stop. Outside on the porch, the old codgers conspire. That bloody boat's ruined our lives.... Inspired by liquor, they head down to the boat, to wreak their vengeance.

Amy awakes with a start. Sitting calmly by the bedroom window is the old aboriginie. "He will wake up, soon... You are helping." He smiles at her. "I can't help anymore..", Amy responds, sitting up. There's a noise outside and the aboriginie glances out the window. Amy frowns and goes over. In the distance, the old codgers are trooping over the ridge, axes in hand. Waking Michael, they race out to the boat, the rest of the town following. At the crest of the ridge, Michael screams, stopping the dogers from burying their axes in his precious boat. Warrick holds Michael back as the women take the old codgers, their anger now spent, and pull them back into the town group. As everyone heads back to bed, Michael settles in on the desk to guard over his baby. Amy sighs and heads back to

town.

The next morning, the women troop down the dune, carrying the new sails. They arrive to a opulent breakfast feast, created by the men. Emancipation has occurred. After attaching the new sails, it's time to launch the newly repaired boat.

The boat is pushed down into the water and floats perfectly. Amy raises up a sail and they sail off. Michael is euphoric until the boat suddenly jolts to a crashing stop. Michael and Amy are tossed to the deck. On shore, the celebrations stop suddenly as everyone looks out at the now halted boat. Amy hauls down the sail as Michael scrambles up to the bow and looks overboard.

Michael hops down off the boat and, from the shore, appears to stand on the surface of the water. He starts cursing the gods. The boat is stuck in the bottom. The water level of the ocean has dropped too much. The boat, and Michael, aren't going anywhere.

Amy tries to calm him, because the last plane out was actually yesterday. He blames even more, but she thought he knew.

Furious at Michael for blaming her for everything wrong in his life, Amy swims back to shore. Michael remains on the boat. When she tells everyone what happened there is a moment of disappointment and then everyone goes back to celebrating. Amy realizes they're all celebrating because they got the boat to float, they succeeded, and it doesn't matter that the boat is now stuck for the next 75 years. Everyone troops back to the pub for another celebration party.

Amy calls for Michael to come in and join the party. He yells back, "Get out of my life, I didn't ask you to help me, but you did anyways. Now look what you've done!" Amy looses it, after being blamed for all Michael's misfortunes. "Get on with enjoying life as it happens around you, and quit having such a terrible time!" When he doesn't respond to that, she gives up on him. "You're not going to drag down my life!", she yells, stomping off.

Amy storms into the pub, still angry. Downing a couple stiff drinks, she drags Derrek up onto the dance floor. Sheila turns to Warrick, something is going on that isn't good. Michael charges into the pub, soaking wet. He walks up to the bar and asks Warrick to help him pull the boat out again. Before Warrick can tell him to forget the boat, Michael sees Amy and Derrek, kissing on the dance floor. Without a word, Michael turns and walks out of the pub. The town women can't figure out why Amy's dancing so closely with Warrick, if she's married to Michael. It seems Michael and Amy's story has gotten more complicated over time. Concerned, Warrick goes out to find Michael.

Michael is down in the water at the bow of the boat, trying to get it free. Warrick comes out to talk to him, carrying a couple beers. He doesn't want to talk, he's lost his girl in

Perth.

Warrick calls out that Amy is getting really drunk with Derrek. Michael says he doesn't care, because they never were a couple! Or is everyone too stupid to notice this?!? Warrick, insulted, storms back up the ridge. Warrick tells Sheila the news, Amy and Michael have been lying to them all along. Bastards....

Michael is still in the water, cursing the boat, the ocean and Australia in general, when he is shook out of his thoughts by a door slamming and people laughing. Amy laughing, Derrek laughing. The two stumble into the street and kiss furiously and passionately against a car. Back at the bar, Warrick and Sheila stand in the doorway watching.

The distant sounds of the party continue as Michael struggles to get the boat free. He's as stuck as the boat. Amy and Derrek stumble up the stairs to her room, shedding their clothing between kisses and swigs of scotch.

The next morning, Amy wakes up in her bed, still with Derrek. He's out like a light. She realizes that Michael's stuff is gone. She freaks out. Michael's walked off again! Everyone is woken up and rush out to find Michael once more. As they race along the shore, Michael steps out of the cabin on the boat, curious. He's moved out there, safe in the middle of the ocean. Everyone's pissed at him for scaring them, again but Michael doesn't care.

