

Excerpt from *My Heart is a Hall*, written by Finegan Kruckemeyer. Not to be presented without official licensing. To enquire, please go to: finegankruckemeyer.com

A magical realist narrative, accompanying a movement piece.

When the clouds came, people shut themselves inside. They put rolled-up towels along the windowsills and at the foot of every door. They played board games and listened to music, and drank beer, and laughed about this rain and the goodness it would do to their gardens.

But the rain kept falling. The dams filled and the roads became fluid as mud washed its way along them. The old bridge at the edge of town gave up its groaning and was swept away. People began to worry, then, as they listened to the wind howl, as they watched the trees lean sideways outside. A night settled that didn't seem to end. The clouds sat low in the sky and the heavens poured.

It was sometime into the third day that the water got into the Hamilton's cellar. It found its way through a weak sidewall and began filling the place. Soon it was bubbling up between the floorboards and the family knew what came next. They took the things they loved, and made for the hall.

Also in the valley, the Chesapeakes and Murphys watched as the rain broke through the reinforcements and entered where it wished. They armed themselves with photos too, with heirloomed china and letters from the war, and joined the Hamiltons in the one strong building on the hill.

Over the next two days, high or low ceased to matter as the flood climbed and overtook everything. The valleys became rivers, the flatlands lakes, the low rises turned into underwater contours of an inland sea that was being invented before the townsfolk's eyes. Finally even the dwellers in the highest homes made their peace and set off on foot.

All came to the hall.

Inside was warm and a constant fire burned. Loaves were sliced by the hundred and toast cooked. The small children ran around in great, unceasing circles. The teenagers hung out in the backroom and talked about one day leaving this town. The rain smacked against the windows in broad, unforgiving streaks.

Until the point came when the entire town was submerged and the walls of the hall creaked and groaned as water lapped at the windows. Outside, bits of farm machinery floated by and millions of apples bobbed, torn by waves from the branches of broken trees. Inside, all worked out the ratio of oxygen to lungs and feared for their remaining days. Scared, they called a meeting, in a large circle of chairs in the middle of the main room. And they decided.

They went to the backroom that held equipment used by the road crews, and found the vats of tar used for patch jobs on the bitumen. Then with many rollers they covered the floor with it, pouring the liquid so it coagulated between every floorboard – a perfect, waterproof pitch. For a day they all sat on the small stage as below them, the floors dried.

Then once done, a team went down to the cellar and stared up. Above them were the floorboards and they tarred this side too. Another day they sat and waited.

Finally, with floor completed, they took tools and descended the cellar stairs. Jimmying nails long held in the wood, crowbarring at foundations, they began to prize the hall footings away from the cellar walls, as the timber groaned around them. Water began to pour in the gaps made in the structure and they worked quickly, until only the smallest wood held hall to cellar. As one, they ran back upstairs and through the door. This they nailed tightly shut and tarred as well.

Then all the townsfolk (except the eldest sat with babies in their arms), they ran from side to side, causing the hall to tip ever so slightly left then right, causing the final lumber to groan and tear away from its anchored peers, causing the hall itself to finally disconnect from its foundations (laid in 1947) and with a surreal feeling that made even the bravest shiver, the hall it broke away and slowly, slowly floated up to the top of the newly-made ocean.

The families stood at the windows and looked out at this alien landscape, at the highest leaves of the tallest trees sitting on the water's surface, at the utes and tractors bobbing, wheels up. The tip of the church spire poked out, a last ironic homage to a now absent god, and still the rain it fell. Some clever kids found the road signs that the council had stored out back from when the speed limits in town were changed, and stuck these out the windows and used them as oars. With four to a sign, and 22 signs sticking out of 22 windows, the town rowed their hall across the ocean, the floor letting not a drop in, the tin roof keeping them dry.

For forty days and forty nights, the town floated, living on buttered toast and urns of tea, having meetings and getting in arguments and falling in love, all the things that people do when forced together for a long time. Occasionally, in the distance they'd see other towns, in other halls, with the same idea, and row across and swap food or stories.

Until the hour came when the rain... stopped, and the clouds parted, when the sun shone through and the top of the ocean sparkled. Slowly, the earth absorbed the vast, vast quantities of water, slowly the depths began to lessen, slowly trees revealed themselves branch by branch, hills came back into view. And finally, with a reassuring thud, the day came when the hall touched land once more, landing in the middle of a field.

And the town was many miles away now, currents and oars having taken the people off on a journey. And the town was not even really a town now – the houses were sodden, the fences broken, the road departed, the cattle and crops no more. But the townsfolk, the people who are really what a town is anyway, they remained. And so did their photos and their letters, their medals and reminders and most important things. The objects that hold memories, and the people who hold objects, and the hall that holds them all.

This had survived, and now – in a new place, with a new mission – the hall doors opened, the people emerged, and the task of building a new town around their old hall, it began.
