

# RE:AL

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*Mr. And Mrs. Nowhere*  
by Jonathan Sapers

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Catherine beat her hand against the porch door, trying not to sound frantic. Inside, a sleepy-looking couple sat on an impossibly white couch. Catherine's hands had mud on them, her hair was dirty. Wake up! Wake up! she wanted to cry. Don't scare them. She beat her hand against the door again. What would she say if they came? The man came smiling as if he thought she were playing some kind of joke. Help, call someone. We're stuck down on the bar. The tide's coming up.

"My Margie is in the truck," she said, gesturing over her shoulder.

He blinked at her for a moment and she wondered if he were drunk. Then his features lurched into action. "O.K.," he said, and disappeared into another room. The woman stood and smiled warmly, stretching without reaching like a cat.

Catherine blinked. A warm fire burned in the large fireplace. I'll just sit, rest, forget. The silence and the light and the crackle. Suddenly, an older woman came running, the sleepy man's mother.

"Come on," she said. Catherine blinked.

"Come on," the mother said. But she must go. Her little life was down the hill, not here. She followed. Outside, a station wagon was already idling. Fancy car, lots of electrical gadgets. Like Mim's cousin's. The woman drove fast. Like the stock cars. Down the long driveway, back toward the beach.

Now the night reminded her that it had been beautiful. Even dark, the sky was backlit peacock blue. What had lured them down in the first place. Lured Sam.

The fancy car took the bump next to the warning signs like a horse over a gate and bounded down towards the truck. She wanted to scream "Don't!" but she was in the warm room trance. Everyone would be stuck down here. Me and the lady and Sam and Margie. But she didn't. She couldn't. And it was O.K. The woman seemed to know what she was doing. Margie wasn't crying.

"Come on, get your baby and your husband and come in the

car.”

Catherine wanted to say, “No, I’ll just sit here”—something smart—but she didn’t dare. Water had already reached the truck’s front tires. She heard Margie cry and was off running, the same way she had run up the hill toward the house so fast, faster than she’d ever run in her life. She pulled open the cab door and grabbed the baby from Sam’s arms. Sam just sat there. She could tell what he was waiting for. He was waiting, waiting for the chance she wouldn’t give him any more because of the baby, to have a cigarette. He had a cigarette after everything, anytime, anyplace, like a period at the end of a sentence.

“Grab the carrier!” she yelled and he was roused and passed it to her. “Come on,” she said, and raced for the lady’s car. As she climbed back in, she heard running steps. The sleepy man came up out of the darkness. He stopped and put his hands in his pockets and stood next to Sam. Sam drew out a cigarette. They would attempt to push. They would try. They would stand around. Maybe the sleepy man had the strength of—he didn’t look like he could be all that strong at all. The lady drove the car up the road out of danger fast as a boat.

“I called Jerry Bigelow,” she said, when they landed safely back outside the house. Catherine had never heard Mr. Bigelow referred to as Jerry. She nodded politely. What would Bigelow care about their little truck? Except to impress these people. She now felt the house looked bigger than before when all she had seen was the room with the light. She felt embarrassed standing in the lady’s driveway as if she were naked in a church. She hugged her Margie.

“There’s no way,” Sam said. He switched off the engine and got out of the truck and looked at the man Catherine had brought, who had been pushing, not accomplishing much. The water encircled the front wheels. Sam sucked in hard on his cigarette. They shouldn’t have come down here. Shouldn’t have come out at all. They should have stayed home and watched television. There was a good show on.

“I just bought it last Friday. I don’t suppose you can do anything with a truck after something like this happens.”

“No, no, Jerry Bigelow’ll be here. He’s supposed to be coming.” The man’s voice was flat, without accent or origin. He was like a ghost. A man from nowhere. Nothing came down the road into the darkness or was coming. What did Bigelow want with his truck? He

knew Sam couldn’t pay for towing. The water gurgled as it encircled the last of Sam’s truck’s tires.

“God, it comes quickly,” said Mr. Nowhere.

“This must happen a lot.”

“Where are you from? Don’t you know about the tide?”

“Sure. I didn’t believe it could happen like that. Not so quickly.” Sam threw his cigarette into the oncoming water. It fizzled on the surface and sank. Take that too.

Bigelow’s big truck rumbled down the road and careened toward them stopping short at the bump. That was fast for Bigelow. Service. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad after all.

“Here,” Mr. Nowhere said. They walked up the hill.

Sam pulled open the passenger side of the cab. Bigelow looked past him.

“Can’t do it, too late, I’m sorry,” Bigelow said. How did he know? “The good news is, you can clean her out with a garden hose. Why don’t you give me the keys.” Bigelow reached his hand toward Sam without looking at him. Sam reached in his pocket for the keys it had taken him a year to get. His for a weekend.

“When was the last low?” Sam didn’t know and Bigelow knew it, he was rubbing it in. Rubbing it in that Sam had lived his whole life beside water and took it for granted. Couldn’t stand it, in fact. Wanted to be in computers, or telephone marketing, move to a big city, like New York. He looked at Bigelow blankly.

“It’s nine now . . .,” Bigelow hinted.

“About six,” Mr. Nowhere said, filling the silence.

“I think it’s safe to say I could come get it at three a.m. or I could come again at seven, right?”

“Mmhhh,” Mr. Nowhere mumbled, as if this were an everyday occurrence, as if he weren’t agreeing that Sam’s truck could afford to spend the night underwater and be completely ruined, just so old Bigelow wouldn’t risk his tow truck, as if Sam hadn’t just lost his truck which meant everything to him, but wouldn’t fetch the cost of its own rescue. These people are crazy. But he didn’t say it. Shouldn’t say it. Wouldn’t.

“Seven O.K.?” Sam realized. Almighty Bigelow was addressing him. “Better give me the keys.”

“O.K.”

He stepped down. Bigelow's headlights lit up the warning sign: TIME and TIDE WAIT FOR NO MAN! Not even you, Sammy. Ride across the ocean floor! Sam realized he had his shoes off and mud on his pants.

"I might have done it," Mr. Nowhere said, wistfully, considering Sam's truck.

They walked up to the house in the darkness, Sam thinking only about the money, not anymore about the beautiful night or Catherine's hair. They offered him to come in and he came and sat down on a white chair, protesting that he might leave a mark. Catherine was already there, balancing a cup of coffee on her knee, like a lady in church, looking at Sam as if he were a visitor. She handed him the baby and went in search of a bottle. He didn't want to feed the baby now, only get home and have day start and start earning money again. They would need money. The baby reached for the cross around his neck. The room seemed warm, too warm. Their rescuers' faces were much too bright. Like the dancing people you see in the licks of a fire if you stare at it too long.

"When do they burp on their own?" Catherine was asking Mrs. Nowhere. She could always say something about babies. He wanted to rush the baby through her bottle but didn't dare. It would all be over soon. After what seemed like an age, the baby decided she was done.

"You people probably want to be getting home," said Grandma Nowhere. "Here, I'll take you." Turning us off like television.

"Mother nature got the best of me tonight," Sam said, genially.

"And you'll get the best of her another day," said Mrs. Nowhere, hopefully.

At dawn, Sarah stirred, waking Harry. The sky was a coral blue. A truck rumbled down the road outside their window and seagulls flew up in a panic, sealing off sleep.

"We are lucky," Sarah murmured.