Everyone troops back. While Amy and Sheila are making breakfast, Sheila tells Amy a story. At the same time, Warrick is telling a slightly different version to Michael at the boat. It seems before Warrick and Sheila were married, they had a falling out and Derrek quickly stepped in and charmed Sheila. It got Warrick to realize how much he cared for Sheila and he had to fight Derrek to get her back. Amy is appalled, Sheila let herself be fought for, like a piece of meat?!? No, she just let them fight to salvage their pride, she knew that being with Derrek was a mistake. And Derrek knew it too. But Michael and Amy both aren't listening.

That night, Michael lies out under the stars, looking for the constellations Amy pointed out to him while they were stuck on the highway. He sighs, he's really truly trapped.

While Amy and Derrek are having sex in her bedroom, Warrick and Sheila realize that the noise from their bed will be masked by the noise from the other bedroom. They quickly hop into bed. Afterwards, they talk about what to do about Michael and Amy and Derrek. Warrick decides on a new approach. Meanwhile, Amy is realizing she doesn't have a lot in common with Derrek, although he's got all sorts of plans for the two of them.

Warrick storms out to beat some sense into Michael. Down in the water, Michael is still trying to rock the boat free. Charging into the water, Warrick tries to drag him to shore. Michael fights back and, with one final push, the boat breaks free. Michael climbs aboard and pulls up a sail. "Forget this town,

I'm out of there, once and for all!", Michael cries as the boat sails forward and grounds out, again. Michael bursts out laughing at the complete futility of everything. On the shore, Warrick gives up and leaves as Michael drops to the deck, emotionally beaten.

Suddenly, the old Aboriginal man is above him. Michael confronts him, demanding answers. But what he gets is silence. Defeated, Michael sits down. "So much water," the old man says after a while, "..so many changes. Everyone is pulled to the water, everyone finds themselves drawn to the water. Some more than others." He looks at Michael. "Water is liquid, ever changing, ever shifting. Your body is liquid, but is your mind?" Michael stares out, thinking. He turns back to find the old man gone.

Michael goes back to the bedroom to talk to Amy. But Derrek is there, sitting on their bed, while Amy's in the shower. What starts out as a talk ends up with Michael getting angry and challenging Derrek. Derrek quickly agrees to a fight. Right now. Before Michael can say anything, Derrek pushes him out the bedroom door. Together, they go downstairs into the pub. "Fight Time!"

Instantly, the townies shift the tables, creating a space for the fight. Michael is rather startled by the sudden transformation from pub to boxing ring. The townies quickly place bets. Up stairs, Amy comes out of the shower. Derrek's gone and the bedroom door is open.

As Derrek climbs into the ring, he sees Amy. He gives her a cocky thumbs up, full of swagger. Michael catches Amy's eye. He gives her the same cocky gesture, but she shakes her head and looks away. Michael is confused, Derrek sees this interplay and grins, thinking it's a sign in his favour. Michael watches Amy as she crosses the room and leaves the building.

Michael realizes there's something wrong with his logic as Warrick rings a bell and the fight begins. He realizes that Amy doesn't want bravado, she doesn't want macho posturing, she just wants someone who will say that he cares. He has to get out of the fight. And fast.

As Derrek starts towards him, Michael looks wildly around the crowd. There is no way out. Suddenly, he locks eyes with the old aboriginal man. Holding up a glass of water, the old man smiles and gently pours it out onto the floor. Michael focuses completely on the water flowing around, searching out the lowest ground, making way for the uneven textures of the floor, trickling down thru the cracks. Giving way to larger obstacles but getting to where it wants. Michael looks up but the aboriginal is gone. He has to duck as Derrek tries to separate his head from his shoulders. Michael hops back and runs over to Warrick, telling him to stop the fight. Warrick won't, Michael has to physically fight Derrek if he wants to win Amy. Michael turns to face the charging Derrek, his arms down, defenseless. Derrek swings. But he stops, his fist inches from Michael wincing face.

Opening his eyes, Michael stares at Derrek's powerful, scarred knuckles. The room is silent. Michael looks at Derrek, "I'll fight you, but not with fists. With knowledge. A fight of brains. Twenty questions from the crowd." Michael stands and waits as Derrek considers this. Then, slowly he drops his fist.

