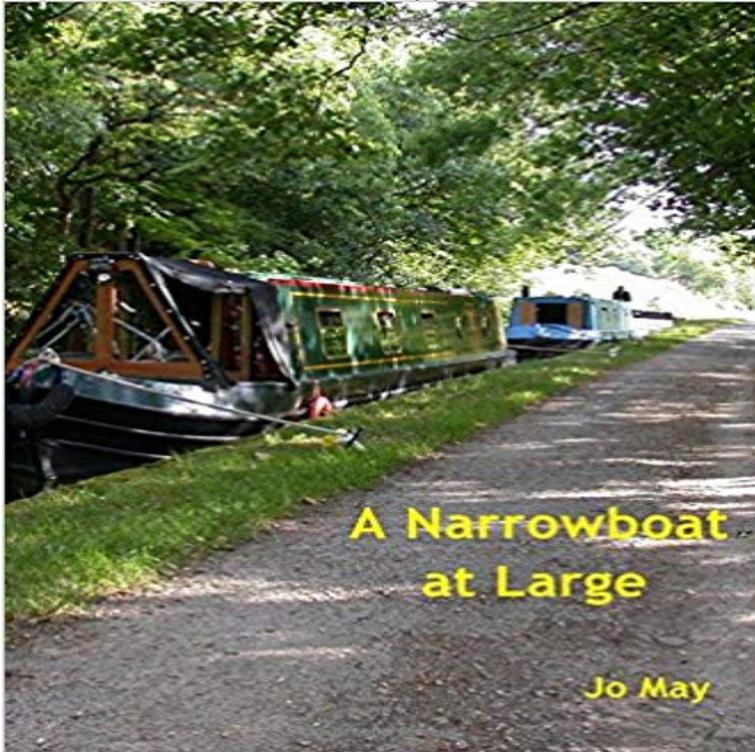


## A Narrowboat at Large



So why did we take to the water? My wife can't swim, the dog hates it and I prefer beer. Financially we were afloat and we lived in a perfectly decent house until my wife came up with the zany idea of living on a boat. I'd just got home from work, via the pub, when Jan asked me to watch a video while she prepared our frugal meal. I watched a pair of old fogies trundling along a canal in the rain on a narrowboat. You can imagine my reply when she asked if I fancied emulating the sodden wrinklies and taking to the water. She's a lady of vision and determination (she married me after all) but this was elevating madness to a whole new level. Jan's oncologist had her a few years previously that she probably wouldn't see the new millennium, so she had a different perspective about the future than many people. Despite lots of huffing and head-shaking, twelve months later we had sold a perfectly respectable house, given up a job that kept us in cornflakes and moved onto a metal hole less than a tenth the size of our house excluding garden. It was the 4th July 2003 independence day. We knew nothing about narrowboats their workings, waterways lore and how we would cope being cooped up together particularly when it's minus five and the nearest shop is miles away. We had a mountain to climb which you can only do by using locks, and we'd never done a lock. A more accurate analogy is shooting the rapids because our venture took on a life of its own and we were washed down stream on a tide of enthusiasm and ignorance. We had to make it work or the people who had laughed and scoffed would be proved right we really were mad. Well, make it work we did, and were still boating twelve years on. It's marvelous and it possibly saved Jan's life.

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