

Finegan Fine

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This is a tale about a houseboat living in the Aftertime.

The pole shift has happened and the waters have risen several hundred feet due to melting poles and glaciers and the heating of the ocean bottom. The rising sea level is happening slowly but steadily, forcing survivors to relocate when they discover the flood is not receding.

Finegan Fine has found a niche in this new world by running a trading boat along the new coastline and up and down ever broadening rivers.

Introduction

The main theme is the sociological adaptation of the populace to the lack of rescue and rising waters after the cataclysms. Finegan meets survivors from all walks of life:

- the very wealthy who expected to survive in their well stocked enclaves,
- the politically connected who expected rescue on demand,
- the wealthy who thought their bankroll would buy them comfort,
- suburbanites unprepared to be self sustaining,
- those who stubbornly refused to leave their cities and towns and steadily starve to death,
- families who are separated from each other,
- rural folk familiar with local produce,
- immigrants caught a long way from home,
- pedophiles peddlers selling children,
- the handicapped who take hardship in stride,
- military men cut off from their commanders,
- former politicians trying to establish a continuity of government,
- those who turn from their responsibilities and those who raise orphans and care for the aged,
- teens without supervision,
- the deluded who think the good times will return,
- and those trying to maintain slave labor camps.

A second theme is the devastation itself, which is widespread. Florida is under water, trapping those who lingered too long. Coastal subdivisions and river front towns are steadily flooded, often forcing people to repeatedly relocate. Satellites have been torn from the sky, so communications are by short wave radio at best. Rescue is simply not forthcoming.

A third theme is survival techniques. Survivors adapt by eating atypical but highly nutritious foods. They live in makeshift shacks and tents. Electricity is generated from windmills or by pedals. Barter is the mode and the dollar is dead.

A fourth theme is how people react to the crisis - by rising to the challenge and helping one another or by looting and hoarding. Survivors are on their own and must rely on resourcefulness and cooperation with others for survival. Those that mistreat others find themselves without supplies or friends in due time.

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Chapter 1: Houseboat Living

The humidity and Spanish moss hanging from the trees on the Georgia coastline is not unusual, but the fact that the coastline is flooded is unusual. Rooftops and treetops are sticking out of the placid water, which is lapping gently on suburban lawns.

A houseboat is floating nearby, tied to a sturdy tree trunk sticking out of the floodwaters. The houseboat is solidly built, a modified commercial houseboat with metal floatation tubes underneath and a single story home in the center, and with patios all around. But this houseboat is not new, is well weathered with paint worm off and a roof tile here and there missing.

And the houseboat is immensely cluttered.

Bins of vegetables are stacked one on top of the other and side by side. Engine and mechanical parts are heaped in piles on the corners of the houseboat, placed for balance. There are pegs everywhere a peg can be placed, where loops of fishing line, wire, and rope are hung.

Boxes are stacked, smaller boxes on top of larger ones. Some of the wooden boxes have pull-out drawers. Large plastic containers are stacked here and there, but only a few are labeled. Folded tarps are on top of one pile, topped by fishing netting flung there to dry after a night's catch.

Poles have been placed on the four corners of the houseboat and lines are strung from these poles to the single story house in the center. On one, some fresh fish, gutted and headless, are hung by the tail. On another, a confederate flag is hung alongside a US flag. On yet another, some attractive items of clothing, hung out to advertise that they are for sale or barter.

A party of gulls approaches, greeting the dawn with their screams. They fly overhead, swooping down toward the fish hung out to drain and dry on the line. The raucous calls of the gulls have woken Finegan, who comes stumbling out of the house, bleary eyed, shirt half pulled out of his pants, barefoot and annoyed. He is waving his arms at the gulls and walking toward his catch, pulling a wooden box along behind him.

Arrrgh. Go catch your own.

Finegan's dog Barney, a mutt with one rear leg missing, is hobbling out behind him, throwing a bark or two in the direction of the gulls. Gulls are nothing new to Barney, and not a threat.

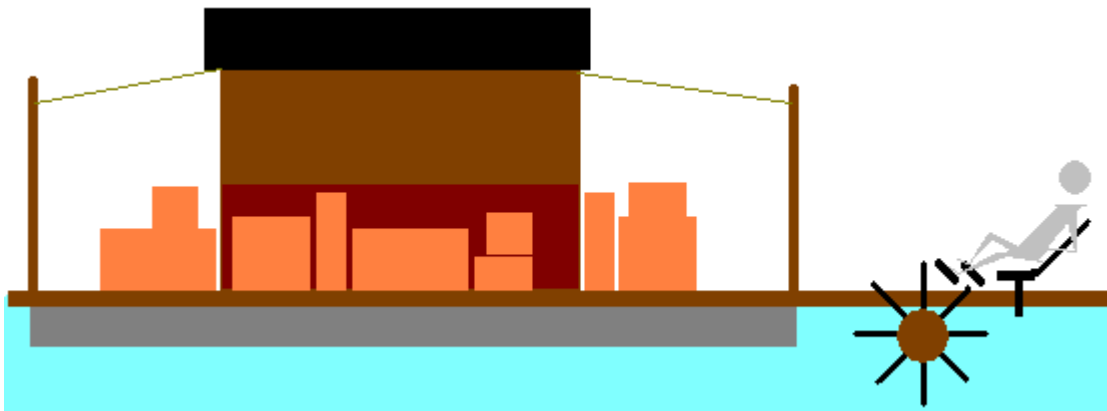
The fish on the line are hooked by a hangman's noose made of wire with a hook on the other end of the wire. The cleaned fish are hung by their tails to drain and dry. Finegan unhooks the fish quickly, dropping them into the wooden box, which he covers with a wooden cover near at hand.

Finegan grabs a dented bucket and dips it into the water, sloshing the deck of the houseboat, washing off remaining fish guts and blood. He pulls the fishing netting flung on top of the tarp pile and hangs it over an unused corner line.

All is now ready for a trip up one of the new bays that have been formed by the flooding, peddling wares and looking for barter. Finegan pulls on the rope securing the houseboat to a flooded tree, going hand over hand to pull the houseboat close. Noting that the tie point is an inch below water Finegan looks at Barney and mutters,

Still rising.

At the rear of the houseboat is an extension with a water wheel, half in the water, half out. Finegan has rigged the large wooden paddles so they turn when he pedals on some bike pedals - powered by lean muscle and determination.



Sitting on the bike seat, leaning back against a seat backstop he has rigged, Finegan reverse pedals to pull away from the tree. He is steering the houseboat by a rudder attached to a lever. Satisfied that he is clear, Finegan leans back heavily into the chair's backstop, pushing with his lean legs aggressively, and the houseboat moves up a newly flooded ravine along what is now the new coastline.

A country road at one side of the ravine is dipping down and disappearing into the murky floodwaters. Trees and shrubs are clustered on the hillside pasturelands and sink into the floodwaters too, so that only the tips of the trees are visible further out. The flood is recent, but persistent.

Finegan is keeping the houseboat centered in the flooded ravine, being careful to avoid being snagged by flooded trees. Though the houseboat moves slowly, it moves steadily. Finegan strips his shirt off, overheated from the exercise, and tosses it onto a pile of boxes nearby.

The houseboat is approaching a rooftop sticking up above the water.

Over here. Over here!

An elderly woman is sitting on her rooftop, barefoot and clinging to the roof peak with one trembling hand while waving at Finegan with the other. She is wearing a summer dress, lightweight and slightly damp around her thin frame.

Finegan lets the houseboat drift, closing the gap. He strides to the front and grabs a large grappling hook on a rope and throws it onto the rooftop on the extreme left. He jerks on the rope so the hooks catch on the roof, then throws another to the extreme right, doing the same.

Disappearing into the house, Finegan comes out with a battered stepladder. He steps up, grabs the knob at the end of the roof peak, and heaves himself onto the rooftop.

Trust me now. I won't drop you into the water.

In a tremulous voice, May relays her plight.

*My son-in-law took the family to shore
yesterday. He was supposed to come back for me.*

Finegan takes her free hand, holding it high so she can cling to his hand instead of the roof peak.

*Ease yourself over to the boat now. I'm going
to help you down. You can't stay here.*

May scuffs along the roof, clinging to the roof peak with one hand while gripping Finegan's hand with the other. When they get to the edge of the rooftop, she freezes. After a slight pause, Finegan suddenly grabs both her hands and swings her out over the boat, so she is hanging over the stepladder.

Get your footing now.

Seeing that she has her footing, Finegan releases first one hand and then the other. Finegan steps over to the grappling hooks and frees

them, first on one side and then the other, and swings down onto the stepladder just as the houseboat is starting to drift away.

*Just to ask, you didn't happen to have any
booze in that house, did you?*

May has a look on her face like he had invited the Devil himself into their midst.

Alcohol? Oh lord no!

Further up the ravine the terrain is relatively free of trees and shrubs, though is still plunging into the water. A farmhouse is beyond the pasture, at the high crest of a hill. The farmhouse is leaning at a tilt, with part of the roof torn off and thrown into the yard.

There are tents in the yard, mostly made from tarps and blankets. About a dozen people - men, women and children - are emerging from the tents and rising from where they have been seated at a picnic table, pointing toward the approaching houseboat.

Finegan moors the houseboat with his pair of grapping hooks and pulls a plank from between some boxes, shoving it out onto the shoreline. He strides over to greet those who are running down from the farmhouse.

*Finegan Fine here, trader. I've got stuff
you're no doubt looking for. And what useless
things have you got that you'd like to get rid
of?*

A friend of May's toward the back of the crowd recognizes her.

We were so worried about you.

Looking past May to the houseboat and not seeing any others, she looks puzzled.

Where's the family?

May is walking cautiously along the plank, stepping gingerly onto shore and up to greet her friend.

*They left in a boat yesterday. Something must
have happened because they were supposed to
come back for me.*

May is looking a little consternated, but her friend has hardened her face. They both turn to go up the hill, the friend's arm around May's frail frame. May's friend says grimly

I never did like that man.

Finegan is bargaining with the farm matron. She complains that the group staying with her

Ate everything.

Ready to barter, Finegan says

I've got some fine fish here, fresh from last night, and if you let me stay for dinner I'd be obliged.

Finegan reaches behind him to pull a rusty child's wagon out and heaves the wooden box of fish into it. They set out up the hill, side by side, chatting.

How'd you catch all that? We don't get but an occasional with the line.

The sky is beginning to turn orange, signaling eventide.

Fish are sizzling in a pan placed over a campfire. Finegan is milling around in the background, talking to several people over a pile of junk that has been assembled. There are children in the group, curious as always.

A man jogs up holding what looks like a radio setup, including a long stiff wire that has been used as an antenna. Finegan takes this in his hands and looks it over, talking to the man at the same time, and glancing up at the rooftop.

Can't get anything from there?

The man shakes his head.

Not lately. I think the base tower went down.

The group is drifting away, moving toward the picnic table in anticipation of supper. The farm matron comes up from behind Finegan and begins talking behind him, so the group won't be alerted to their conversation. She has a bag of onions hanging from one hand, her barter for the fish, to explain why she is approaching him. Finegan looks up, but does not yet turn around to face her, sensing the agenda.

The farm matron speaks quietly.

I have a favor to ask. We've got little Joey here, was trapped here with his grandad when the waters started to rise. Grandpa died yesterday, and the boy wants to go home. Take the boy up aways and give his folks the body. I'm afraid if you don't do this, someone here will eat him.

Finegan nods, then turns for their official conversation about the onions.

*Fine mess you have there! Keep well too. You
grow these here?*

As the farm matron backs away, Finegan moves to the side to address an old timer at the fringe.

Finegan is desperate for a drink, the burning issue on his alcohol sopped mind. Of all the casualties in the flood, the disappearance of readily available booze has been the worst, to his way of thinking.

Where you folks keep the still?

The old timer laughs and points.

Out yonder in the flood.

Chapter 2: Burial at Sea

The following morning Finegan has a couple passengers on the houseboat. Joey is sleeping at the side of his dead grandpa, who has been wrapped in a sheet. Joey has one arm over the chest of the corpse, his head resting on grandpa's shoulder despite the flies beginning to buzz about. Finegan is standing in the doorway of the house, arms folded, looking at the scene and pondering.

Barney had been sleeping next to Joey, but looks up at Finegan expectantly. Feeling Barney move, Joey wakens. He points across the water.

We lived over there, but yonder, behind that hill.

Seeing the cloud of buzzing flies, Finegan is seeking a quick solution.

You ever heard of burial at sea?

Joey is clearly anxious about being separated from his only flesh and blood relative at hand, even if the flesh and blood are not too responsive.

But then I could never go visit my granpa!

Finegan unties the houseboat and peddals out into open water, away from any danger of sunken trees. Joey is at the front of the boat, holding onto one of the corner posts, pointing on occasion as he sees a landmark he recognizes.

The corpse has been moved up to the front of the boat and positioned so it is sitting up, as though grandpa were participating in the homecoming. The flies have gotten thicker now, buzzing around in angry swarms.

As the houseboat moves along in a parallel line to the new coastline, it rounds the hill Joey had been pointing to, and Joey can suddenly see the spot where his home used to be. He gets a stunned look on his face, stumbles backwards toward grandpa and falls into his lap. Joey is batting at the buzzing flies and starting to tear up. He scrambles to his feet and up onto the rooftop where he can face Finegan.

That's the house, there, in the water!

The one-story suburban ranch house is situated on a hillside so that the basement is developed with a patio out into the backyard. The house is flooded to the extent that the basement is under water by a couple feet. The house appears to be deserted.

Finegan and Joey slosh up toward the basement sliding doors. Joey is calling for his mom and dad, but the house is empty. Finegan pulls on the sliding doors and after a few tugs manages to get one to slide open. They wade into the basement, developed as a rec room with a pool table. Finegan heads straight toward the bar and begins rummaging around. He finds a half filled bottle of whiskey, and looks at it with satisfaction, puts it on the counter and checks for more.

Joey is clamoring up the stairs in search of his family but returns, standing at the top of the stairs.

They're gone.

Finegan has his whiskey bottle and some other booze he has located, half filled bottles, in an ice pail tucked under his arm as he mounts the stairs.

Did they leave a note?

The house has an open style, so there are no walls between the kitchen and living areas. Finegan and Joey are looking around on table tops, the refrigerator door, the bathroom mirror, and the kitchen counter top, but are finding no indication of anything but disorganized panic. Some items of clothing have been left on the sofa. A glass of juice sits half empty on the kitchen countertop.

Finegan walks into the master bedroom but lingers in the doorway, as though not wanting to invade the sanctity of the marital bedroom. He notices a photo of the couple on their wedding day, and removes the photo from the frame, handing this to Joey.

Here. Will come in handy. Tell folks what they look like.

Joey is looking solemn. He takes the photo and stuffs it into his jacket pocket. Finegan brightens and turns, nodding in the direction of the kitchen.

Lets see what else we can find that'll be useful.

Finegan puts a hand on Joey's head, then pats Joey's shoulder a few times.

Anything special you'd like to take along?

Finegan and Joey are returning to the houseboat with their arms full of loot. They are wading in water that is waist-deep for Joey. Finegan

has several pots and pans and a coffeepot as well as his precious booze pail. He has tied all this together with a curtain cord, and slung the lot over his shoulder so he has a free arm to help Joey.

Joey has a packet of clothing, tied like a Christmas package by another curtain cord. The packet includes his clothing - a change and clothing appropriate for various seasons - and a toy airplane, remote controlled, which is sticking out from the clothes. Joey has all this balanced on top of his head. He has changed into his swimming trunks, being practical, though is still wearing his jacket.

Finegan heaves his booty onto the floor of the houseboat and helps Joey do the same with his parcel, giving Joey a hand up. Finegan wades back to unhook the grappling hooks tangled in the shrubbery where he has anchored the houseboat.

Joey is standing shock still, staring at his seated grandpa. By now the corpse is almost covered with flies and various insects that are trying to find their way through the sheet that is covering the corpse like a mummy. Joey has become resigned. He turns to look over his shoulder toward Finegan, who is wading back with the grappling hooks held high.

What was that about burial at sea?

The next morning Joey is standing over Finegan, who is passed out drunk on the deck of the houseboat. The ice pail and empty bottles are strewn about near him. Finegan is snoring loudly, sprawled on his back with both arms splayed out.

Joey picks up the empty bottles and tosses them into the water, a disgusted look on his face, but Barney hobbles up to lick Finegan on the face. Giving up on Finegan, Joey walks off to the other side of the houseboat and grabs the net, Barney at his heels.

Common Barney, lets go fish.

Joey is sorting through his catch, a conglomeration of small fish, crabs, twigs from trees, and the occasional coke bottle. He is tossing what he does not want back into the drink, and putting the flapping fish and snapping crabs into a box. Barney has his nose into the box, curious and explorative and perhaps a little hungry, but pulls back quickly when a fish flaps or a crab snaps.

Finegan shuffles to the front of the boat, holding onto supports as he goes, not too certain of his balance. He is shielding his eyes from the sunlight, although all days are gloomy and uniformly gray lately. Finegan is clearly hung over.

I suppose you two want breakfast.

Then, gulping a bit in trying to overcome the urge to upchuck, hand to mouth, he reconsiders.

Listen, I'll tell you what to do. You cook.

Joey is lifting a pot of boiling water off an outdoor grill and placing it to the side on a folded cloth used as a hotpad. The portable outdoor grill has coals lit but is on the outer edge of the houseboat, where any chance of fire can be contained by pushing the lot over the edge. A bucket of cold water is nearby, as insurance. The houseboat is loaded with flammable material, and Finegan is no fool.

Joey loads the grill with fish fillets and pokes a couple potatoes wrapped in aluminum foil into the coals, to bake. Barney is watching the cookout eagerly, sitting on his haunches, tongue out, panting and drooling, eyes watching every move Joey makes.

Finegan has a pot of freshly brewed coffee on the deck beside him. He is holding a steaming mug of coffee in both hands, hunched over the mug and looking out over the water directly in front of him. He groans, and pushes himself up on one side, with one hand on one knee, the other hand still holding the mug. Finegan holds his breath for a minute, then winces. Hangovers can be a bitch.

Chapter 3: Good Hard Cash

Water is splashing at the sides of the houseboat. Finegan and Joey are securing some gear as the wind has picked up. As Finegan heaves the fishing net up over the line reserved for drying the net, he catches sight of a pair of men in a rowboat.

The rowboat is in the distance. One of the pair is standing and looking down into the water. The other, a diver, pops up, gasping for breath and holding onto the edge of the rowboat for a minute, then diving again. Finegan mutters under his breath.

Hello, what's this?

Finegan's curiosity finally gets the better of him. He waves his arms and shouts at the pair.

Hello, need some help?

The man standing in the boat glances up briefly and gives a weak wave back but is fixated on the spot where the diver disappeared.

Seeing he is being ignored, Finegan unties the houseboat from the tree where it has been moored, and maneuvers the houseboat closer to the rowboat. Letting the houseboat drift, he leaves his seat at the paddle wheel and comes forward to engage the pair in the rowboat.

What's the problem?

The man in the boat only glances up briefly, then back at the spot where the diver comes up for air periodically.