Michael asks for the first unbiased question. What major aeronautic event happened in 1783? Michael stares at the old woman who gave the question. This is going to be harder than he thought. He answers, the first hot air balloon ascent. The crowd cheers and Warrick marks it down on the darts chalkboard. Derrek brusquely calls for the next question. In Greek mythology, who was Jason's father? Michael stares, mouth agape, at the difficulty of the question. Derrek smiles and answers, Aeson. A mark for Derrek. Another cheer.

Outside, Amy sits in the sand on top of the ridge, staring out at the beached boat. She hears the cheering and, thinking it must mean some sort of powerful hit, sighs. What's she going to do?

The two pace around the rings, feeling each other out. So far, ten questions, five correct answers each. What's in a Rob Roy? 2 parts Scotch, 1 part Vermouth, Derrek answers. Michael's eyes light up. Warrick shakes his head. Scotch, Vermouth and Bitters!!, Michael calls out. Right! A huge cheer goes up and Derrek furiously smashes a chair against the barricade of tables.

Outside, Amy has turned around to face the pub. She hears the smashing of the chair and the cheers of the crowd. She shakes her head again, neither of the men understand her at all. Sheila comes out of the pub, and runs up the ridge. "You've got to come down and see!" But Amy isn't going to condone the violence and won't come. "But there isn't any violence!", Sheila exclaims.

They enter the pub as Derrek answers a question right. Amy doesn't understand what is happening. They are moving around in the ring like they are sparring, but no one is hitting. They're fighting for her but Michael changed it into a battle of brains!

It's all tied up. The last question. Everyone looks around the room, wondering who will ask the final question. Amy steps forward. Michael and Derrek look at her, neither knew she was in the room. She looks at them. Last bets are placed. "What are you feeling, right now?", she asks.

Michael stares at her. Not the kind of question he expected. What is he feeling right now? Suddenly he sees the old aboriginal man looking over Amy's shoulder at him, smiling. "What am I feeling? I feel nothing, I feel everything." Confused silence. Derrek whoops, "What kind of an answer is that?! I know what I'm feeling! I'm feeling my victory!!" The crowd goes wild but Amy looks at Derrek, sadly, and shakes her head. Amy smiles at Michael and walks out of the pub as

everyone mobs him. Derrek drops to the floor, he's lost. In loosing everything, Michael won.

While being congratulated by the townies, Michael realizes Amy's gone. He pushes thru the crowd and out onto the porch. Amy is standing, looking at the desert. As Michael steps up beside her, she turns and lashes out at him. How dare he think she can be fought for! She is not a possession to be bartered! Stupid, stupid, stupid! Michael tries to explain but Amy pushes him off the porch. Derrek is watching as Michael walks off down the street. With a grin, Derrek slides up to Amy, taking her in his arms. And she gives it to him, too. She spent fifteen years in a controlling marriage and no one understands! He can get the hell away, too. She will do only what SHE wants, without anyone's input. Derrek staggers back, mentally sucker-punched.

Derrek and Michael end up drinking together. Friends at last, equals. Neither are really dejected, more so resigned. They both tried and both failed. Both single. Ah well. They were both single when they first met. That night, Michael sleeps on the boat, contentedly. Amy stands at the bedroom window, looking out at the receding ocean and the boat. She shuts her diary.

Michael on the boat. He wakes up and Amy is standing over him. Another dream, but where's the old man? "This is a moment, Michael, nothing more. Never expect more than what we have right now. We don't know how long this moment will last, but as soon as you start thinking about how long you want it to last, it will stop. Be in the present with me, for however short it is, or in your mind alone." Michael realizes it isn't a dream. They make love, no expectations, just the moment, under the stars.

Footsteps in the sand. As each shoe lifts up, the footprint fills with water. Michael climbs up onto the beached boat. He can see nothing but desert. Slowly raising his arms, the ocean returns, filling up, raising the boat off the sand. Michael smiles.

In the morning. Amy wakes up alone in her bed. The flowers have died in the desert. It is over. Amy and Sheila have a tearful goodbye in the completely empty street. She climbs into Warrick's truck. They stop on the ridge and gaze at the boat, beached on the sand. Michael is standing on deck, looking out. Warrick says Michael is staying behind to help build a new school for the community. Amy smiles. "Maybe I'll stop in later."

"Just come back before it rains again..." Warrick says and puts the truck into gear. As they drive off, Derrek watches from the door of his garage. The old aborigine appears beside him and pats his shoulder, comfotingly.

THE END

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