THE BARCOO RESCUE

Clean night without a whisk of wind to flicker the firelight's flame
the squatter dozed from a days hard work and his wife asked was I to blame.
"I heard you tried teaching old Des to swim 'neath the gums by the Barcoo pool,
and were your efforts met with a win? For he came back and swore like a fool!"

"I barely survived myself" I grinned, "He sank in my arms like a stone,
surfaced white as a sheet after strangling me, how's he take that boat out alone?"
"Last year these stars shone bright," she said, "but a breeze set the embers aglow,
for the Barcoo had stirred from its slumber deep and the still waters started to flow."

"For hundreds of miles to the North the rains had pelted for days on the plain,
and a mighty big flood was headed down here, to the green channel country again.
We shifted our stock to the higher ground along with their feed and our gear,
for we could be waitin' six weeks or more before road or air-strip were clear.

All night water rose with muted roar, then swept 'cross the plain like a tide,
an hour before dawn the radio called, from the woman on the other side.
"My man's away droving out West," She cried , "My kids to the rooftop I've borne,
but the water is washing the house stumps away, the place will be gone by the dawn."

"Then a saddle slapped hard on our Clydesdale's back, and a snort as the girth pulled tight,
Des kept the old boy for billy tea rides, but he'd do more than that, tonight.
The pair walked down to the floodplain edge, thick black waters gathered them in,
my light showed them swim to the bank for boat, tied onto a red gum limb.

There he left the old horse and his boat burbled on, as great logs bore down all around,
he twisted and dodged and bumped on through, until their veranda he found.
The Clydie held on for his owners return, as the waters rose over the bank,
till he swam to keep up his place on the lead, he wouldn't leave Des till he sank."

"Then the generator died and the light's last glare lit the boat, tied back to the tree,
but midst the swirling suck of the waters no sign of my man did I see.
Alone in the dark, I walked past the edge, strong current pulled hard at my legs,
then a monster splashed up with streaming snout 'twas the horse, two kids, mum and Des."

Quietly she sat and sipped at her tea, while her man snored away at her side,
the fire flared up and I saw that she shook, but one final question I plied.
"So what of the TV and paper reports, children saved by a man who can't swim?"
"We don't call that news, just helping a friend, and tomorrow try not to drown him!"