There's an outboard down there, and gasoline.

Finegan points to the sky.

You've got something better right at hand!

Finegan disappears into the house, emerging with a tattered book on sailing. He is flipping pages, then holds the book up in the air, opened by his splayed fingers, pointing the illustrations at the pair in the rowboat. The diver has come up for air again and is clinging to the side of the rowboat.

Finegan explains,

You could rig a sail! There's always a breeze out here. Look, I can help you. I've got the supplies right here.



The rowboat has been outfitted with a single sail, the supports nailed to the side of the rowboat with bracing at the bottom of the rowboat. The sail can swing from side to side to catch the breeze.

As Finegan and Joey stand on the deck of the houseboat, waving goodbye, the new sail has billowed out in the evening breeze, and the rowboat is picking up speed as it moves toward the shoreline.

Later that evening there are several popping noises on the shore, with lights that look like firecrackers briefly going off. These are not firecrackers, but gunshots. Finegan comes out to stand next to Joey and Barney, who have been sleeping on the deck. Finegan places his hand on Joey's shoulder, shaking it gently, to waken him.

Grab Barney and hold his mutt shut. There's trouble.

Joey wraps both legs around Barney, holding his mouth shut with one hand, while Barney looks up at Joey, his eyes big but trusting.

When Finegan has put some distance between the houseboat and the shoreline, he steps through the clutter, coming forward to see about breakfast. Joey is still seated with Barney, but no longer holding him so he can't bark, the danger being past. But just as they are about to relax, Finegan freezes, looking off into the open water.

Finegan points to a small yacht, seemingly adrift, not anchored. The houseboat is slowly drifting toward the yacht, due to momentum from the trip into open water. Finegan steps back and ducks into the house. He pulls a pistol out of a drawer and stuffs it into the back of his pants at the waistline.

Stepping back onto the deck to stand behind Joey and Barney, Finegan places his hand on Joey's shoulder.

Somethin' doesn't smell right about this.

As the houseboat drifts up to almost touch the side of the yacht, a man stumbles out of the cabin, whiskey bottle in hand, staggering slightly. He is wearing a sweaty white t-shirt and blue casual pants. Two women emerge behind him, still in nightgowns. Finegan introduces himself.

Ahoy! Finegan Fine here, trader.

The yachtsman says,

*We're looking for food, fresh food. Sent a man
over to the mainland last night to look for
some and ain't seen him since.*

Finegan asks,

At night?

Aggravated at having been challenged, as it is obvious they didn't intend any but theft of someone else's food cache, the yachtsman replies,

Aaaaahhh. We didn't want any trouble, ya know?

The yachtsman loses his balance and falls against the cabin, bouncing back out onto the railing, which he grabs to right himself.

You got any food?

Finegan is playing along.

*Plenty. Potatoes, onions, some cabbage, and
fish fresh from last night.*

Finegan glances at the rear of the yacht, which doesn't seem to have any fishing apparatus. It's a pleasure craft, not for fishing.

You don't fish?

The yachtsman is surly.

We had supplies.

Where he bends over backwards for good folk, Finegan has a distinct dislike of those who think the world owes them a living.

What have you got in exchange?

The yachtsman digs in his pocket and pulls out a roll, waving it in the air.

Good hard cash.

The yachtsman's wife, the older of the two women, looks horrified that he is drunk and waving money around in front of a stranger. She puts her hand on his arm, attempting to pull it down out of sight. He shakes off her hand, annoyed. Finegan says,

Can't use that.

The yachtsman gets belligerent.

It's good hard cash!

Finegan shakes his head and points to the half-empty whiskey bottle the yachtsman has been waving around.

*I'll take one of those, a full one, and some
antibiotics if you have any. I'll toss in some
applies for the pills.*

The yachtsman ponders the deal for a moment, then turns to the women standing to the side in their nightdresses. They look at him expectantly, obviously wanting the deal to go through.

The yachtsman waves his arm toward the deck between he and the women.

Bring the stuff on up here then.

Finegan is not putting himself in that position.

*You have one of them come down here to pick it
up.*

Finegan leans to the side, murmuring to Joey that he should get some used plastic grocery store bags from the house. He is motioning to the vegetable bins and the fish box on the deck, giving instructions.

The daughter of the yachtsman, the younger of the pair, slips into the cabin and returns dressed in shorts and a t-shirt, barefoot. She has a bottle of whiskey and a small bottle of pills in her hands. She tosses the whiskey to Finegan and climbs down the metal ladder at the side of the yacht to hand him the bottle of pills. Finegan examines the bottle and nods to Joey. Finegan has not turned his back on the yacht the whole time.

Joey is stuffing vegetables into the bags. He pulls out a large cabbage from one bin, the outer leaves curling and turning brown on the edges. He pulls out a few apples, wrinkled from dehydration. He bags several potatoes and another bag of a half dozen onions. The fish likewise are bagged, though some are set aside for the crew's breakfast. The daughter is handing the bags up to her mother, then climbs up herself.

Finegan walks backwards to the bike rig at the rear of the houseboat, never turning his back to the yacht but trying not to look too obvious about this, and easing into the seat starts a reverse paddle until there is some distance between the boats. Finegan shouts his goodbye.

Your man got himself shot last night.

The daughter, who has been standing at the rail watching the houseboat pull away, looks shocked and anguished. The man making the night raid was obviously her husband.

Chapter 4: Peaches and Cream

The houseboat is approaching a large island created by the rising water. It is a hill surrounded by valleys. On one slope is a pecan orchard, and on another a peachtree orchard, but from a distance these only appear as woodlands. This is land formerly in the state of Georgia.

In between there are some trees and country roads, which dip down into the water. The island is at least a mile wide, but is clearly surrounded by water. The distance to the mainland appears to be about a quarter mile, not far, but too far to swim for those not fit.

Joey is on the roof, looking out for hidden treetops that could cause problems. Joey paces, shielding his eyes on occasion, and points in the direction he thinks will be the best approach. They are looking for a sharp slope, not a gradual slope, so they can use the gangplank and don't have to wade in the water.

The people on shore are running along the shoreline trying to line up with the spot where the houseboat will land. Half the group are white, half African American, all dressed in similar casual tattered clothes. Finegan runs the houseboat close to shore and comes forward to anchor with his grappling hooks.

Stand back. Stand back!

The crowd of about a dozen people shrinks back a few feet.

Stand way back! Way back.

The crowd turns and moves back a goodly way and Finegan heaves his hooks onto the bank, then moves the plank into place and strides across. Joey is at his heels, and as always Barney stays behind to guard the houseboat.

*Finegan Fine here, trader. You folks seem eager
to do some trading.*

A spokesperson for the group says,

*We're trapped! Can you give us a lift? We waded
over for peaches and pecans, due for harvest.
Stayed too long.*

Finegan ponders a moment.

Got any left?

The spokesperson is eager.

*Plenty. We planned to take it all back. Uh, we
could give you some.*

Finegan barter back.

*Tell you what. I'll give you portage with all
you can carry, but the rest is mine.*

The spokesperson, the apparent leader of the stranded survivors, looks from one side to the other among the others and sees that they all feel they have no choice.

Agreed.

They all start clamoring for the gangplank. Finegan says,

Whoa! Where's the loot?

The spokesman has his hand up, trying to stop the stamped. He turns, directing the group to get their harvest and return to the boat. And Finegan reassures them,

I'm not going anywhere. Be right here.

A legless man has been approaching during all of this, on crutches. He is just arriving as they all are scampering off to collect the harvest, and stops, dismayed. He raises one crutch to point at the disappearing backs.

*Well I know I reek but they're not even trying
to be polite.*

Finegan, delighted to have the company, welcomes him aboard.

Common aboard. They just went to get the goods.

I'll be taking you across.

The legless man is seated on some boxes, his crutches beside him and his one leg stretched out in front of him, bracing. His dark hair is unkempt and his clothing dirty and tattered. He has a short beard, more from the lack of shaving regularly than an attempt to have a beard. Appearance is the least of his concerns.

Joey has come up to sit near him, Barney lying down at his feet. Joey is curious and finally cannot contain his curiosity.

How'd you lose your leg?

The legless man replies,

Accident, where I worked. Chain broke.

He has been glancing at Joey during this exchange, gauging his reaction. Joey meets his eyes, not ashamed of his curiosity as he sees the legless man is not touchy.

Does it hurt?

Joey jumps off his box and comes over to the leg, his nose a few inches from the stump. He puts his finger out to poke the stump, then hesitates, glancing at the legless man.

The legless man pats his stump, showing Joey it is sound.

*Don't hurt no more. Sometimes the leg itches
though.*

Joey looks up at him and smiles, catching the joke, and then returns to his seat on the box. He has grown serious, pondering the man's troubles.

*I used to get a check every month, but don't no
more.*

Then, more a comment to himself than to Joey, he mutters under his breath.

*Wouldn't do any good anyhow. Nobody wants
paper.*

The legless man seems to notice for the first time that Barney is missing a rear leg. He points at the dog.

How'd that happen?

Joey looks up and over his shoulder to the tall pile of boxes where Finegan has stationed himself. The lookout post. Finegan tells the tale.

*Lost it to a shark. Small hammerhead. He
had ahold of part of my catch, pulled right up
on deck. I guess he thought Barney looked like
a better meal. I've never quite forgiven
myself.*

The legless man, being a positive person, puts a positive spin on it all.

*Aw, hey, he looks like he's doing fine! Me too.
Gets me out of emptying the crap pot, that's
for sure.*

He throws a grin up at Finegan.

The ladies feel sorry for me.

The houseboat is making its final run from the island to the mainland, with the last of the crowd. Only four people at a time were allowed due to the weight. They are carrying as many peaches and pecans as they can stuff into their clothing or hang over their shoulders.

Finegan has distributed these last four so that two each are on a side of the houseboat. His booty from the island has been loaded into boxes at the front. Joey is distributing the weight from front to back. He hops over the roof of the house to do so, carrying the peaches and pecans in a plastic bag which he empties into boxes at the rear. Finegan says,

*I'm still riding too high back here. You folks
move on toward the back, please.*

While they're waiting for the pedals to lower fully into the water, a young woman has moved toward the rear of the boat and is flirting with Finegan. She has one haunch on a box and has pulled her skirt up, ostensibly to keep cool in the midday heat, exposing an attractive leg. She is wearing a low-cut summer dress, but has heavy leather boots on her feet. She keeps glancing at Finegan, smiling. She is young, attractive, and buxom.

This place needs a woman's touch.

Finegan has a half full bottle of whiskey beside him and has been taking a sip now and then, this being his last trip and the day having been exhausting. He is trying to be moderate, in consideration of Joey's reaction to his last drunk, but sneaks a sip whenever Joey has his back turned during his many trips across the roof to balance the load.

*Nothing personal, but I've got my hands full
already.*

The flirt leans forward showing her ample cleavage.

Not like getting your hands on these.

Finegan holds up the whiskey bottle, burping, and shakes his head.

No can do.

Chapter 5: Political Connections

The crew on the houseboat is in the house, staying dry, as it is pouring rain, drumming on the roof, sounding like thunder. The rainwater flows off to the side of the roof where it collects into a gutter, thence to the corner of the houseboat where it collects in a barrel. When the barrel fills to overflowing, there is an overflow spout that dumps into a second gutter, going over the side of the houseboat.

Drinking and cooking water is being collected, regularly, as the water off the coast is seawater.

The houseboat is about a quarter mile from the coastline, in open water where flooded trees are unlikely to be encountered. Further out in the water by a mile or more are the tops of some high-rise buildings, a small city, flooded.

Finegan is standing on the front of the houseboat, holding onto a corner post and looking in that direction. He ducks into the house and returns with the radio he collected earlier at the farmstead. He tucks the end of the long wire used as an antenna into the spot where the corner line is tied around the post, so it sticks up into the air as far as possible.

Finegan is expecting that the buildings hold a short-wave tower. Finegan is turning dials this way and that, holding his ear close at times. Suddenly the radio crackles and a strident voice can be heard.

Mayday. Mayday.

Finegan replies.

What's your location?

There is a pause, as apparently this is the first response to the call in some time. The man can be heard over the radio talking to others in the room.

Got someone.

Then, talking into the radio mic again,

Florida, sinking fast. We need rescue. We've tried to raise the coastguard. Can you send some boats or choppers? . . . Who are you anyway?

Finegan is rolling his eyes skyward at the unrealistic requests, knowing that these people did not pay attention to all the warning signs and failed to take action on their own when they should have.

I'm a private party and don't run boats. Can you see the mainland? Do you have something at hand that will float?

Finegan is aware that they can see the mainland and are not as helpless as they imply. He is used to former captains of industry and lazy city folk and politicians demanding they be treated in the manner to which they were accustomed and is having none of it. The man in the flooded buildings again talks to his companions.

Not a boat. He's asking if we can do it ourselves. Yeah, well.

Finegan continues.

You got bottled water there? Water coolers? Any empties?

The man is missing Finegan's point.

Yeah, we're about out of drinking water. We need help here, dammit!

If they are ignoring his point, Finegan is ignoring their demands.

You got extension cords, wire, around the place? Wire some of those empties together, like a raft. Turn a table upside down on top and wire that too. There's your boat.

Finegan hears the discussion on the other end.

Wants us to do it ourselves.

The houseboat has finally been noticed.

Hey, are you that floating house out there?

Finegan has caught them in a lie.

I thought you couldn't see the mainland. I'm not in the rescue business, but I'll stay here while you come across, keep an eye out.

Demands and lies having failed, manipulation is tried,

There's sharks out there!

But Finegan resists

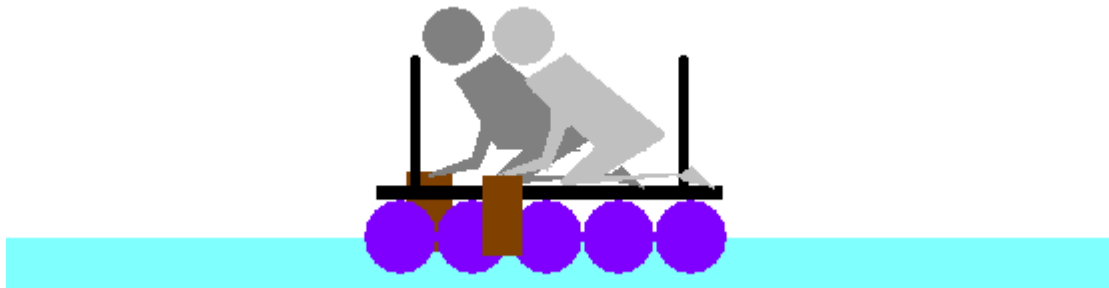
They've got too many dead to feed on these days. Not likely.

A window just above the waterline has been broken out. A couple men, one of them portly, are pushing the water bottle and table raft out the window, easing it down into the water. They have a line tied to one

side of the water bottle raft, and are holding onto the other end of the line. The faces of a couple women can be seen behind them, bobbing up and down.

One of the men tosses down a couple chair backs they intend to use as paddles. The men climb down, the portly one first, being assisted from the window by the slender one who holds onto his hand so he won't drop down too suddenly. Then the slender one jumps down, taking the line with him. The bottle raft then pushes off from the side of the building. The women behind him look alarmed, as they are clearly being left behind.

The bottle raft is half way between the houseboat and the high-rise. The two men are on either side, paddling unevenly, so the slender one, who is more energetic, has to pause now and then to allow the portly one to move his side of the raft forward. Else, they tend to go in a circle.



Suddenly, the radio, which is still in Finegan's hand, crackles.

I think this is the button here. Hello?

Finegan says,

I'm with you. Are they sending the raft back for you?

A frantic woman says,

They left us! Those were the only bottles we had. They left us!

Finegan says,

I'll be over to pick you up shortly. Is there anyone else there, stranded?

The woman replies,

Just the 3 of us. He kept saying the coast guard would come if we got in trouble. Kept saying it was all arranged.

Finegan says,

*I want to see those two closer to shore before
I come for you. Don't want them chasing after
me, if you follow my drift.*

The houseboat is approaching the broken window, which has one of the women half out already, seated on the edge, ready to jump. In the distance we see the bottle raft, very near shore. The men are standing and pointing toward the high-rise, obviously angry that they were not picked up in similar manner.

Three women are seated on boxes to the rear of the houseboat, eating peaches. One has one shoe on, one shoe missing. She is still seething.
I'm giving that man my notice!

Barney is sniffing up the skirt of one of the women and gets batted away. It's been awhile since they've bathed. Finegan is at the paddle wheel, moving the houseboat up the coastline.

The sound of clapping and singing, and a guitar, are heard floating out over the water. A blazing bonfire can be seen, and people dancing, hoedown style. This is a party, celebrating or just having fun.

The three women from the high-rise are seated on boxes at the front of the houseboat, and Joey is at his usual place on the roof, pacing back and forth, watching for trees or objects under the surface. They will moor for the night here. The houseboat is not even noticed at first by the party, gliding up to an open spot along the water's edge to the side of the party, anchoring with the grappling hooks, and finally plopping down the gangplank.

About this time their approach is noticed and a couple comes over to greet them. The camp mistress is stout but friendly, her man thin as a pole and quiet. Finegan introduces himself.

*Finegan Fine here, trader. I've got some
passengers who need directions to any
government base that can help them locate their
relatives.*

The camp mistress smiles.

You're kidding, right? We have those?

Finegan has made this statement only to impress on his women passengers that they need to make their own way and not expect help. He shrugs, acknowledging the situation. The camp mistress addresses the passengers.

Where you from?

One of the women points out across the water toward what is now ocean in the direction of what used to be Florida. The camp mistress is used to traffic from Florida.

*Ummm . . . Well most from Florida went up to
Atlanta, but I'd not advise it.*

The passengers look puzzled over this statement, so the camp mistress explains.

*Well, the riots and all. Heard about those.
Best to stay away from the cities. They got
zombies there.*

As the couple turns to return to the bonfire the camp mistress looks over her shoulder, calling back with a wave toward the bonfire.

But you can stay here.

The passengers are frozen, not sure how to proceed, so Finegan breaks the spell by moving forward cheerfully.

*Common Joey, lets see what's to eat. Got those
peaches?*

Joey has a sack of peaches and another of pecans, their contribution to the communal supper. Joey runs ahead to give these to the camp mistress.

The passengers trail along behind Finegan. As they arrive at the bonfire, they are greeted by others who have been alerted by the camp mistress. Some put their arms around shoulders to comfort. One of the passengers breaks down and is hugged by another woman.

Finegan drifts off to the side with Joey to discuss business and see what the group might have for barter. He puts his hand out to shake another man's hand. Then he grabs the hand of a smiling flirtatious woman nearby and swings her out into the dance area in front of the fire, stomping and swinging.

Joey continues to shake hands and introduce himself. He pulls the photo of his parents out of his pocket and shows it around. Those who look at the photo are shaking their heads.

Barney is sleeping in the doorway of the houseboat, guarding the two inside. An empty whiskey bottle is on the floor next to Finegan, who is snoring.

The camp mistress is walking quietly through the dewy grass to the waters edge, and up the plank. She has come to warn Finegan. Finegan gets up, groggy. The camp mistress points at Joey.

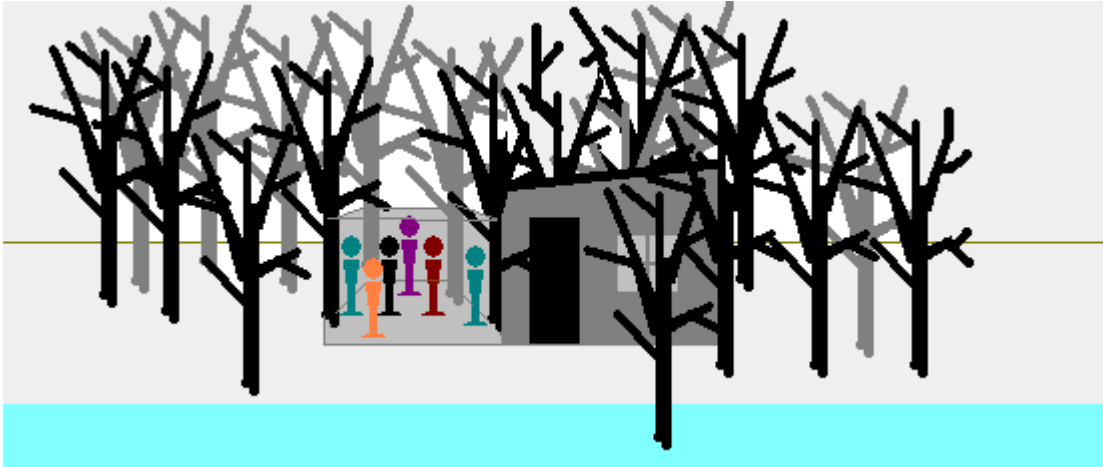
*Keep that youngster close now, yahear? We've
had reports of kids goin' missing.*

Finegan raises an eyebrow, and nods.

Jury of Peers

The houseboat is traveling up the middle of a broad river, thick with trees along both banks. Dead tree branches are standing like black, wet soldiers at arms, so thick in places no approach to shore is readily available. Finegan has Joey at his usual post atop the roof of the house. Finegan points ahead, along one side of the river.

What's that up there? Looks like a shack.



Finegan slows his peddling, letting the houseboat drift. Several young children are seen in the yard of the shack, clustered together. Finegan sees a place where some high ground is jutting out into the river, where one could walk ashore. He points in that direction, soundlessly, wanting to go ashore to see if something might be amiss. Why are there no adults around?

Finegan peddles quietly and steers with the rudder, while Joey hops to the front of the houseboat to throw a rope over a sturdy branch. They are downriver from the shack, and have apparently not been seen by anyone. Holding onto a branch, Finegan swings down onto the finger of land. He is holding onto branches as he goes along the land projection, stepping gingerly. He makes his way to the riverbank and up along the bank toward the shack.

Finegan walks up to a chicken-wire cage, strung from one tree to another and nailed firmly. The only opening is at a door of the shack, so there is no escape from the cage. The chicken wire seems to be buried in the ground, as well as strung overhead, so climbing or tunneling are not a ready option either. Finegan walks up to the fence, curling his fingers through the chicken wire, tugging it slightly, testing. It is immediately apparent that this is not a yard meant to

keep children at play from falling into the river. Something else is afoot.

The half dozen children huddled in the center are young, 3 years of age to a girl of 7 years or so. They are thin, very pale, very dirty, and wearing tattered clothes. Because the children have fallen silent, Finegan's presence has been noted. The main door of the shack opens and a hag emerges.

Hey! You looking to buy?

The hag is thin, wrinkled, toothless, and has long greasy hair hanging straight down, some strands in front of her face. Her clothes hang on her, as though she has lost weight. She wears bedroom slippers and socks that are falling down around her ankles. Wanting to assess the situation, Finegan plays along. Finegan points to the 7 year old girl, who is standing to the rear of the clutch of children.

What'll you take for the girl in back?

Like the others, the girl has a solemn face. The girl blinks, stares at the ground, and is making fists with her hands as they are held at her sides, tense and frightened.

Finegan pulls out a gold watch on a gold chain, dangling it in the air in front of the hag, but she objects.

Food! I want food. Else some'it useful, like a gun. Ammo. What cha got?

Finegan stuffs the gold watch back into his pocket and while pulling his hand out of his pocket flips it back to grab his pistol, which he has tucked into the waistband of his pants at the back. Pointing the gun at the hag's head, Finegan says,

I do just happen to have a gun.

The hag bolts for the door of her shack, but Finegan grabs her by the scuff of the neck. With the pistol at the back of her neck, she has no choice and throws her scrawny hands up in the air. Finegan says,

We're going to let those kids out.

Finegan gives her a shove in the direction of the shack door, all the while holding firmly to the scuff of her neck.

The hag is on her stomach on the ground, her hands and feet tied together behind her. The girl is looping and tying and jerking on the piece of rope. Finegan has been holding the pistol on the woman. He puts his gun away and tests the knots briefly, giving them a tug. Suddenly, the girl is talkative.

She put a rag over my mouth. It smelled.

The girl points with a finger in the direction of the hills up above the river, swinging her arm back and forth indicating she is not sure where her capture took place.

I got tired and sat down for a spell.

The girl looks sad, glancing to the side at the cluster of younger children, now out of the cage but still huddling together.

She likes the little ones. They're easier, I guess.

Finegan goes into the shack and comes out with a bottle marked Chloroform and a dirty rag. The hag is furious.

Hey! You steal my kids but don't steal my stuff! I gotta live.

Finegan wets the rag with the Chloroform and slaps it over the hag's face, holding it there. Still trying to assess the situation, Finegan asks,

Has anyone come by?

The girl says,

Not since I've been here. She said if someone didn't come by soon, she'd have to eat one of us.

Finegan has been looking around, and has noted a rowboat pulled up onto shore. The boat looks sound. Finegan has formulated his plan.

Common kids, lunch time. Ever had a ripe peach?

The rowboat is being pulling up alongside the houseboat, filled with the rescued kids. Finegan is rowing the heavily loaded boat carefully. Joey is reaching out to catch the rope attached to the front of the boat, securing it to the houseboat. Then he moves along the rowboat, pulling it close along the side of the houseboat, and holds the rear so the rowboat is now flush alongside the houseboat. Finegan lifts the kids out one by one, setting them on the deck.

Dole out some of them ripe peaches and set to frying the fish from this morning. It looks like they haven't had a decent meal in a week.

Putting his hands back on the oars, Finegan says,

I've got something to tend to.

Joey nods, and goes to untie the front of the rowboat, tossing the rope into the boat. Finegan pushes the rowboat away from the houseboat with one of the oars and turns the boat to head back to the shack.

When Finegan returns the rowboat is filled with loot he has taken from the hag's shack. There is a crossbow, a hunting knife, a rifle with

ammo, several pots and pans, and wool blankets. He pulls up to the same spot along the side of the houseboat. The kids are all seated in various places around the front of the houseboat, where Joey has been frying fish and baking potatoes. They all have a plate of sorts in their hands, and are eating ravenously. The girl is helping dish food out and is passing a cup of water along from one to the other. Joey secures the boat as before, tying it at the front and then holding the back. Finegan heaves the loot onto the deck.

One last thing.

Joey nods and again unties him. Finegan again moves back again toward the shack.

The houseboat is now in open water in the center of the river. They are returning downstream, back to the group of survivors at the bonfire. The kids are clustered together on the deck at the front, some nodding off, some sleeping, some looking forward at the river as though in a hypnotic state. Trailing behind Finegan is the rowboat with the hag on her knees in the bottom. She is complaining loudly.

You let me loose! That's my stuff, damit.

Finegan has a smile on his face, ignoring her.

Toward evening the houseboat is approaching the shore where the bonfire party was held just the night before. Those on shore can see the front of the houseboat, which leads during the pedaling process, and can see a pile of youngsters now almost all asleep. One of the young kids jumps up, recognizing his mother on shore.

Mama! Mama!

The group on shore is gathering, more and more campers coming from the woods or from temporary shelters thrown together and rushing to the shoreline. As the houseboat slows and Finegan leaves the pedals to moor with the grappling hooks, some in the crowd wade into the water, not waiting. The kids are coming forward to stand on the edge of the houseboat front, some reaching their arms out. Finegan throws his hands up, smiling, and arranges to work with a couple men coming to help, handing them each a grappling hook, which is walked, rather than thrown, onto shore.

That night, the hag has been tied to a chair, seated near the bonfire where her features can be seen. There are boxes and various chairs lined up to one side, where the jury has been assembled. Six men and six women are seated, listening. The camp mistress is bringing the girl to the other side, where her features can be seen by the jury in the firelight. The girl will testify as to her experience, and what she observed at the shack. The girl points at the hag.

Smelly rag over my mouth and held me down.

The hag of course is objecting.

*She's a lying. I found them lost and brought
'em home.*

In the shadows on the edge of the court scene, the parents can hardly keep silent.

*Burn her, burn her alive! Why are we having
this stupid trial, it's obvious.*

Someone walks up to Finegan and hands him a bottle.

You've earned this, I recon.

Finegan takes the bottle, taking a swig. He points with his bottle hand.

*Now what? I half expect them to toss her into
the fire.*

Later that night, the hag, her hands still tied, is being muscled to the rowboat on the edge of the shore. She is resisting, being pushed and carried between two men when she tries to dig her feet into the soft earth along the shore.

*Can't do this. Those kids lied. This is murder
I tell ya.*

Almost covered by the people who have muscled her to the rowboat, she is lifted and set into the center of the boat, and then tied down by numerous ropes - feet, knees, and elbows tied to the boat in some manner or another. The rowboat, without oars, is pushed away from shore and into the receding tide and the outflow from the river.

Exile at sea, to starve to death in the same manner she was starving the kids. The boat drifts from shore and into the night, the hag's cries becoming distant and barely audible.

Industrial Revolution

Finegan is sorting through various small mechanical parts stored inside the house of the houseboat. He is pulling boxes out, checking the contents, pouring some out on a table in the center of the thoroughly cluttered house, and labeling other boxes. He is sorting stuff on the table into small boxes and labeling these. The overall approach is to move what he has sorted and labeled into one cleared corner of the house - taking a total inventory so to speak. Finegan says,

I forget what all I have, ya know?

Joey is being a loyal assistant, taking labeled boxes away and bringing others closer to Finegan who is seated on a stool during this process. Every once in awhile Joey finds something totally inappropriate, like a dirty shirt, and holds it up for Finegan to pass judgement. Finegan shrugs and says,

I dunno. . . Put it on the laundry pile, I guess.

Finegan sighs, and looks up at Joey.

I suppose that's another thing we should be doing.

He returns to his work, pulling things out of a box Joey has dragged to his feet.

The houseboat is moving along the outer edges of a flooded subdivision, some rooftops seen sticking out of the water and some just under the water. Finegan is keeping a distance away, as the slope appears to be shallow. He is sticking to deep water. Finegan points to the flooded rooftops.

The last thing we need is to be stuck on one of those. I don't fancy trying to lift this boat offn' one of 'em.

Finegan flashes a smile at Joey, who is looking worried.

Well, we could always wait a day or two until the water rises.

Then, muttering under this breath.

Just keeps rising. . .

A thin trace of smoke is rising from a ravine, indicating a campfire. Some women are running from the open grassy area behind the subdivision into the woods around the ravine. Finegan is not attempting to steer the houseboat to any shoreline near them. He sees an unspoken question

in Joey's eyes, as Joey keeps looking at the scampering women, then back to Finegan's face. Finegan says.

*They're not ready yet. Too early. They're
living off what they pulled from these houses
and . . well . . ah . .*

Finegan is struggling for a way to explain to Joey the nature of business and self-survival. After the rescues he's seen recently, Joey has come to think of their role as some kind of emergency services. But some survivors need to run through their supplies and feel a pinch of some sort before they are ready to barter on a fair basis. This Finegan has learned. Finegan's face brightens, as he has arrived at an explanation.

They're expectations would be too high.

The houseboat is seen approaching a partially flooded pastureland, the fence posts and wire running down a slope and into the water. At the high end of the pasture are several wooden shelters, flat topped, for goats. Goats are seen standing on the tops of their shelters, as well as ranging in groups around the pastureland and clustering around a hay dispenser.

A lean man, bow-legged and sprightly, comes striding down the pasture toward the shoreline. The goat-herder is wearing faded blue jeans several sizes too large, as he has lost weight. A leather belt is cinching the pants, keeping them from falling down. The belt has obviously been pulled several notches past their usual worn catch point, tightened regularly lately. He has a stained white t-shirt that has not seen Tide or bleach for many months, but looks like it has been washed recently as it is not stained by sweat or dirt.

The goatherd seems to be following him, and gather behind him at the shore. Curious, and following their herder as goats do without needing any prodding. The goat-herder calls out.

Howdy. Need some help there?

Finegan has come to the front and is preparing to toss his grappling hooks.

Nope, just give me a little room. . .

Mooring the houseboat, Finegan strides across the gangplank, his hand outstretched.

*Finegan Fine here, trader. No doubt I've got
something you need.*

The goat-herder is rubbing the back of his head, dark hair obviously cut by scissors, not professionally done. He extends an invitation.

Well, why don't you come for supper and we'll discuss it. I'll go over some of our problems. Mebbe you can help. . . Goat cheese and roasted pumpkin suit you?

The goat-herder has fashioned a shelter for himself near the goat shelters at the top of the hill. Various weathered boards, showing signs of various paint colors in past lives, are nailed to form a lean-to. The ends are open for ventilation, covered by cloth that can be dropped down in cold weather, and the boards of the lean-to can be lifted for light also. He cooks over a wood-burning stove placed under a tarp, so rain is kept from the cooking area. A stovepipe carries the smoke up above the tarp.

There are several bedraggled suburbanites sitting on a tree trunk, waiting for supper. Their feet are covered with dust, as they have been working a field all day. Though they look exhausted, they look contented. Children are among them. Joey goes down the line, showing the picture of his parents.

This was when they were a few years younger . . .

Joey is not getting any response, and looks discouraged by the end of the line.

The goat-herder has fashioned a table out of a board supported by stools and boxes, and has chopped a couple pumpkins into sections. These he slides into the wood stove oven, in a covered baking pan. After brushing the table top clear, he brings out some goat cheese wrapped in cloth from a cooler placed into a niche in the rocks. He slices this up and puts it on a plate, passing it down the line. Some of the suburbanites hand the platter to Joey and Finegan, including them as guests in the feeding line. The goat-herder explains.

What we got here is a two-step operation. Goats will eat pretty much anything. . . Seems one of these women (waving to the lineup) saved a lot of pumpkinseed. Halloween, ya know. . . She saw this coming. . . So we used up the last of Ms. Granger's diesel plowing her field and planting them. Now we got pumpkin leaves to feed the goats, and plenty seed for next year.

The crowd is nodding at all of this, confirming the tale.

Now we got nothing that works. Everything is by hand. . .

Many in the crowd are nodding vigorously at this comment. Eyes rolling. The goat-herder faces Finegan, raising his hands up and grinning.

*So, trader, here's the deal. If you can help us
with the industrial revolution, we can give you
pumpkins and cheese!*

The goat-herder turns back to the task at hand, pulling the roasting pumpkin out of the oven and testing it with a long pronged fork.

The next morning the goat-herder is silhouetted against the orange dawn sky, seated on a stool next to a goat milking station, milking one of his goats. He swings to the side to pour the milk from the milking bucket into a milk cooler, tall and with handles on both sides at the top. Finegan's bare feet are sticking out of the houseboat. As the goats bleat, greeting their herder, Finegan's feet twitch.

The goat-herder is squeezing whey out of cheese curds using rough cloth squares to hold the curds. The whey is being saved as a drink, nothing wasted. He slams the curd bag on the table to flatten it and form a rectangle, flips the cloth this way and that to form a package, and places the curd in a cooler to cure. The goat-herder, who has been concentrating on his work, has just noticed that Finegan has quietly arrived. He flashes a quick smile over his shoulder.

Morning!

Finegan says,

I'm ready when you are.

Finegan and the goat-herder are approaching a collapsed barn, caved in at the center, the roof shingles mostly missing. Farming implements are here and there in the tall grass, devices meant to be dragged behind a tractor - a raking device meant to collect hay, and a plowing device with sharp tines meant to plow several rows at once. Finegan and the goat-herder stride across the barnyard and into the doors of the barn, now askew due to the collapse.

Finegan is walking through the barn, used to house implements rather than house cows or horses. He is walking slowly along a workbench at the side, looking at tools laid out or hung on the walls. Several bikes

have been tossed into a corner, tires deflated or missing. The old tractor stands in the center, covered with dust and a few splinters of boards from the collapsed roof. Some chickens have been roosting in the barn, and take off squawking as the men make their rounds. Finegan asks,

*So what are you folks doing by hand that you'd
like to have, ah . . . mechanized?*

Joey is tossing some nuts and bolts back into a box, one of many that has been brought from the houseboat, and placing the boxes back into the old rusty wagon from the houseboat. Finegan is sitting on a stool, hunched over what looks like an assemblage of junk, making his final adjustments. He stands up and stands back, a look of satisfaction on his face. The goat-herder and the suburbanites are walking up at one side, and stand in a group, expectantly. Finegan says, proudly,

Behold!

The group does not react, is unimpressed and confused. What does this contraption do?



Realizing they are not following his genius, Finegan gives a demonstration. He climbs into a bike seat, one of a pair for a dual pumping operation. He pats the other seat and motions to the goat-herder to hop on.

Each seat has a lever, so the contraption can turn by one bike seat disconnecting while the other stays connected. Thus, the contraption can turn 180° to the left or the right, depending upon which seat has disengaged. Finegan waves the watching group away.

Stand back!

Finegan is murmuring instructions to the goat-herder, then pushes a lever on a control panel between the two bike seats. They both start peddling and the contraption takes off.

From front to back, it is a multistep operation to clear, plow, and plant. At the front of the long contraption are lawn mover blades, recently sharpened, turning round and round. They have been lowered by

the lever on the control panel, and turn as the contraption moves, cutting any weeds on the row about to be planted. Next, along the contraption, is a rake, one taken from the large raking farm implement in the yard. The cut weeds are thus swept aside, and can be collected later for hay if desired. Next along the long contraption, are dual plow blades, also lowered by the lever on the control panel.

And last, just behind the seated men, is a seed dispenser, which is a cup ending in a funnel that lifts up and down like a pecking hen, releasing and placing a couple seeds every foot or so. When the seed dispenser lifts, an old boot at the end of a pole is stamped down on top of the spot, tamping the seed into the dirt. The seed dispenser and tamping boot are attached and under the control of a wheel that turns as the contraption moves along. Finegan is ready to demonstrate.

Lets go.

They begin peddling and the contraption moves through the tall grass for a few feet. Finegan throws a lever at his side, disengaging his side, and throws the lever at the control panel, lifting the mower, the rake, the plow, and halting the seed dispenser. The goat-herder continues pumping until the contraption has turned 180°. Finegan re-engages the levers and the pair plow a second row alongside the first.

Zombies

Joey and Finegan are loading the last of the pumpkin exchange aboard, distributing them along the sides of the house atop various boxes or in niches. The goat-herder comes up with a couple packs of goat cheese, walking up the plank and handing them to Finegan. He nods and smiles at Finegan.

Been a pleasure.

As he is walking back down the plank he remembers something, raises a finger and the air and turns.

Going up river past Millstown?

Finegan nods an affirmative.

Watch out for them zombies! Some never left.

They're like the living dead.

The houseboat is moving up the center of a broad, slowly flowing river. The rise in sea level has swollen the river as well as the coastline, so tree limbs are sticking out of the water on either side.

A river-edge town appears in the distance, the streets flooded and all the buildings under water at least into the second floor. There are no high rise buildings, but there are several multi-story brick buildings that serve as the business district. The river front eateries and piers are all under water, with only the top of a sign occasionally sticking above the water. One says "Millstown".

Some stick thin, very pale people begin to emerge from the rooftop stairwells, shuffling toward the edges of the buildings. They stare silently at the approaching houseboat, not waving or calling out. Finegan sticks to the center of the river. Joey hops down from his station atop the roof and sits down on the deck, putting his arm around Barney as they silently glide past the scene.

Finegan is mooring the houseboat for the night, tying it to a sturdy tree trunk toward the center of the river. Given the scene at Millstown, he does not want to be close to shore. He is ready for a good supper and a solid night's sleep not interrupted by bleating goats being milked at dawn. He is setting up his camper stove and putting a couple fresh coals in the firepit, not yet lit, when he jerks his head

up suddenly, hearing the sound of an oar dipping into the water, splashing.

A single man is approaching in a canoe, swinging his paddle from one side to the other to steer the canoe toward the side of the houseboat. He wears a broad brimmed hat, a faded flannel shirt, and faded loose cut jeans. He is balding and middle-aged.

Finegan motions for Joey to catch the end of the canoe and tie the line the man is tossing to the houseboat, while Finegan stands back in case there is trouble. Passing the city earlier, he has his pistol at his back. The man in the canoe asks,

Did you pass a town awhile's back? River front town. Millstown.

The man heaves himself onto the deck and fishes a map out of his back pocket. He opens it and places it against a pile of boxes, running his finger up and down the river and poking at the riverfront town they have just passed.

My mother's there. Or I think she might be. . . We talked just before the trouble started and she said she wasn't going to leave. . . Been there all her life. . . Taken me all this time to work my way across the country. I've got to check.

Finegan's eyes meet Joey's, a wordless understanding between them that Finegan is going to help this man. Simultaneously, they both speak. Joey says,

I'm going with you!

While Finegan says,

You stay here.

They continue to stare at each other, wordlessly. Finegan sighs and steps into the house and returns with a rifle, handing this and some ammo to the man. He hands the sheathed hunting knife to Joey and squats beside Joey with instructions.

Only if someone makes a move on you, OK? Keep it in the leather or you'll cut yourself.

The canoe is moving downriver, both Finegan and the traveler manning an oar, the traveler to the rear as he is more experienced with canoeing. Joey is seated in the center, holding the rifle upright. They steer to

the shore upriver of the town, pulling the canoe on land and setting off on foot through the woods toward the city.

The threesome are walking along a deserted street not yet flooded. The residences at Millstown run up into the hills, only the business district along the waterfront flooded. Victorian houses, tumbled down with some completely collapsed, are lining the street. All the yards and flowers and bushes are overgrown, fences broken and any painted surface looking very weathered. Most of the windows are broken, and most doors are hanging open.

The traveler is peering at any address number still visible on the houses, and finally, somewhat excited, finds his childhood home.

There it is.

He is running now, Finegan and Joey bringing up the rear while trying to look around them as they do, sometimes running backwards to do so. The traveler bursts through the front door, which has been ajar but not hanging open.

The threesome are standing in the living room of the Victorian style home. The furniture is old fashioned, tassels hanging from lamp shades and over-stuffed chairs and sofa. The traveler has apparently searched the house and found a note on the refrigerator door. He is holding the yellowed piece of paper in his hand, staring at it.

She says she's going to Atlanta with a group of people. The phones are down, and there's nothing to eat.

The traveler looks up at Finegan and then down at Joey, connecting with their faces briefly, then goes back to staring at the note.

That's it. That's all I've got. Off to Atlanta, I guess. . . That's the state capital.

They turn to go out the front door and suddenly freeze. There are zombie people at the front door. The zombie people are at the windows too. Finegan speaks quietly, so that only he and Joey and the traveler can make out what he's saying.

They look malnourished, not mean. I hear they refused to leave the town.

Nobody is moving, all frozen, so finally Finegan has a plan.

*Backs together now, let's just push our way out
the front door.*

Finegan and the traveler are shoulder to shoulder, with Joey facing backwards, at their back, his knife drawn and turned upward in front of his chest. They move as a tight group toward the front door.

The zombies are gently knocked aside as Finegan and the traveler come out the front door, pushing steadily but gently. When the way seems clear, they pick up the pace, Finegan with his spare hand on the scuff of Joey's neck, making sure he is not left behind. Joey is almost glued to their backs, walking backwards, his eyes moving from side to side, scanning for danger.

When they seem clear by a couple feet, they all bolt in the direction of the canoe, running.

OK. Run for it!

The zombies are following them, staggering along wordlessly, too malnourished to break into a run but clearly intending to follow.

The threesome are running back to where the canoe is pulled ashore and clamor into it, the traveler pushing the canoe out into the water and stepping in at the last minute. He and Finegan push away from the shore, and paddle upstream energetically. The zombies are approaching the shore, still following them. The traveler says,

*Lord! No wonder my mother left. Were we
supposed to be supper?*

Finegan replies,

*Not sure, but I think they were just curious. I
think they eat rats, stuff like that. Mostly,
they've just been starving. Waiting to be
rescued. Probably near brain dead too, from
starvation.*

Finegan and Joey have been glancing over their shoulder. Finegan says,

*I think we're pulling away, but I want to put
some miles between us. I'll give you a good
breakfast in the morning if you'll help me get
upstream tonight.*

The traveler says,

Deal. I owe you that.

The houseboat is moored at a small island in the center of the river, tied to a tree. Finegan has just finished tying the knots, and returns to pick up where he left off the day before - making a meal. He is pulling some potatoes from a bin, and taking some fish out of the wooden box he uses as a cooler. He sniffs the fish and determines they are not yet spoiled. Finegan fires the coals and puts a blackened pot of coffee on the grill, then pulls a pan out and slices potatoes and an onion into it.

Joey and Barney were asleep on the deck, as usual, but stir due to all the commotion. The Traveler is asleep on the house roof, hat over his face, and snoring. Finegan glances at the traveler and says,

*We've been taking shifts all night. I recon
he's played out.*

Finegan scans the shore in the direction of Millstown, several miles downstream.

*I recon we shook the shufflers. Joey, after we
eat, I'm crashing. You stand watch, eh?*

At the smell of frying fish and potatoes and onions in a pan, the traveler awakes, raising first one knee and then rolling over onto his side, hand under his chin and hat pushed back on his head.

Boy that smells good . .

Energized, he rolls onto his butt and scuffs on his butt over to the edge of the roof, climbing down using pile of boxes as stairs.

*I'm going upstream a'ways and then overland to
Atlanta. . . Not sure what I'll find.*

Finegan is dishing out the pan-fry onto three plates, and hands one to the traveler, then pours mugs of coffee. Finegan casts a glance at the traveler's shoes, soft sole for comfort while canoeing.

*You'll need some walking boots. What'er you
goin to do with the canoe? Carry is overland? .
. I've got some boots in a box. They might fit.*

Joey gets his clue and puts his plate down, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He goes into the house and starts searching for the box labeled "boots". Finegan is also rummaging around in the laundry pile, and pulls out a red bandana. He holds it up.

*Tie this on a tree where you stash the canoe. .
. Even trade. . . You goin to need some socks?*

The Castle

The houseboat is approaching a broken concrete dam, shattered by the earthquakes. The floodwaters have raised the water level to the top of the former dam, but there is not enough clearance to go over without scraping the bottom of the houseboat, potentially getting caught and stranded.

There are flooded trees but mostly the banks are clear and steep. Finegan selects a sturdy tree as his anchor and ties up. The canoe is tied firmly to the side of the houseboat, the paddles laid in the bottom. Not a soul is in sight.

Finegan is pulling a tub out from the clutter, and sorting laundry, preparing to finally have laundry day. Joey emerges from the house holding an old Tide box.

This?

Finegan glances up.

No, that's salt. It's a brown box. Slivered bar soap.

The camping grill is at the side, heating a pot of water, which can be seen steaming. Finegan takes a couple pails of river water, pouring it into the tub. He examines the box Joey brought from the house and shakes some of this into the tub, then immediately pours boiling water on top of the flakes. He then grabs a washing board nearby and starts scrubbing shirts, wringing them out, and throwing them to the side to be rinsed later.

Finegan stands straight, sweating a bit, to catch his breath. Looking to the side, up along the shore, he sees a fisherman.

Company . .

The fisherman is quiet and dressed in earth tones, had been there all along, not noticed. He nods in Finegan's direction and recasts his bamboo pole and line into the river. He does not have expensive fishing gear, but rather a pole with a line tied to the end, primitive.

Finegan returns to scrubbing his laundry, seeing that his activity is downriver from the fisherman's spot, and that they are not interfering with each other. Joey is picking up the washed items and rinsing them in the river.

The houseboat is now covered with drying laundry. All lines from the corner posts are full, the laundry attached to the lines by anything but laundry pins. Some shirts are attached by the arms of the shirt knotted loosely around the line, as though the shirt itself were holding onto the line. Heavy pants such as jeans are attached with tools - clamps or pliers. The roof of the house is covered with small items such as underwear and t-shirts.

The Fisherman is making his way down along the steep bank toward where the houseboat is moored, a string of fish in one hand, his pole in the other. He raises the hand that holds the string of fish.

Howdy. Be happy to share the fish and some news.

Finegan has been sipping a mug of coffee, the pot still on the grill, staying warm. He puts his mug down and rises to move toward the canoe, tied to the side of the houseboat.

Let me bring you over . .

The houseboat crew and their guest are seated on the clutter at the front of the houseboat, framed by flapping laundry hung on the corner-post lines. The laundry tub has been emptied into the river and is turned upside down. Finegan is seated on this as a chair. They are all finishing fried fish and potatoes, putting their plates aside and sipping coffee. Time now to finish catching up on whatever news they have to share. The fisherman says, with a deep sigh,

*So the fire took it all . . gutted the place .
. people keep showing up, looking for the
stash, so we let the char heap say it all. . .
No need to explain.*

Finegan asks,

Those armed guards, they gone too?

And the fisherman responds,

*Them that didn't kill each other off during the
shootout, yeah. They took their guns and went
off to Atlanta.*

Finegan asks,

Just you and your family here?

And the fisherman relays,

*Those that come looking to loot, they don't
stay. They move on. . . We try to stay out of
sight.*

Finegan sets his mug down and rises to pick up a pumpkin and holds it high.

For the fish. Would you mind taking me back to the castle? What looters want is not always what's valuable. I'd like to sort through.

Joey is watching Finegan's face but they both are arriving at the same conclusion, having learned to almost read each other's minds. Joey will bring the canoe back and stay with the boat, in case looters arrive.

Finegan and the Fisherman are walking up a barren hill, no trees or shrubbery on the hill. Near the top of the hill, not at the crest but to the side of the crest nestled against a rock outcropping, is the charred remains of a large house. The spiked metal fence that surrounded the house is still intact, though the gates are hanging open. Some sheep are seen on the hillside in the distance, grazing. The two are seen walking through the gate.

The fisherman is pointing toward a corner pinnacle.

There they had the lookout. Had one atop the hill too in a concrete bunker. Then the goods they had in a basement bunker, huge. The guards blasted that open to get at 'em. Heard the blast from miles away. This was after they kilt Mr. Anderson. He'd hid the key and was holding out, ya'know. He was real tight fisted . . . always was. Acted like he owned everybody. Got him kilt, I recon. We ain't seed him since.

The twosome continue walking toward what was the front door of the enclave. The monstrous double front doors are hanging open, still standing though one is hanging a bit off its hinges. The doors are charred but still intact, as they were solid wood on top of metal centers, designed to be impermeable. The twosome slide between the open doors, stepping gingerly through the trash. The main room of the house has been burned to the extent that there is no roof and the floorboards have been consumed. Only an occasional floor beam is in place. Finegan points to the side, where the fire was less intense in the wings of the house.

Lets try that route.

Finegan and the fisherman punch out the remains of a window glass, and climb through the open window frames. The room they are entering has a

solid floor, though the drapes and furniture have been consumed by the fire. The fire raged upward in the drafts, not downward.

There is a bar on the far end of the room, farthest from the main room inferno. Finegan heads over there, poking around behind the bar, but nothing seems to have been left by the looters. He pulls at some plumbing used to pipe carbonated water, and detaches a carbonating device under the counter to take along.

He is still looking around, determined to find some booze. He is pulling out half melted soda bottles, littering the floor with them. Toward the back of this stash he finds what he is looking for, a half-filled soda bottle that has a tape tag on it. The soda bottles toward the back had not melted as much as those exposed to the air of the room, and this bottle is intact.

Aha!

Finegan opens the cap and sniffs with satisfaction, taking a swing.

*As tight as he was, the help had to hide any
booze they were stealing. . . Probably measured
the bottles daily.*

Finegan holds the bottle high, sloshing it, smiling.

*This is how they got around him. The whole
bottle went missing.*

Suddenly he realizes there may be more, and drops down to dig around in the soda bottle cabinet.

Finegan and the fisherman are going down some concrete stairs into the basement of the castle hulk - an external entry to the basement. The door to the basement has been blown open, the doors in fragments pointing inward. There is some standing water on one side of the basement floor, from rain and damaged drains and the fact that the cataclysms tilted the house on its foundation. The walls are severely cracked.

To one side of the basement, in one wall, is the entry to the food stash, the entry now one big hole due to the explosion that set the house afire. Various pieces of cardboard are littered here and there, some floating in the flooded basement corner, as the supply depot has been sifted through repeatedly by looters. Finegan is going to have a look, and starts walking toward the blast hole.

Maybe they left some soap.

The shelves in the center of the bunker are knocked over and somewhat charred. All the shelves of the bunker appear to be empty, though some items have been thrown to the floor, discarded. As Finegan suspected, these include boxes of soap powder and packages of bar soap. He goes over to start stacking them in a pile. A voice growls out of the corner.

That's mine.

Finegan jerks his head up to look in one corner of the bunker, and sees a shell of an old man, huddled behind some broken and empty cardboard boxes. His clothing is matted with dirt, his hair long and stringy and also matted, his beard thin and long, and his face wrinkly and with a perpetual sneer plastered across his face. It is clear he has been using a spot nearby for a toilet, as a pile of dung and yellow pool of water attests. Finegan says,

*Make you a trade! How about some roasted
pumpkin and pecans, eh? Something to eat.*

The owner was not expecting to be fed or treated fairly, and looks puzzled, unable to answer. Finegan takes the initiative. He pats the pile of powdered soapboxes and bar soap packages.

*I'll leave these here, and be back in an hour
or so.*

Finegan steps toward the exit, holding his soda bottle half full of booze to his far side so the owner cannot see this. He moves lively, before the owner can speak, the astonished fisherman at his heels. When they are clear of the room and on their way up the concrete steps, the fisherman says in a loud whisper.

*I thought he was dead! . . . Huh . . . Maybe he had
a bunker within the bunker. . . . What's he been
eating?*

Finegan and the curious fisherman are returning down the concrete steps, holding a couple plastic buckets. One is filled with roasted pumpkin pieces, skin still on and browned at the edges, and the other is partially filled with shelled pecans. They make their way into the bunker and look expectantly into the corner of the bunker where the snarling owner was last seen. There is no one there.

Then they see the owner seated on the pile of powdered soapboxes and bar soap packages, glowering and sneering.

It's mine!

Finegan calls the owner's bluff, knowing he is not interested in soap and has probably run through any secret food cache he had hidden in a bunker within the bunker. Finegan turns to leave.

Suit yourself.

The owner snarls,

Wait!

Looking like a trapped, mean spirited animal, eyes shifting in every direction and the sneer ever returning to his, the owner motions to his side.

Bring that stuff over here and set it down.

Finegan sets his plastic buckets to the side of the soap pile, but far enough way that the owner must actually rise from the pile to reach the food. Finegan steps back. The owner lunges for the food, shuffling to his corner of the bunker with it, hugging the buckets to his chest. He starts stuffing the roasted pumpkin into his mouth like a famished animal. Finegan picks up his soap pile and backs away toward the bunker entry.

Love at Last

The houseboat is peddling along a stretch of flooded shoreline that is rolling, grassy hills. Flocks of sheep can be seen here and there, grazing. Joey is at ease on the rooftop, sitting cross-legged, as few trees seem to be in the area and the hillocks can be readily seen under the water. On occasion he points to the right or the left, indicating which direction Finegan should steer the boat.

On shore is what looks like a group of people wrestling with a sheep. Two men are holding it down while a woman is sheering the wool off. Finegan stops peddling the houseboat, letting it drift closer to shore in the morning tide. Some in the group glance up, noticing the houseboat, but don't stop their task until the sheep has been sheered. They stand up suddenly, the sheep bounding to its feet and escaping.

The group continues to stand and stare, not waving or calling, piles of wool around their feet. Finally the woman leans over to bundle the loose wool, tying it with a cord and slinging it over her shoulder. She sets off up the hill.

Finegan decides he must either moor or peddle to open water and turns the boat toward shore, a spot where the shoreline elevates quickly and the rising tide won't run past his grappling hooks. He comes to the front and heaves the hooks high into some brush at the shoreline. Puts the plank at a sharp angle so that when the houseboat rises with the tide it will be level, and climbs up, Joey at his feet. They walk over to the two men, still standing like statues.

Finegan offers his hand.

Finegan Fine here, trader.

The deafmute comes to life and takes Finegan's outstretched hand, nodding. He signs, using sign language. Finegan looks momentarily stunned, trying to figure out how to communicate and not sure if they understood his words. He hands Joey a stick and picks up a leaf, then he and Joey exchange while Finegan mouths his word in an exaggerated fashion.

Trade.

The deafmute nods and motions toward the houseboat, taking off for the houseboat with Finegan in tow. They both clamor up the gangplank, with the deafmute poking through Finegan's goods. Finegan is at his elbow, looking a tad worried as he is not sure the man understands the nature of their business - an exchange.

The deafmute seizes on a folded tarp, and leaving his finger firmly on the tarp, stands and smiles at Finegan. Using the man's body language, Finegan motions dramatically toward the hill where the woman carted off the wool, and starts to step toward the gangplank, watching the deafmute closely. Seeing that he is following him, not carting off the tarp, Finegan is reassured and smiling, and raises his hands up slightly, shrugging to Joey.

We're using sign language.

The roof of the old wool mill has been partially torn off, and the sign likewise torn apart. The word "Deaf" can still be seen on the sign, however. Some of the stones in the walls have been shaken loose and dropped into the yard, while other walls look relatively intact. The deafmute is leading them around to the side toward the mill where wool is combed and spun and large looms are worked by foot pedals.

A woman is working a loom, weaving wool cloth. There is a price list on the wall, listing sizes of blankets or fine woolen cloth by the yard. This posted paper is yellowed with age. Some gardens are seen in the distance, where men are hoeing the rows of vegetables.

The deafmute walks up to a pile of folded blankets and fine woolen cloth in a bolt. He gestures toward these, indicating this is what they are willing to barter. All the blankets and bolts of cloth are earth tones, not dyed.

Finegan nods, turning toward Joey and pulling him close. He is tugging on Joey's shirt, which has started to get tight as he is growing. His pants likewise are tight, the waist button undone so a cord around the waist is holding the pants up. The deafmute nods, understanding. He motions that they should follow him into another section of the mill.

Here there is a treadle sewing machine, and flexible body models. The models have sections that can be squeezed together to simulate a smaller man or woman or child, or pulled apart for a fatty. Any shape can be simulated - fat hips, big shoulders, etc. There is a model for each sex and several for children of various ages.

The deafmute takes Joey by the hand and takes him up to one of the models. He is using his hands to measure Joey's body and then squeezing or pulling apart the model sections accordingly.

A seamstress comes up with a tape measure and takes some measures of Joey - across his shoulders, around his chest, from neck to waist, and from waist to crotch. She brings up a swath of fine woolen cloth and holds it up to Finegan and Joey for approval.

Finegan is loading a couple tarps onto the rusty child's wagon he uses to cart goods. The gangplank is now level with the shore, the tide having risen. He sets out toward the hilltop, toward the mill complex. As Finegan is coming up over the top of the hill he pauses to catch his breath and looks out over the hills. The deafmute is coming to meet him.

There is smoke rising from the mainland here and there. The deafmute glances at Finegan, slicing his hand under his chin indicating much danger there. The deafmute points at the water, then pats his hand down, indicating the time when the water was low, then pulls his hand under his chin again.

He motions to Finegan to follow him, and goes to a cleft in the rock nearby, showing Finegan a hidden bunker with a metal door. The door is in the shadows so blends in with the rock. Pulling this door open, the deafmute steps in, Finegan following.

Finegan nods, indicating he understands what the man is saying. The group hid here if any danger from looters was a threat. They emerge from the bunker and return to the hilltop where they stare at the fires on the mainland. Finegan suddenly remembers he has a pair of binoculars at the houseboat, and raises his hand to the deafmute, pushing against him, indicating "wait here", then takes off running toward the houseboat.

Moments later, Finegan is returning with the binoculars, puffing up the hill. He holds them high so the deafmute can see what he was after. Finegan stands at the crest of the hill, holding the binoculars to his eyes, scanning. There are fires in the background, people dashing back and forth, throwing rocks at each other.

Finegan hands the binoculars to the deafmute who takes a look. When the deafmute tries to return them to Finegan he pushes his palm in the direction of the deafmute, indicating he should keep them. The deafmute looks at Finegan's face for a moment, then nods and returns to using them, not arguing and accepting the gift. They need to know when danger is approaching.

Finegan has brought Joey to the fitting room of the Mill complex, where the models and sewing machine are housed. They are standing in the dimming light. Joey has the new pants and shirt on, and they fit perfectly. The pants are of heavier material than the shirt, and a lighter color of brown.

The seamstress has squatted down while she checks her work. She tugs at the shoulder and waist, and is satisfied with the fit. She has her yellow cloth tape measure around her neck. She rises and faces Finegan, then pulling her tape measure from around her neck moves as though to measure Finegan's shoulders. Pressing against him, and taking his face in her hands, she suddenly gives him a long, lingering kiss.

Finegan stands shock still, not expecting this. As she pulls back, looking into his eyes, he raises an eyebrow, indicating something else has arisen. Giving up the booze has its benefits. Then with a smile, he folds her in his arms, leans her backwards, and gives her a long passionate kiss.

Joey is sitting forlornly in the door of the house on the houseboat with Barney. Both are missing Finegan, who has not yet returned. Joey takes the picture of his parents from his pocket and looks at it in the dim light, then tucks the photo back into his pocket. He puts his arm around Barney, who is leaning against him, and sighs. Finegan comes into view in the dim light, dragging his rusty wagon.

Joey has scrambled to his feet, trying to act nonchalant by fussing with some rope at the side, as though Finegan's whereabouts had been the last thing on his mind.

What did they trade for the binoculars?

Finegan replies,

*Honey. Something sweeter than honey, in fact. .
. You know, as good as that seamstress is, we
should try to bring her some business now and
then. . . Not sure how to arrange that, though.*

Finegan is lively and smiling. He gazes up toward the mill complex hill, reflecting.

Maybe I'll need a new set of clothes.

Finegan and Joey have just finished breakfast and are cleaning up. They have their backs to the hillside. Finegan tips the coals in the portable grill overboard and they fall sizzling into the water. Joey is bent over the other side of the houseboat, rinsing the plates and cups. They are too busy with their tasks to notice the seamstress coming down the hill, holding a folded woolen blanket, until her wooden shoes clop on the gangplank.

Finegan looks up, stands, and comes to accept the blanket. The seamstress smiles warmly and pushes the blanket into his arms, holding her rounded fingers up over her eyes, saying "for the binoculars". She holds his face between her two hands and gives him a big kiss on the mouth. She turns with a wave to Joey, and walks back up the hill. Finegan is looking after her with a lingering, dewy-eyed gaze. Joey is looking at Finegan with his mouth slightly open and blinking, astonished, having never seen this side of Finegan before.

No Call Home

The houseboat is approaching a bend in a broad flooded river. The land has an occasional clump of trees in a ravine, but is primarily pasture land. Toward the top of one hill, on a slope of land, is a massive garden, being tended. Those tending the garden are a mixture of various races and cultures - Hispanic, Vietnamese, and Russian. Hoes are being wielded aggressively, weeds pulled and laid down on the ground as mulch, produce being picked and placed into baskets, and a wheelbarrow full of compost being pushed down a row.

Finegan has pedaled the houseboat to an open spot on the shoreline, anchored, and is walking across the gangplank with Joey at his heels. One of the Hispanic workers nearby nods and welcomes them.

Hola.

A Russian, dressed in faded jeans and a garish shirt approaches. He acts as the group's interpreter as he speaks English better than some.

*Hello to visitors. We here grow food and live
harmony one with other.*

Some of the gardeners pause in their work to watch the exchange, while others continue with their work.

Finegan Fine here, trader.

The Russian asks,

What you trade?

To which Finegan replies,

What you need?

Finegan has been taken to the Russian's sleeping quarters. This is a shack made from pieces of broken housing - part of a roof overhead, wallboard on one side, a tarp hanging to form another wall, and a blanket on top of a straw bale for a bed. They are both seated on the crude bed, Finegan inspecting radio components. The Russian complains,

*I trapped here. Can no fly home. Can no call
home. I worry.*

He points to the distance, where he worked as a contractor.

*We work for cheap, send money home, but now I
regret.*

Finegan, trying to help, asks,

*Do you have a tower? Short wave is the only
thing working, and you need to be close to a
tower.*

Finegan and the Russia are walking along the edge of a broken blacktop road. They pass a car parked next to a rupture in the road, where there was no way to proceed. The road has heaved six feet into the air. The doors of the car are hanging open, and the glove box is also hanging open. In the distance are several buildings, some partially collapsed, with almost all the windows broken. Pigeons have taken up residence inside the rooms beyond the broken windows. The parking lots are overgrown with weeds where the blacktop is cracked. The ground has heaved and bent the chain-link fence in places, with an occasional deserted car here and there. The place is deserted. The Russian is gesturing in the direction of the complex they are approaching, then puts his hand on his chest.

I chemist. On contract.

Finegan points to one of the buildings, seeing what appears to be a tower there.

Let's try that building.

Finegan and the Russian are climbing stairs inside one of the buildings. The concrete stairs are broken in places but the rebar is holding. However, the men test the strength of the stairs now and then before gingerly putting weight on a step, and hold onto the handrail frequently. They arrive at the top of the last flight of stairs and open the door to the roof. A flock of pigeons takes flight, startled. The men walk over to the tower. The Russian has his radio in hand, and Finegan has brought his short wave radio, which he knows to be operational. There are tie lines from places on the tower to places on the roof, which held during the high winds as the winds simply flowed around the wires and thin tower.

Finegan drops to a squat at the base of the tower, which is enclosed in a box. He pries open the door with a penknife and pulls out some wires, inspecting them. He loosens some screws on the side of his radio and attaches some wires from the tower directly to these points, then finds the radio batteries are now dead. He looks at the radio in the Russians's hand, and sees it is a crank radio, generating its own electricity.

Let's try yours.

Finegan stands up to crank the Russian's radio, then squats again to connect wires. The Russian's radio is making static noises as the dial gets turned. Suddenly, they connect.

*(skritch) . . meeting later . . (snap) . .
something to eat . .*

Finegan presses a button to send a message.

*Caruthersville, Alabama here. Can you tell me
your location?*

The voice on the other end pauses, then says,

*Memphis. Are you in contact with rescue
services?*

Finegan responds,

*No. I've been along the new Georgia coastline.
Florida is flooded. Atlanta is a zombie town.
Do you have international connections? Russia?*

Memphis pauses, then laughs.

*Are you kidding? Farthest we got was someone in
Asheville. Had them for awhile, but they were
being overrun with folks from the coast.
Flooding. Been a couple months now, no contact.
Where the heck is the national guard?*

Finegan says,

*I've seen no sight of them. Period. No
military, no guard. Everyone is on their own.*

Memphis continues to press for information.

*(skritch) food depot? We're plumb out here.
Hunted out too. Some fish in the Mississippi
though. It's big now, stretching west as far as
the eye can see.*

Finegan says,

*Everyone gardens, sheep and goats and the like.
You too?*

After a pause, Memphis concurs.

*Them that can, yeah. Lot of suicides here
lately. Peaceful. They go peaceful like.*

Finegan signs off.

*My Russian friend might connect now and then to
chat, but I gotta go now. Maybe I'll make my
way up there. I run a trading houseboat. What
side of Memphis are you on?*

Memphis laughs, and says,

The part above water. Ah, high, the hill tops.

Finegan signals his goodbye.

10-4.

Finegan turns off the radio, shaking his head in the negative, but the Russian already has caught the drift.

*No call home. Maybe you take me home in your
boat?*

Finegan is startled at the request.

*Oh, no, it'd never make the ocean. No can do.
No, no, you need a bigger boat, well, you need
a boat period. What I have is a raft! The waves
would go over it. We'd all die.*

Finegan and the Russian are returning to the camp, walking up a dirt path toward the shanties that the camp has assembled from junk. These are all people who were not welcomed at other communities, joining forces and helping each other. There are more men than women present, and every woman is pregnant or with a baby in arms. Joey is playing with a group of Mexican and Vietnamese boys, kicking a ball around.

The Russian points in the direction of the houseboat.

You no have light?

Finegan is reaching for the Russian's radio and unscrews one side to inspect how the crank device works. He looks up at the Russian.

*No, but they can be rigged. You've got lots of
fresh vegetables, how about a trade?*

Finegan is grinning at the Russian, as the crank motion has set him to thinking.

Several of the men are bringing forward car batteries and headlights taken from hulks nearby. These cars had been driven to the migrant camp when the migrants were ejected from other communities, and then parked. They are old trucks and battered older cars, but ran as long as the gasoline in their tanks lasted and where they were able to work their way over fields to bypass breaks in the roads. The batteries are being placed in a series, side by side and row after row, and wired together.

Finegan is working with the back of an old farmstead windmill, which has had several of its blades repaired with pieces of wood screwed onto the broken blades.

Got that alternator?

Finegan indicates the Russian should hold the windmill in the air, holding it from the hub at the backside, while Finegan holds onto two wires coming out from the hub backside. Finegan looks up, noting there is no breeze at the moment, then turns the blades by hand. The two wires he has in his hand spark, causing Finegan to jump.

Hey! Success.

Finegan then bends over a metal box between the battery series and windmill, connecting wires. He motions to one of the men, a Hispanic, to turn the blades of the windmill while he, Finegan, bends over with a flow meter to check on the batteries.

The windmill is now standing up where it can catch the breeze, on a narrow triangle of boards nailed with cross-struts, crude but sturdy. The blades are lazily turning in the evening breeze coming off the broad river. The series of batteries has been covered with a tarp roof, to keep the rain off. At the far end of the battery block is a rack of headlights, glowing. The migrants are all milling around, contemplating this new setup. Finegan is off to one side, being handed an armful of Bok Choy cabbage.

Finegan and Joey emerge from the darkness, coming down from the hill toward the houseboat, pulling the rusty wagon. Atop the hill is a blaze of light from several headlights, pointing in various directions. Frogs are thrumming along the shore. Finegan says,

*Time for a good night's sleep . . . if the
neighbor's lights don't keep us up.*

Shark in the Water

A tall building, the second story sticking out of the water and topped by a lookout tower. The houseboat is peddling toward these buildings, with Joey as usual pacing on the roof, looking for underwater objects. Joey points to the right, directing Finegan to go right.

Some sort of roof tops to the left, in rows.

Finegan stops peddling to joins Joey to have a look.

Those are barracks.

They see the top of a barbed wire fence, where the outgoing tide is ruffling over the barbed wire. Finegan has just noticed this ruffling along the fence tops, showing the square outline of the compound.

Oh shit.

Finegan spins on his feet to look back where the houseboat entered the compound, and sees this now exposed barbed wire too.

*We'll have to wait here until the tide rises
again. . . I might do some diving while we
wait, check out those barracks.*

Finegan glances in the direction of the tower.

. . Or check out that tower.

A guard can be seen in the shadows, seemingly wrestling with himself. Then it becomes apparent that he is taking off his clothes, and suddenly dives, nude, into the water and swims in the direction of the houseboat. Seeing that he is not a threat, being without a weapon, Finegan and Joey hop down and prepare to help him onto the deck.

The guard is African American and very fit. He swims with a strong stoke to the front of the houseboat and heaves himself up, twists sideways to sit on the edge, and pulls his feet out of the water and to one side, sitting alongside the edge. Joey and Finegan move to boxes in front of the guard, to talk.

*Don't want toes in the water for too long . . I
saw a young shark in here once, the other day.*

The guard notes the fishing net hung up to dry on the line just to the side of where Joey and Finegan are seated and points to it.

*Shark makes good eating. Maybe we could troll
for it! . . If he's still in here I expect I
stirred him up. Got any bait aboard?*

Finegan has gone into the house and returned with a pair of shorts, and tosses them to the guard, who rises to step into them. Finegan is grinning at the situation, their nude guest.

*Only the three of us. But if we fish awhile we
might catch something and then we can put blood
in the water.*

The guard says,

*Fishing sounds good. I haven't had anything to
eat since the last of the dried food ran out.*

Finegan is throwing the net out over the water, waiting until the open mouth of the net sinks, and then pulling the net along with ropes attached to the four corners. One side of the net has floatation corks and is the side that traps fish. The other sides are being pulled up and toward the houseboat. Finegan pulls hand over hand along the ropes that close the mouth of the net, pulling the catch onto the front deck.

Twigs, weeds, seaweed, small flopping fish, and a crab or two are among the catch. The guard grabs the fish and crabs and puts them in a bucket, brushing the trash back into the water. Finegan is curious.

So you're the last here?

The guard says,

*We were told to hold our posts, so that's what
I did. . . Everyone else gave up and left.
Going home, ya know. I got no home. . . Was
foster raised and all and left that for the
Army.*

The guard sits back, looking at Finegan, and sighs.

*We couldn't raise anyone after it hit. You seen
anything of a command post?*

Suddenly the net starts jerking around in Finegan's hands, and the guard jumps up to help him haul it in. A small hammerhead shark is in the net, attracted by all the commotion in the water. Joey brings a wooden bludgeon and starts whacking it in the head and the shark stops thrashing. Barney is going crazy with barking, remembering the day he lost his leg to a hammerhead shark.

The camp grill is out and slabs of shark meat are sizzling. Finegan is putting pieces in a pan at the side, for supper. The guard has been stuffing his face, famished, and delighted at the houseboat setup.

*This is great! You eat like this all the time?
(swallow) How'd you come by this setup?*

Finegan says,

*Mostly, I built it. I saw what was coming, the
coastline eating away and all.*

Finegan is dumping the coals into the waterway and Joey is taking the pans and dishes to be washed at the other side. The guard raises to go wash his plate beside Joey.

*Can you take me to land later? I got some
things back in the tower. I could swim it, but
everything would get wet . .*

The houseboat is pulled alongside the tower, tied to a post at the corner of the lookout tower. The guard is lowering bundles down to Finegan, who stashes them at the side. Finegan asks,

You got any booze?

The guard answers,

That was the first thing that went.

The guard heaves himself over the side of the lookout tower and drops down to the deck of the houseboat. Finegan has his back turned, stashing the last of the guard's bundles, while the guard pulls a pistol out of his jacket pocket. When Finegan turns, he looks startled and puts his hands in the air. The guard says,

The water's up now, we can get outta here.

Finegan moves to the back of the houseboat and starts peddling away. The guard is facing him, seating on some boxes at the back. Joey is pacing back and forth on the roof, watching for objects under the water and the best spot to cross over the barbed wire fence. The barbed wire is just under the surface of the water now, with the tide in. Seeing they are leaving the compound, the guard says,

*All right! . . Boy, you come down here now
where I can see you.*

The guard does not move from his spot, fearing Finegan more than Joey, and keeps his eyes on Finegan. Joey appears overhead on the roof, just behind the guard, with the wooden bludgeon used earlier to kill the shark. He clubs the guard over the head. Finegan leaps to his feet, rushing forward to disarm the guard.

The houseboat has moored to the shoreline, temporarily, and the guard is walking the plank toward shore. He is dressed, but has only a couple of his bundles with him. He is protesting loudly.

*Look, I just wanted to be sure you weren't goin
to rob me or somethin.*

Suddenly some men dressed in various Army garb emerge from the bushes nearby. They are a mixture of African American, Hispanic, and white. The guard is horrified to see them. He is backing up the gangplank and encounters Finegan's pistol in his back. The men in front of him are unarmed but seem to be bearing a grudge against the guard. Trapped, the guard addresses the crowd, edging forward.

*Common guys, no hard feelings, eh? You'd a done
the same. . . What'cha been eating? You look
pretty fit. . . I done you a favor, actually.*

Finegan stands guard with his pistol, the only weapon in the vicinity.

Joey dashes across the gangplank to toss the grappling hooks back on board, then pulls the gangplank onto the houseboat. The houseboat is slowly moving away from shore in the now outgoing tide. One of the soldiers on shore says,

Yeah? We might eat you, ass hole. Get his gun.

The group is frisking the guard, discovering that he is unarmed. When they are safely away from shore, Finegan goes to the back of the houseboat, tucking his pistol in his pant waist at the back, all the while keeping an eye on the men on shore. He back pedals to move the houseboat further out beyond any waves. The guard is in the middle of the group of men, who are pushing him around and occasionally giving him a punch. Finegan looks up at Joey, who is standing at his post on the rooftop. Finegan says,

*There was a shark in the water all right, but
not the one we ate. . .*

The Orphanage

The houseboat is being pedaled up along a broad flooded ravine, in the midst of farming country, fields cleared of woods but not all fields planted so they have become overgrown in weeds. Trees can be seen lining the fields in places, or in ravines not yet flooded. One large field that has been planted is in Amaranth, a tall, leafy grain plant with plumes containing small seeds. Amaranth is known to be entirely edible, and is one of the rare plants that can equate to meat as it has lysine, a protein that meat contains. Another field nearby is planted in Corn, which when combined with Amaranth equal meat in protein nutrition.

The houseboat stops, Finegan taking a break to view these planted fields, a rarity during his travels. While he watches, some small children emerge from among the tall Amaranth plants. They range in age from 2-3 years, toddlers, to pre-adolescents. Most are not dressed in clothing appropriate for their age. Most of the older children have adult shirts or t-shirt, which fall almost to their knees and are tied around the waist. All are barefoot. Only the younger children have clothing that fits, and this so well worn it is clear they are hand-me-downs. The children are solemn, staring at the houseboat, and not leaving the safety of their Amaranth forest.

Finegan leaves his bike seat and comes to the front, standing side-by-side with Joey as they too solemnly view the scene before them. The houseboat is close to shore, next to where an idle field slopes down into the water. Finegan says,

I'm not sure they're used to company.

Finegan decides to moor the boat and check out the situation, as there does not appear to be an adult in charge. As he slings the grappling hooks into the ground and slides his gangplank forward, the children slip back into their Amaranth forest silently, disappearing.

Finegan and Joey are walking along the edge of the Amaranth field where it abuts an old farmstead. The house has collapsed, and weeds and brush have grown up along its sides. The barn was knocked sideways by earthquakes but the roof is intact and has been propped up by lumber so it is, in essence, a lean-to. The hay in what was formerly the upper floor of the barn, the hayloft, is now the floor of the collapsed structure, and is covered in various blankets. This is where the children have been sleeping - out of the rain, but not out of the

chill. As Finegan and Joey approach, some small children are seen dashing into the collapsed barn and crawling under their blankets, or dashing into the woods. They are indeed shy, and not used to visitors. Joey glances at Finegan and says,

I'm not the only one . . . missing parents.

A wood burning stove is in the yard, under a tree where a tarp has been tied to the lower branches to act as a roof. A broken picnic table is nearby, supported by pieces of firewood where a leg is broken. Some dishes are piled on the table, washed from the last meal. The sound of young children's voices can be heard in the distance, unintelligible. An older woman with a limp appears, surrounded by a dozen children of various ages. They cluster around her, all talking at once, and gesturing toward Finegan and Joey.

The orphan mistress has graying hair, barely pinned on top of her head in a bun. Her dress is tattered and hanging on her body as though at one time she were somewhat overweight. She looks immensely weary, and walks as though she might not make the next step. She stops to take her breath and looks up at the visitors. Seeing them non-threatening, she raises a hand weakly, as though saying a "hello", and then walks forward toward the dining area. She takes a seat on the picnic table, sighing as though relieved to be off her feet. Taking a deep breath to gain her strength, she lifts her face to smile at the visitors and waves them forward to join her. She directs her charges.

*Stir that fire and put on a pot. We'll serve
some tea.*

Finegan introduces himself.

*Morning mam. Finegan Fine here and my partner
Joey. I'm a trader, moving up and down these
parts. Got my houseboat out there at the end of
your field. Pretty impressive plots you have
there. You plant and harvest that all by
yourself?*

The orphan mistress smiles and winks at the absurdity of this idea.

Fortunately, I've got plenty of help.

She leans back, having caught her breath, and continues to direct her young charges.

*Honey, use that other pot. It has a spout.
That's it.*

Finegan says,

These aren't all yours . . .

The startled orphan mistress responds,

Oh Heaven's no. I'd surely be in the ground if that was the case! Picked them up in Montgomery when the troubles hit. I was down there visiting, checking on some friends of mine that can't move around so good no more. After I buried them . . . heart attack and such . . . I was heading back home and found these kids just lost. . . Been weeks, and no one came to collect them. . . Well, what could I do? . . . We came home together. Been a blessing, these darlin's have been. A blessing.

Finegan's mouth drops open at this unexpected description of a dozen or more orphans, some obviously only toddlers when she collected them, being described by this exhausted woman as a "blessing". He catches himself as he realizes they are watching his reactions.

Oh, indeed. My Joey here's the same. Got separated from his parents and we joined up. He's a blessing, no doubt about it.

The older children are arranging the cups and spooning some sort of tea from a tin into each cup, then pouring hot water from a pot of water taken from the stove. They bring the first cup to Finegan. Finegan says,

Oh, no, give the first cup to, ah, your mistress here. . .

The orphan mistress smiles at his chivalry, and accept the cup, sipping from it with half closed eyes as though it were something magical, a source of rejuvenation. Finegan accepts the next cup.

I can't help but wonder at your fields. I been up and down this coast. Found some folks that planted pumpkin, but most do vegetable gardens in rows, and they work at that day and night. You've got fields . . .

The orphan mistress looks up from her cup of tea, suddenly realizing what he's missing from the picture.

I been at this business for some years. Planted corn and amaranth, being vegetarian and all. Don't need meat if you got those. Made a mix for the local organic outlets. Amaranth greens are a good salad too. Made my living at that. No need to plow if you keep the weeds down regular. Just re-seed.

The orphan mistress waves in the direction of the wall of young children clustered behind her, each clutching a cup of tea.

These are the best little weed pickers I ever seen. You pull a weed up, the grubs and beetles fall out, and the chickens clean them up. You go down the rows and knock the bugs off the plants, and the chickens foller along and clean them up. What's left is our produce, bug free. . . and eggs. We got lots of eggs.

There are some chickens at the side of the old house, scratching and pecking at the dirt. One hen has a cluster of young chicks around her. Suddenly Joey is interested.

And chicken noodle soup, right?

The orphan mistress looks aghast.

Oh, we don't eat anything that had a face! . . . They get picked off often enough. They're prey to many a creature. . . But we eat the eggs.

Finegans asks,

Is there anything you need?

The orphan mistress responds.

I got no money . . .

Finegans clarifies his offer.

I'm looking to help here. Anything you need?

Finegan is approaching the barn lean-to, the sleeping quarters for the kids, pulling the rusty wagon behind him. Joey is behind the wagon, keeping a hand on the top of the pile of blankets, to keep it from tipping over. The woolen blanket given to him by the seamstress is on top of the pile.

The orphan mistress is tucking the kids into bed. They lay one beside the other, side-by-side to share body heat during the night, as there are few covers and not enough to go around. Small children are between



older children, so the older children can raise their knees up, lying on their sides, if they wish. After they are stacked into place the orphan mistress throws one of her few blankets over them, tucking in the edges. The orphan mistress has suddenly noticed Finegan's approach.

Well lord sake. . .

The rest of the children lay down on the straw while the orphan mistress wafts the now ample blanket supply over them. There is one blanket left. Finegan, smiling, hands it to her.

And one for the mistress!

Finegan and Joey are arriving back at their houseboat, at sundown, pulling the now empty creaking wagon behind them. Before they cross the gangplank, Joey throws his arms around Finegan's waist. Joey has a wet face, and takes one of his hands to wipe tears from his eyes. Finegan, wordless, grips Joey's shoulder with a one-handed hug, looking a little teary himself.

Continuity of Government

The houseboat is approaching a series of islands, a flooded city. Buildings and streets are on the islands, with the approach to any of the islands blocked by flooded buildings, which can be seen under the water. The scene looks almost magical from a distance. Some tall buildings stick up out of the water despite their foundations being flooded. In the distance are suburban islands, with only the occasional house above water. All the buildings have been damaged by earthquake and high winds, though some walls of the metal framed high rises are intact. Most of the buildings are sloping in one direction or another, the result of a collapse. There is no sign of life anywhere.

Joey is pacing back and forth on the roof of the house, pointing now and then to warn Finegan of a submerged danger. Barney is at the alert at the front of the houseboat, tail up and tense, sensing the tension in his crewmates. They hear a shotgun blast. Finegan and Joey dash into the house and peek out the doorway, Barney in hand beneath them. Finegan says,

I didn't see where it came from, did you?

Joey points and says,

Close to shore somewhere, over there.

Finegan says,

*Full moon out again tonight too. . . Gonna be
hard to make a getaway.*

Finegan is looking concerned, frowning and blinking, processing and rejecting multiple getaway plans.

*Worst case, we may have to slip into the water
at night and go find whoever is doing this. . .
I don't think we can go underwater and pull the
boat to safety. . . Might . . . But those are our
two options, I think.*

A rowboat is seen approaching with two men, one rowing, one with a shotgun across his knees. Neither wears a hat, but both have long sleeve shirts on with a band of red cloth tied around their upper right arms. The rowboat pulls up to the houseboat, the man rowing attempting to latch a rope around one of the posts on the houseboat corners. The sentry has his rifle pointed toward the door of the houseboat, where Finegan and Joey were last seen.

But Finegan has moved behind some boxes near the front of the houseboat. Finegan has his rifle resting on a box, pointing at the guard.

*You're not boarding, and you're not leaving
either. Toss that rifle into the water. . .*

Now!

The sentry hesitates, and is fondling his gun like he is debating his options. Finegan shoots into the water near them, showing them he too is armed. The sentry says,

*Look, I'll put it down. If I lose this there'll
be hell to pay.*

The Sentry puts his rifle down on the floor of the rowboat. Both men in the rowboat are now standing, hands up. Finegan says,

You shot at us!

The sentry replies,

Well you just shot at us!

To which Finegan asserts,

Well, you shot first!

But the sentry protests,

That was a warning shot!

But Finegan counters once again,

So was mine!

Finegan is grumbling under his breath, not wanting to create alienation but not wanting to be taken advantage of.

Arrrrrh.

Joey is positioned on the other side of the houseboat, also behind some boxes, with the pistol aimed at the pair in the rowboat. Finegan says,

*OK, both you men step onto the deck but move no
further.*

The men finish tying the rope around the corner post and pull the rowboat close, putting one leg each onto the deck and heaving up.

Finegan directs,

*You, oarsman, take that tie off your arm and
tie your partner's hands behind him.*

Both men from the rowboat look at each other hesitantly. Then the sentry shrugs and puts his hands behind his back to be tied. Finegan says,

*OK, both you men sit down on the deck and face
out toward the water. And you, oarsman, put
your hands behind your back. . . Joey, check
the tie on the first man and tie the second.
Tie 'em tight.*

As Joey is coming forward with some pieces of rope in his hands, Finegan steps out from behind the boxes, to be close at hand in case a scuffle results. The sentry says,

*Can we come with you? If I go back with you
holding the gun, there'll be hell to pay.*

Finegan asks,

From who?

And the sentry responds,

President Collins.

Both prisoners are now seated on the floor of the house. Their feet are now tied together as well. Joey is perched on top of some boxes, his feet under him and in a crouch, holding his pistol loosely in his hand, dropped wrist, pointing the gun downward. He is at ease. Barney is tense, sensing the tension in the air, and growling now and then, circling the seated men on stiff legs, sniffing them. Finegan is seated on a stool by the table where he has rested his rifle and the rifle retrieved from the rowboat.

Now explain . . . President Collins.

Both the sentry and the oarsman start talking at once. The sentry says,

*Former Senator from our parts, Mississippi, but
when it hit and he figured every place else was
wiped out, he said he had to be the new
president, considering the US government had to
be represented and all . . .*

While the oarsman says,

*The guy's nuts, I think. Holds these cabinet
meetings with his family and claims he has
executive authority because we must be at war
or something. Commandeered all the supplies in
the area too . . .*

They both stop and look at each other, then both start talking again, each expecting the other to shut up. The sentry says,

No radio response so everyone else must be dead

While the oarsman says,

Now he's starting to raid the neighbors . . .

They both stop and look at each other again, then at Finegan, falling silent. Finegan says,

*Well, I'm taking you up along the shore a ways,
if its safe, and dropping you off. I'm a trader
but this is no place . . . I'd be trading my
freedom . . .*

Finegan looks at Joey.

You stand guard here so's they don't move.

Finegan motions out toward the front of the boat, pointing toward the island city.

Any more like you, snipers?

The sentry says,

*This was my post. The rest are inland with
President Collins on raids.*

Finegan has moored the houseboat at an open spot along the shoreline, gangplank in place. He is marching the men across the plank ahead of him. He has untied their feet but their hands are still tied. Joey is on the roof, standing guard with the pistol in one of his hands, pointing down at his side. There hear shouting and argument from over the hill. The sentry and oarsman turn and try to bolt back onto the houseboat, but Finegan, who is still carrying the rifle, blocks their way with the rifle across his chest like a board.

*I have a better idea. Get up behind those
bushes over there.*

Finegan motions for Joey to duck into the house and follows the men into the bushes. The three men are peeking out of the bushes.

What is that, a raid?

Both the sentry and oarsman start talking at once, again. The sentry says,

*Senator Collins goes out with them, 'cause
they'd know his face and all . .*

And the oarsman says,

*They call it taxes, like money ain't no good no
more so it's gotta be food.*

Both men stop and look at each other again, falling silent. Finally Finegan says,

*I got the picture. So you want out of this, eh?
What do you propose we do with Mr. Collins?*

The two prisoners look at each other, then back at Finegan.

Finegan has untied his two prisoners and armed the sentry with his rifle, now trusting them. The oarsman holds a club. Finegan nevertheless stays behind his two prisoners, just in case they get a sudden change of heart. They are creeping along the bushes, out of sight, toward the arguments.

What they see is a confrontation between Collins and a local survival community. Collins is pot bellied and short, somewhat red in the face and balding. He is standing with two other men who have guns. All three of them have red cloth tied around their upper right arms, their insignia. Finegan asks,

You know those men?

The sentry and oarsman look at each other, not wanting to speak at the same time. The oarsman says,

You first.

The sentry says,

They only act loyal. Everyone is afraid to stand up to Mr. Collins. Everyone is afraid of being first, ya know, and thrown in the brig.

Finegan says,

Well, you're going to be first.

The sentry gulps, then takes a deep breath, cups his hands around his mouth and yells.

Collins! You're not in charge anymore! No more robbing people. You're a fraud! You're not the government, never were!

The sentry is finally venting. Finegan and the oarsman look at him, a little aghast, their mouths open.

You're not in power, ass hole! You fat pig! Who put you in charge, eh? You did. And you don't get to say, you piece of crap.

Finegan puts his hand over the man's mouth, seeing that the rant will never stop. Finegan says,

Tell him you're disarming his guards and that they should give up. They're facing an armed rebellion. Tell him that.

The sentry is breathing hard, but is trying to calm himself.

Here's the deal, you piece of shit. We're an armed rebellion. Lay down on the ground and eat dirt, you piece of shit. . . And you other guys, join us or die!

Collins can be seen facing the confrontation from the bushes, fists in a ball at his side, frowning. Finegan has his hand over his face, peeking through his fingers at the sentry. He looks over at the oarsman.

You try.

The oarsman says,

*You're not in charge anymore Collins. You're
disbanded. Turn over all the weapons. No more
tax collections.*

Collins begins striding toward the bushes. His two armed guards are smiling and bending over to put their guns on the ground. The community he was attempting to rob had been standing as a group in the background, but now scatters, fearing a shootout. Finegan says to the sentry,

You dash over and collect those guns.

And then to the oarsman,

*I'm going to stand out with my rifle. You go
down and make Collins drop to his knees and
hands over his head. . . Whack him if you have
to. . . But not too hard.*

The sentry runs in a semi-circle around Collins. When he reaches the other two formerly armed men, they all do high-fives and hug each other. Collins shakes his fist at the sentry and points at him, throwing out threats.

Arrest that man!

The oarsman steps out from behind the bushes and marches toward Collins. He says,

They're not even armed! Christ sakes.

Finegan steps out from behind the bushes, his rifle resting in his arms. Collins stops his stride. The oarsman takes his club and punches Collins in his gut, so he doubles over. Then he whacks behind his knees so he falls on his butt.

*Hands over your head. . . Hands over your head
I said!*

Collins is rolling onto his knees, putting his hands up, but only part way, sputtering objections. The oarsman whips some cord out of his pocket and starts to tie collins' hands together.

The sentry is at the back of the houseboat, peddling. The oarsman is sitting on a box near him, as they are taking turns at the pedals. Collins and his two men are at the front, at the edge of the deck, facing the water. Collins is still bound at the wrist, hands in front of him. He is loudly protesting his arrest, citing statutes that he feels authorized his presidency. He keeps this recitation up the entire trip and can be heard in the background doing this nonstop.

*. . according to the Presidential Succession
Act of 1947 I'm in charge! . . Continuity of
government! . .*

Finegan is also on the roof, his rifle resting in his arms, but he is watching the three men at the front. The flooded city islands and shoreline are seen in the distance, as the houseboat is heading out into deep water. Joey is pacing the rooftop as usual, but looking back at the bike seat, keeping an eye on the sentry and oarsman to ensure they don't leave the pedals and try to come forward.

*. . I was under consideration for Secretary of
Transportation, dammit. . . The office was
vacant, so that puts me in . . All those other
people are dead, I tell you.*

Rock outcroppings can be seen, and some trees. The island they are approaching is not large, but has a long way to go before being under water. It looks deserted, long since abandoned, and has no buildings or farm animals in sight. Finegan says to Joey,

*We'll let the boat come close. Stop in about .
. now.*

Joey hollers to the pair peddling,

Stop peddling!

The three men stationed along the front of the houseboat turn and look at Finegan expectantly.

*Untie his hands . . You want to go with him,
you can.*

The two men are looking at Finegan and shaking their heads. Finegan says,

*Then push him into the water, it's shallow
here.*

Collins continues to complain,

*. . This is kidnapping and treason . . You'll
be shot for this. . . Death penalty.*

Collins, still protesting, is shoved into the water and rises up, sputtering. He can put his feet on the ground under the water, and begins wading toward the island shore, thrashing and sputtering. Collins turns to face the exiting houseboat, finally subdued, saying in a quiet voice,

. . Oh dear . .

That evening Joey is flinging the weapons they took from the armed men overboard. The two men taking turns peddling are facing the rooftop, so

can see this. The two men standing at the edge of the front deck have turned to watch this spectacle. Finegan is holding court on the rooftop, his rifle in one hand.

*No more armed robbery! New rules. And leave
that pompous ass out there to yell at the
squirrels. Don't go rescue him nor nothing like
that. . .*

Lost and Found



The houseboat is peddling along close to a shore that has occasional rock outcroppings. Most of Memphis is at least partially flooded, but the upper floors of high rises are above water. As with other locations, earthquake and wind damage are obvious, even from afar. The high rises have a spire here and there standing, metal shafts that are flexible and do not collapse in quakes. Masonry or brick buildings are a rubble, collapsed. Frame buildings are often simply tilted to one side, thrown to the side during a large quake.

The remains of Memphis seem to go on for a long distance, to the right and left of the houseboat. The tops of the Desoto bridge can be seen to the left of the houseboat, on what was the Arkansas side. The Arkansas side is completely flooded, as far as the eye can see. The remains of Interstate 40 can be seen dropping down into the water and heading toward the remains of the Desoto bridge arches. A rusty sign sticking up indicates Interstate 40.

Finegan is standing on the roof of the houseboat, holding his short wave radio with newly installed crank to gen electricity. He is cranking away energetically, then holds the radio to his ear, listening.

(scritch) . . . approaching . . . (snap)

Finegan adjusts a dial and listens again. Having located the group he spoke to earlier by short wave, he interjects.

*Yo, Finegan Fine here, trader. We spoke before.
Which hilltop are you on?*

Memphis Papa answers,

*I'd give you the GPS but we can't raise that no
more. Are you that houseboat we see? What you
got rigged on the back?*

Finegan explains,

*That's a water wheel. Slow, but works, and I
can steer. Direct me to you.*

Memphis Papa says,

You're down river from us. Well, ah, what used to be the Mississippi anyways. We see you when we look at the sunrise, down, ya know, ah, south of us . . . Or what used to be south. Hell of a mess, twisted around and all. . . Come up river a bit, and I'll talk you in.

Finegan is sitting on what used to be a dining room chair along a piece of plywood being used as a tabletop. Several men and women are seated around this table too, all in various kinds of chairs - folding chairs, living room easy chairs, stools, and stepladders. The table is stained in many places, having been used for many conferences. A large map of the US is laid out on it, taped in places to hold it together and frayed at the corners. Finegan is leaning on his left elbow, holding a mug of coffee in his left hand, and pointing with his right hand. Joey is standing just behind his left shoulder, standing on his toes, peering at the map intently.

I started out upriver from Savannah. The river was rising something fierce. By the time I built my boat, I was going overland on the water. That bad.

The group nods in unison. Finegan sits up straight and looks over his left shoulder at Joey.

Joey here got separated from his parents. Ain't found 'em since.

Finegan goes back to leaning on his left elbow and pointing at the map.

We worked our way around what's now the new coastline of Georgia. No maps for any of that. I gather that Florida is gone.

Finegan sits straight again, taking a sip of his coffee.

I'm guessing you all have a better idea of the rate of rise, but seems to me it just keeps rising. . .

The group nods in unison.

Memphis Mama is a wrinkled, pale woman slouched at one end of the table. She wears a flowered dress and has some kind of plastic flower covered hair net holding her gray, greasy hair in place. A strand or two of her gray hair escapes, hanging down on her neck or over her face.

And the sun rises in the south and sets in the north.

Everyone just sits, stone silent except for the occasional slurp on a cup of coffee. Joey is craning his neck to see every face up and down the table, as he is intensely curious. It's clear no one is going to speak.

How come?

Memphis Papa is a grizzled man at the end of the table, sitting in an easy chair that is collapsing at one arm and with upholstery that is very stained. He has a beard, tousled hair, and wears a tattered shirt with dirty cuffs. Like Memphis Mama, his posture also shows the effects of too many conferences and not enough exercise, as he appears collapsed into his chair.

We figure that the Earth shifted in space, son.

*That's how come everything got shook up, and
somehow that's how come the water keeps rising.*

. . Best we can figure.

Joey has dug the photo of his parents out of his pocket and flaps it in the air.

Did my parents come by?

Finegan and Joey are standing in front of a wall covered with pinned notes. The note paper is of every kind - scraps of paper torn out of phone books, lined notebook paper, pages torn from day-timers, notes written on the edges of coupons, notes written on the carbon copy from checkbooks, pages from children's coloring books, etc. The wall is covered floor to ceiling with some notes starting to cover other notes, layering.

Martha, Ed Grover and I are to Cincinnati.

MacMahons are heading to Uncle John's farm.

God help us! Little Bob drown and Big Bob died from the grief.

We made it! See you at the Hemp's. Mitzy

Joey walks up to the wall and starts to read, when Memphis Papa interrupts him.

*This here's for Arkansas, across the river from
us. They came up here like drowning rats on
anything that would float. We got a separate
room by state, so's to reduce the confusion.*

What state were your parent's from?

Joey spins around on his feet, facing Memphis Papa, with a hopefully, eager look on this face.

Georgia!

Memphis Papa says,

This way.

They all walk down a corridor of an old office building that remained upright during the quakes. Some of the rooms along the exterior wall are cluttered with broken furniture and boxes of refuse cleared out from the interior rooms. The exterior rooms have broken windows, so the cardboard is weathered near the windows. The interior rooms are being used for lost and found boards. There are labels on the door jams of the interior rooms, arranged alphabetically - Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, N Carolina, Ohio, S Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, W Virginia.

Painted in red paint on the wall across from the Alabama and Arkansas rooms is a general index, a list of these states, with an arrow pointing down the corridor.

Memphis Papa walks ahead of Joey, who is literally at his heels. Finegan brings up the rear. They stop in the Georgia doorway, Joey bumping into Memphis Papa's ample rear end.

Here we are.

The room is bare, not a single note pinned.

*We got a few from Florida, came by early on
boats, but ain't got nothing from the East
Coast to speak of. Too far by land.*

Memphis Papa drops his hand to the top of Joey's head, patting it.

Sorry son.

Finegan and Joey are preparing to leave. They are moored onto the back porch of an older home, which is listing into the water. This is the current residence of Memphis Papa, who is there saying goodbye. Finegan pulls the gangplank onto the boat while Memphis Papa gently tosses the grappling hooks onto the deck. He has a warning.

*You going upriver? Watch out for them yahoos on
boats, they been looting at night round these
parts.*

Yahoos Afloat

It is foggy, a fog rising from the water as the air is cool and the water, up from the Gulf, is warm. Finegan is peddling along silently, well out from the shore. Joey is sitting on the front deck with his arm over Barney, who has his mouth tied shut with a red bandana.

A floating city, a collection of many different types of boats or floatation devices is bobbing up and down in the water. One is a group of rowboats tied together at the front, so they form a wheel. This seems to be a way of holding onto them more than a living space. One is a yacht. One is a raft cobbled together from logs for floatation, with a mattress in the center covered by a couple umbrellas. There are a couple speedboats with plastic covers as rain guards, pulled back so those living in them have air.

Sounds of whooping and yelling and spashing can be heard. Dimly, through the fog, some young men and women are seen jumping into the water, skinny dipping in the dark. There are no lights anywhere - not on shore, not on the boats, and not on the houseboat.

Finegan is cooking breakfast on the portable camping grill, flipping fish over and sipping coffee with the other hand. Joey is at the back of the houseboat, preparing to clean up after Barney, who does his job on a piece of plastic, which is then slipped over the edge to be rinsed and folded. A daily morning routine. Barney steps off the plastic, giving his fresh turd a last sniff. Finegan is setting out 3 plates on a box next to the grill. He dishes out potatoes from a frying pan set to the side on the grill, then divides the fish. He sets one plate down on the deck for Barney and hands another to Joey, then takes a seat on one of the boxes to eat. Joey asks,

So they were yahoos because they were noisy?

Finegan has his mouth full, but answers anyway.

*Ah, yeah, but don't care about other people
much . . . having a party all the time . . . taking
what they want.*

Half a dozen people have appeared on the shoreline, just standing and staring. They are dressed in farm clothes, the men in coveralls, the women in plain cotton dresses and hair in braids wrapped around their heads. The men have clubs in their hands. Finegan waves but his wave is not returned.

*Umm . . . Looks like they're a little touchy
about people in boats.*

Joey waves too, and Barney barks once, wagging his tail. Finegan decides to go over in the canoe, which has been tied to the side of the houseboat. He gets into the canoe in broad daylight, so those on the shore can see he is not armed and certainly, being outnumbered, is not dangerous. Finegan says,

*They look like good folk. . . See what this is
about.*

As Finegan approaches shore he raising both his hands up, holding the paddle with both hands, to indicate no sudden moves on his part and allow a full view of the canoe bottom and his sides, to show he is not packing a weapon. As the canoe bumps shore, a couple men step forward to pull it onto shore. One of them gives Finegan a hand, which he grabs to steady himself as he steps out onto the shore. The farmer says,

Thought you were one of them.

Finegan explains.

*We came through Memphis and heard about them
yahoos. You militia?*

The farmer says,

Shore patrol, yeah.

Finegan introduces himself.

*I'm a trader. Been all along the new coastline
since Georgia. Might have something you folks
need, been lookin for. We don't raid and run,
that's for sure.*

Finegan casts a glance to his right, down river down the shoreline.

*Recon it's safe to leave my boat there? Do they
come up this far, during the day?*

The farmer meets the eyes of the others for a moment, getting confirmation on what he is about to say.

*Look, I'll come back with you and show you a
good bay, out of view and all. If there's a
problem here, we'll hear about it.*

The farmer raises a horn he has been holding in one hand. It's a child's toy trumpet made of plastic. He hands the trumpet to one of the others and steps into the water to step into the canoe.

Finegan and the Farmer are emerging from some woods near a tumbledown farm. They are walking side by side, but the farmer is leading slightly. They are talking as they walk toward the collapsed barn and house. Joey is bringing up the rear, dawdling to look at things in the woods as he goes. These woods are different from the woods along the coastline of Georgia, where he had been raised.

The farmer has bib coveralls on, farmer boots that come up near to his knees, and for a shirt is wearing dirty long johns. He is balding, has not shaved in days, and a few wild hairs are growing out of his ears and eyebrows. Appearance is the least of his worries. The farmer is explaining their troubles.

Can't get our rest at night. They sleep during the day, I guess. Half of us sleep during the day and patrol at night, the other half patrol during the day, and no work gets done. Hell of a business.

Exploring for a solution, Finegan asks,

If you could see at night, as well as day, could you cut your night patrol?

The farmer responds,

You mean lights? We ain't got those no how.

Finegan continues to explore for a solution.

No, I mean night vision goggles. I've got several from a military depot. If you had a few people on high points, good view of the water, how many needed to sight the boats incoming?

Now the farmer ponders.

Well, lessee. . .

The farmer has stopped in his tracks to mentally compute, and is pointing off into the air in a half circle where the water surrounds the farming community.

I guess 3 at the least, best off would be 5, but 3 would do it.

Finegan is finally onto something.

OK, I've got those 3. Next step. Trip wires. You got wild life that would trip wires 3 feet or more above ground? You cleaned out the deer around here?

The farmer laughs.

Oh, deer are extinct! We kept our breeding stock and the chickens in the house, slept outside, but the deer, they got taken out.

Finegan says,

From what I seed of that group, they'd not be inclined to crawl along the ground. We could trip wire the whole perimeter to see off alarms. Double trip it, in fact.

In what is to be their typical response, the farmer says,

I got no wire a'tall.

And once again, Finegan to the rescue.

I do. Plenty enough. Fine wire, but it won't break. Now, next step. Best is something like a bell, a clang, can't mistake it, ya'know. Have your night vision guys with a bell too.

The farmer says,

I got no bells.

Finegan says,

I do. Lets get started.

Finegan turns to put his hand out for a handshake with the farmer.

What'cha got in trade?

The night, along the humid river front, is filled with the sounds of insects singing. Finegan, the farmer, and several other farming folk are sitting in the shadows of an outdoor camp next to the collapsed farmhouse and barn. Occasionally someone swats a mosquito. No one is saying a word, all listening intently, eyes ranging along the perimeter of the farmstead. Suddenly there is the sound of a clanging bell, followed minutes later by a second clanging bell of a different pitch, coming from a different direction. Finegan points.

That's your far guard and a trip wire on this other end.

The group mobilizes, grabbing clubs and pitch forks, one carrying a coiled rope over his neck and down under one shoulder. They take off in the direction of the trip wire.

Three teenage boys are clustered in the woods. The raid leader says,

What the fuck was that?

They are standing, momentarily confused, looking around. One of them, a clumsy goof, says,

I ran into somethin here. Ah . . . it's a wire. A wire.

The leader says,

Well duck under it. Common. Move it already.

The bell clangs out again.

*Christ you can't do anything right. Don't pull
on it, duck under it.*

The three boys get on hands and knees and are starting to crawl along under the trip wire when the farming group bursts onto the scene, swinging clubs.

Half a dozen prisoners are tied back to back, in pairs. They are all tied at the ankle too, so running is impossible for any of them. Five are boys, one a teen-age girl. All are very resentful of being captured. Coffee has been brewed over a campfire and scrambled eggs and toast being served to the farming community. Finegan and Joey are guests. The prisoners are not being offered anything but a drink of water from a tin mug, held to their mouths. Finegan gestures to the prisoners and turns to the farmer, who is seated on a hay bale next to him. Finegan asks,

What'cha goin' to do with 'em?

The farmer replies,

Shoot em?

Finegan says,

*One thing for sure, you've got to sink their
boats. They'd just take up again down the
coast. . . I can do that. Got a drill. Sink em
all and sink em good. Shame, but that's the
first place they'd head.*

The resentful farmer says,

Yeah, but they'd raid on land too.

Finegan says,

*Harder to hide on land. And harder to run. On
the water, they could move, find new territory.
They had the element of surprise, at least at
first.*

Finegan and the Farmer are pondering the situations, chewing and swallowing and slurping, both staring at the glowering group of prisoners. Finegan asks,

*How much did they steal? Give me the value in
days stolen from y'all.*

The farmer leans back for a moment, taking in a deep breath, looks up toward the sky, and pausing in his chewing for a moment. Then he swallows.

*Given how many of us'en had to watch, and days
lost collecting our harvest? I'd say several*

*months. This been going on for months. We did
plant and have a harvest waiting, but made no
progress, y'know?*

The farmer gestures around the site, indicating the state of his outdoor camp, which is still out in the open except for some tarp tents in the farmhouse yard. Finegan has a suggestion.

*Here's what I'd suggest. This group owes you
that time. Make a chain gang and work them for
that time. Take them months to work it off.
Maybe they learn something about farming and
don't have to steal no more. Doing 'em a favor.
Good behavior, that one gets off first, on his
own, across land. Send 'em off as a group and
you've got a gang formed. The ringleader goes
last. Keep a night guard on for a good while
after too.*

And as usual, the farmer says,

I got no chain and I got no locks.

And Finegan says,

I do.

Finegan and Joey are walking across the gangplank with a plate of scrambled eggs for Barney, who is wagging his tail, greeting them. Several of the farming community are following him, bearing produce - several bags of potatoes, a cardboard box filled with green cabbages, another filled with turnips, and a jug of home brew. Finegan is stashing the goods in vegetable bins as they hand it over on the deck of the houseboat and leave, one by one. He and Joey wave goodbye as the group trudges up the steep ravine from the hidden bay where the houseboat has been stashed all this time.

Finegan still has the jug of home brew hanging from one of his fingers. Joey looks at the jug, then back up at Finegan, not saying a word but saying volumes.

*This time's gonna be different. I don't feel
the need no more.*

The houseboat is pulled alongside the yacht, moored with the grappling hooks. Finegan is on the deck of the yacht, handing duffle bags of gear down to Joey, who stashes them onto the front deck, running some of the bags into the house itself. Some of the bags clang as though cookware

or tools might be inside. The ring of rowboats can be seen to one side, taking on water, as are the speedboats. The yacht is starting to list to one side also. Finegan says,

Might be a change of clothes in there for you too. You're growing like a weed. Captain's log in there too. Might make for some interesting reading. . . No sense letting all this stuff rot in the water. . . It was stolen in the first place.

Finegan tosses the grappling hooks back onto the houseboat, and climbs down the ladder at the side of the yacht as the houseboat starts to drift away. He opens one of the duffle bags and fishes out the captain's log and, seated on a box, starts to flip pages. The log reads,

We were swept inland by a giant wave coming off the Gulf. Our compass is no help, is erratic.

Finegan takes a swig from his jug and continues to flip pages, reading. In the background the yacht continues to list to the side, almost on its side, and the smaller boats can no longer be seen, having sunk. The raft made of logs had been tied to the houseboat earlier, and is starting to tug away from shore with the houseboat as it drifts in the current, the outgoing tide. The log continues,

Floods everywhere. Landmarks unrecognizable. We're out of food and water. Gas almost gone.

Finegan takes another swig from the jug, flipping more pages, scanning. The shoreline is in the distance now, the floating raft lit from the left by the setting sun. The final log entry says,

Drifted close to land. Taking the dinghy over. Abandoning ship.

Finegan is about to take another swig from the jug but ponders it instead. He goes over to the side of the houseboat and pours the rest of the homebrew overboard, setting the jug down. He looks out at the floating raft, drifting downstream with the outgoing tide along with the houseboat. He says,

Lets cut that loose and go upriver a bit, see what's to see up there, eh?

Finegan picks up a knife and walks over to where the floating raft is tied to the houseboat, slicing the line.

Eating Rats

The houseboat is peddling down what would have been main street of a small town. Two-story brick buildings line both sides of the main street, flooded to the floor of the second story. Much of the brick is broken off, some buildings no more than a single wall with some boards sticking out of it.

The place appears deserted until the mayor appears in a broken second story window. The window has been knocked out to form a doorway, and a rowboat is tied by a rope that disappears into the doorway. The mayor is shirtless, has folds of skin hanging over the waist of his baggy, dirty pants, as though he has lost a lot of weight. He has a scraggly beard and hair on the long side too. He leans in the doorway, yelling at Finegan.

You got any food?

Finegan replies,

Depends. You got anything to trade? I'm a trader.

The mayor flaps his hand toward Finegan in disgust, as though to say "go away", and turns his back, walking back into the room.

The entire length of main street, several blocks, is flooded, with a hillside at the end rising up out of the water. At the end of main street is a hill topped with a nursing home complex. There are several buildings, all of similar shape and size, and a parking lot. Finegan heads for that hillside.

Finegan and Joey are walking through the entry of the nursing home complex. The buildings show the effects of quakes and high winds, some thrown sideways, some collapsed in place, others standing but with windows broken and roof partly blown off. A sign laying along the walkway says, in fading paint, "Coolridge Retirement Home". Finegan is looking around as he walks, sometimes walking backwards, looking for life. He hears a screen door creaking open. The woman manager says,

Can I help you?

A woman in her 30's, her long brown hair held back by a bandana, is standing in the doorway, holding the crooked screen door open. She is wearing a man's shirt that is too large for her, bound at the waist by a tie, the sleeves rolled up to her elbows. She has a long colorful skirt beneath, and is barefoot. Several cats run in and out of the room

as she opens the door. Finegan jerks his head to the side at the sound of her voice.

Finegan Fine here, mam, trader. Perhaps I have something you've been looking for, something you need.

The manager says,

Oh, I don't know. Unless you're a floating pharmacy. You that houseboat down there? The one piled with, ah . . . boy, you do come loaded. What'all you got?

Finegan smiles and says,

Don't rightly know, mam, until I do inventory. As I said, I'm a trader, and I find I can rise to any occasion.

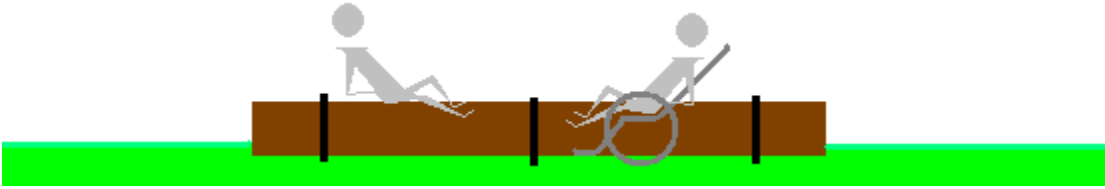
Finegan stops short at this point, all but putting his hand to his mouth, realizing they are flirting with each other and dropping innuendoes. The manager catches this too, and tries to put the conversation back on a safe footing.

Well, ah, we've got a retirement home here, old folks. Mostly what they're missing is medication, but those that suffered from that passed early. Now I'm here as head nurse with a hardy lot. Old, but hardy.

The manager steps through the doorway into the driveway circling the complex and motions to Finegan and Joey to follow her.

Come on back, I'll show you.

The nursing home vegetable garden is at the back of the complex. Most of the gardens are raised beds, long rectangular beds formed by a heavy lumber posts laid horizontally on top of one another, held firm by stakes along the outside driven into the ground. The wall is two feet tall with soil in the interior of the bed. There is a pipe running down the center of each bed for watering with a spigot at one end. The pipes have holes punched into them so water sprays out down the length of the pipe. In between the beds is what was intended to be lawn, but it has not been mowed in ages. Instead, there are wheelchair tracks and a path between the beds, from use.



Several oldsters are tending the garden. Half are in wheelchairs, which pull alongside the beds so the oldsters can simple reach over and pull weeds or collect produce or whatever. Some oldsters are using walkers and sit on the edges of the beds. The beds were intended to be accessible and to not require bending down, designed for the handicapped or aged.

Finegan and the manager are followed by a curious Joey who is trying to get the many cats to come up to him. He bends over and calls to them, but they are illusive though interested and keep circling him. The manager is pointing while talking.

We were fortunate, having these put in ahead of time. And we saved the seed, year to year. All those things were therapy, physical therapy. We'd make a big deal out of it, sorting seeds into plastic zip bags and labeling them, sharing them with family. Now it's proved to be a Godsend.

Some of the oldsters turn their heads at their approach and smile and wave. Finegan asks,

What do you do for meat?

The manager puts her finger to her mouth, a shush motion, and in a low voice replies.

I'll tell you later.

Finegan and the manager have been walking along the path, which circles around and returns to the complex buildings. They are approaching some benches along the path. The manager sits down, patting the seat next to her for Finegan to do likewise. She looks down the path to be sure no one is close enough to hear.

You can see we've got cats. We've got a population explosion.

The manager glances at Finegan's face, prepared to drop the bomb and wanting to see if he's ready for it.

I've got several female cats that bring me their catch. It's the females that hunt. . . Must be a rat population explosion somewhere, as they rarely fail to deliver. Every morning, there they are, dead rats, fresh meat, on my doorstep.

She glances at Finegan's face again.

Well, it's protein! I cook it to death, meat falls off the bone, mix it into the soup that's supper every night. . . No one's died yet.

Finegan leans back against the bench back, putting one foot up on the other knee, relaxed. He says,

I'm sure you're not the only one. . . Don't you fish?

The manager says,

We don't have a pier. Don't have a boat. And except for myself, who could manage it? They'd drown trying. . . We do have a pole and line. Some relative would come for a visit and haul a resident off to some riverbank for a picnic. So we had a pole and line on hand. . . But I can't leave. I'm the only one here. . . Plus my day is long enough as is.

Just then one of the female cats saunters up with a dead rat in its mouth and drops it at the manager's feet. The manager leans forward to praise and pet the cat.

Why thank you Mitzy! That's a beautiful gift!

The peace on the main street has been shattered by the sound of lumber being pulled apart, nails loosened but still holding and complaining as boards are pulled apart. The mayor comes to his window to see what's going on.

Hey! You can't take that! That belongs to someone.

Finegan appears in a window near where his canoe has been tied. The window has been pushed out for easy access. He sticks his head out the window to yell back.

So sue me. . . How come you're not helping that woman up there tending the old folks?

The mayor gets a disgusted look on his face and flaps his hand again in the direction of Finegan, as though dismissing him, and turns to shuffle back into his apartment. Lumber pieces start flying out of the window - studs and railings and numerous floorboards, splashing as it hits the water. In the background there is more hammering as Finegan is retrieving nails as he dismantles the building.

The oldsters in the garden are all shock still, their jaws a bit agape, heads turned in the direction of the noise, listening to the sound of construction.

That evening the manager, Finegan and Joey, and several of the oldsters in wheelchairs or clinging to walkers are looking out over the water in a beautiful sunset. A floating pier can be seen, with a long ramp down to the pier accessible by wheelchairs. Former 6" wide hardwood floor boards from one of the old flooded town buildings, torn from the floor of the second floor, are used as the pier bed and lengthwise as a ramp to the floating pier. As the water raises, the pier will too.

Posts from an interior railing are placed along the side of the ramp and pier, with rope strung between the posts as guardrails. The whole lot is irregular, the posts painted white, the floor boards a scuffed brown, and the rope of varying thickness. Finegan did not have a saw so the ends of boards stick out at the end of the pier. Studs have been hammered along the top of the pier bed, along the edges, as wheelchair guards. Some chairs from the raided second story apartment are placed here and there for those coming to fish on walkers.

The manager looks sideways at Finegan, who is standing beside her. She says,

You must stay for supper. And I think the residents have some seed they want to share with you. They don't see much family these days. In fact, not in over a year.

Then realizing what he must be expecting for supper, she whispers.

Tonight, it'll just be vegetable soup!

Finegan whispers back.

No, no, have your usual! I'm fine with that!

Then, turning to the residents grouped around her, the manager says,

We may not have TV any longer, but now, during these beautiful sunsets, we can do some fishing! Does anyone remember what we used for bait? John, do you remember? Worms. Yes, it was worms from the garden!

Finegan and Joey are coming through the fog, approaching the houseboat where it is moored below the nursing home complex. Finegan has a clear plastic bag filled with little zip lock bags of various seeds, hand

labeled and dated. All is taped watertight. Barney is barking in greeting, his tail wagging. Finegan says,

Better tuck this high and dry.

Joey reaches down to pet Barney, appreciating the fact that he is not evasive as the cats were. Joey tells Barney,

*You wouldn't have wanted any of that soup
anyway, buddy. Just yucky vegetables. . .*

Joey stands up and looks around for some leftovers from breakfast to give Barney, taking them from a covered frying pan atop a box. Barney snatches the fried potatoes from his hand and gobbles them down. Joey says,

*Just old people food. They didn't have much.
Just dead rats.*

Finegan smiles as he puts away the package of seeds, and says,

Yeah, who'd eat a rat!

The Pawn Shop

Finegan and Joey are walking through a business district of a small flooded city. The business district is above the water line, though most of the small city and its suburbs have been flooded. The area appears deserted and has as usual been devastated by quakes and high winds. Shingles have been ripped off roofs, masonry buildings have collapsed, frame buildings have been thrown sideways, and any signs not painted on the buildings themselves have been blown about and are in the street. Portions of the signs can be read, saying things like "Insurance" or "Municipal" or "Handy Mart".

It is drizzling, so Finegan and Joey are steadily becoming damp, their clothing starting to stick to them. They arrive at a former pawnshop, the fading sign painted on the wall above the door. The door open, and they hear noises of someone bustling around inside. Finegan says,

Ya spouse they'd have an umbrella?

The pawnshopman is rearranging shelves, moving items off a shelf, dusting the shelf, then returning the items. For all the clutter, the place is immaculate, all except for the pawnshopman himself. He is short, has an extremely dirty white shirt on, rolled up at the sleeves. He wears a gray-stripped vest, also covered with dust in places. His gray striped pants are bagging and stretched out over the knees from too much kneeling. His black leather shoes are scuffed, the shoelaces flapping under foot.

The pawnshop is filled with items, so every shelf is crowded and every corner piled high. Items line the front of the counter and are piled on the counter top. These are all items formerly of value, when a monetary system was in place and people were not starving. Jewelry lays in piles, though some is placed under the counter for safekeeping. Electronic equipment is stuffed into the shelves behind the counter, with some speakers placed along the front of the counters. Fine ballroom dresses and tuxedos are hanging on a rack toward the back of the shop. Dish sets, fine pottery, glassware and crystal are displayed on one shelf, the boxes containing the full place settings behind these display items. Leather cowboy boots and matching belts are on another shelf, along with accompanying items such as cowboy hats. Under the counter in one spot are displayed metals of honor from past wars or with a presidential seal, given in appreciation.

Finegan and Joey are gawking, looking around in amazement as they slowly walk down the middle of the shop, between the counters. They

look high and low, not saying a word, taking it all in. The pawnshopman says,

What can I do you fer?

Finegan says,

Got any umbrellas?

The pawnshopman says,

None of those, but got a sale on over here . .

He walks over to a counter top piled high with video games.

Half price, today only.

Finegan says,

But we got no electricity!

To which the pawnshopman replies,

It's coming back.

Both Finegan and the pawnshopman stop the conversation and just stare at each other at this point, as Finegan is stunned at this delusion and the pawnshopman does not want to get into details. Finegan leans an elbow on the counter, leaning toward the short pawnshopman who is standing proudly behind his wares, fingertips resting on the counter edge and back ramrod straight.

How do you figure? You must know something I don't.

To which the pawnshopman replies,

Yez sireee, it's coming back. When they come through here laying new lines and roads, we'll all be back in business again. Yez a matter of time.

Just then a man wearing his Sunday best, suit and bow tie and shined shoes and hat walks into the pawnshop. He is carrying a small wooden box, which he sets on the counter. He opens it carefully and music plays. He almost visibly breathes a sigh of relief, as though he had expected it might not workright. He looks at the pawnshopman, who says,

*Not much call for these, but it is a beauty.
What you looking for?*

The man in his Sunday best looks a bit worried as he is going to try for food instead of the usual - cash.

I'd trade for a sack of flour for the mizzus.

The pawnshopman replies,

None of that, but I do have a sale on over here.

He gestures at the pile of video games.

Finegan and Joey are walking away from the pawnshop, followed closely by the man in his Sunday best who has several video games in his hands. Finegan turns on his heel to address the man, still fascinated by the mass delusion ongoing in this town. Finegan nods to the pile of video games he is clutching.

Can't eat those.

Finegan is now walking alongside the man, who is trying out the pawnshopman's sales pitch on Finegan, as he must now go home and face the little lady.

These are worth more, overall. Growth item. Low price now but the value of these babies will skyrocket!

Finegan asks,

So when are the crews expected to arrive?

The man in his Sunday best says,

We ain't heard, but that's cause they're real busy.

Finegan is still engaging the man in his Sunday best in conversation as they approach his home, having never encountered a mass delusion before. The path is along a path worn into the yard, which is no longer mowed. Joey has now caught the fascination too, and realizes what Finegan is trying to do with his polite questions. Joey is walking along beside Finegan, straining to hear every word.

The home where the man in his Sunday best and his missus live has collapsed, the roof falling into the center of the home, the beams having broken during the quakes. But an entry into one wing has been arranged through a window, a piece of rug placed over the windowsill to soften the slide in and out. The porch of the small home is sloping but the roof is holding.

The missus is wearing a cotton dress and slip-on shoes, sitting on a stool in the yard, plucking a chicken. She has her long hair piled on top of her head and pinned with hairpins, out of the way of her work. The missus is gutting the chicken, pulling the entrails out into a bucket between her knees where she has also placed the feathers. She tosses the plucked chicken into a roasting pan to her side, and digs around in the entrails for the heart, liver, and kidneys of the chicken, also to be roasted. As the threesome approach, she looks up. The man in his Sunday best says,

Another bargain, my dear! I'll just put these away with the rest of our treasure.

At this, he sprints for the padded window frame, and putting one leg inside he slips through to escape any questions from the missus. Finegan and Joey are left to introduce themselves but no need as the missus starts talking.

Oh Lord. More junk.

The missus swings on the stool so she is facing the roasting pan and a pot with some dressing, and begins to stuff the dressing into the chicken. It's evident that she does the work around the place while her husband dreams on about the recovery to come. Finegan is in the midst of motioning toward the window where her husband disappeared, ready to speak and has his mouth open, but is interrupted again. The missus sits up straight, catching her breath, and brushes away a strand of hair that has escaped the pins.

At least it keeps them busy. We had some that just withered away, couldn't take the loss.

She nods in the direction of the padded window where her husband disappeared as she bends to finish stuffing her chicken.

He thinks he's got gains.

Just then the man in his Sunday best appears in the padded window, slinging one leg out and turning to pull the rest of his body through. He has a chalkboard in his hand and holds it up with an ecstatic look on his face.

Maw, best ever!

The pawnshopman walks up to his shop and opens the door with a key. A crowd of a half dozen people has formed outside the pawnshop, all carrying clothing or small boxes or electronics in their hands. Some are dressed in casual clothes, others wearing their Sunday best. The pawnshopman says,

Open for business!

Finegan and Joey are walking down the middle of the street, past this congregation, heads turned to watch the drama.

The crowd is bargaining with each other while waiting for their turn in the pawnshop. One woman holds up a sequined dress, holding it out to her side for display, trying to sell it to a man who is holding a box. Another man has mounted antlers of a deer that he is holding in front of him. He is approaching first one and then another in the crowd, but they turn their backs on him.

As Finegan and Joey are leaving the business district they pass a man carrying a large picture frame, devoid of a picture, toward the pawnshop, followed by a woman carrying a large iridescent vase.

Finegan and Joey are returning to the houseboat, moored near the business district of the town. They are walking up the gangplank, greeted by a wagging Barney. Finegan, who is first on the plank, throws a comment over his shoulder to Joey.

I like our stuff better.

Joey grins and laughs in agreement.

Slave Labor

The houseboat is approaching a rock outcropping and water fall. Finegan is on the roof, with Joey peddling. The water is deep, but because of the rock outcropping Finegan is being cautious. Suddenly he holds his hand out to stop Joey.

Whoa!

Finegan is in shock.

Holy shit.

Dozens of skeletons, picked clean by fish and crabs, are under the clear mountain water. Some are of children. Some pieces of clothing in tatters are here and there still on the bodies, but mostly the skeletons are white and quite visible. Joey comes bounding up the boxes from the rear of the houseboat to see. He and Finegan stand side by side, in silence.

As the houseboat is moving along the rocky shoreline, in the background, in the woods, we see movement, a man crouching behind a rock. Finegan motions silently for Joey to stop peddling and to drift, and to stay where he is. Having seen the bodies and seeing the man's caution, Finegan speaks quietly, not knowing what might be nearby.

Yo. Is there danger nearby? We saw those bodies.

The escapee looks over his shoulder and then steps forward to the water's edge.

Can you get me outta here? I'm too old to work anymore, scheduled for termination. . . Please. They've got dogs, they're gonna be tracking me.

Having seen children's bones, Finegan does not assume this man to be a criminal, and hops down to get the canoe.

The houseboat is approaching a small wooded island. It is surrounded by deep water, at least a mile from the rocky coastline they just left. The houseboat is maneuvered to a bay at the back of the island, and all three aboard tie the houseboat to partially submerged trees there. Now that they are invisible, they can talk. The escapee is eating some cold potatoes and fish and a tomato, with gusto. Finegan says,

I'd cook you a proper breakfast but if they have dogs, that'd give us away.

Finegan looks around him to double-check their location.

*As is, they can't sight us, and if they weren't
looking this way when we left, they're
clueless.*

Joey says,

*I was watching, and I seen no activity. I think
we're clean away.*

The escapee starts to cry, not sobbing but just tears running down his face as he stuffs the food into his mouth and chews away. Barney comes up and sits by his feet, looking up - an attempt to comfort the escapee. Finally, Finegan can wait no longer and picks up the story line where they presumably left off earlier.

*So these guys chasing you, they're guards?
Guarding what?*

The escapee looks at him incredulously, as though everyone has guards and should understand what he has been through.

*The workers. Wait, I though you knew. Aren't
you both runaways too?*

The escapee glances at Joey.

*I should'a figured. The first thing they did
was kill the kids . . and the sick . . and the
old . . ah, anyone over 50 is considered past
their prime. . . threw em off a cliff to let
them rot.*

The escapee hands his empty platter to Finegan, who is looking aghast at this systematic extermination. Joey has become very quiet. The escapee continues with his story.

*We were told to come to a military base where
some wealthy folks had set up with supplies. It
was like they were gonna share their supplies,
and like the military would protect us.*

The escapee lets out a guffaw at the absurdity of his expectations, compared to what happened afterwards.

*Soon as the phone lines went dead and the roads
were ripped up, things changed. . . The
commander was in thick with them rich folks,
always going up to their bunker and all. . .
Next thing you know they were herding us all
into that yard, behind barbed wire. I thought
that was gonna be for criminals, ya know, but
we all got sent in there. . . Then they pulls
out those from 15 to 50 years of age, healthy
men and women not pregnant, and we got sent to
put up new homes for them wealthy folk.*

I was a plumber, so knew a thing or two about putting in plumbing. . . When we came back that first day, everyone else was gone.

The escapee falls silent. Finally sighs and continues.

We learned what happened when the guards bragged about it. Who shot how many and all. They liked it, the murders.

The escapee sits up straight, looking Finegan in the eye, as now the story is getting personal.

They were drawing straws for who was gonna do me, last night. The long straw gets to do it. So, ya know, what'd I have to lose? . . I went over the top and ran like hell.

Finegan asks,

The whole base is like that? Wanting to shoot civilians, kids?

The escapee realizes he has left out part of his story. He waves his hands in the air, as though to say "wait, wait, I missed a part".

Oh no, no. Most ran off to see about their families. Went AWOL long before the troubles hit. They saw what was coming. We'd see 'em walking by, through the woods, every day, sometimes in bunches. Those that was left became the guards, and if they objected to the plan, then they got put in the work camp too. . . New rules. . . I think it was the plan all along.

Finegan asks,

So how many people left in that camp, and how many guards, you recon?

Finegan and the escapee are preparing to take the canoe to shore. The canoe has been loaded with a couple backpacks and the rifle. Finegan says,

Joey, you know what to do. I expect I'll be back in a day or so, but if five days pass and you ain't seeing me, you head off back down the coast the way we came. Stay to deep water, and only at night, and keep Barney muzzled. . . Look up that woman taking care of the old folks.

*And hey, they do eat rats, and there's nothing
wrong with it. . . Them folks in Memphis
weren't too bad either.*

Joey says,

Yes sir.

Finegan and the escapee have pull the canoe up on shore on the rocky coastline. They both put on a backpack, Finegan carrying the rifle. They set off through the woods, picking their way carefully, the escapee in the lead.

Finegan and the escapee peer out from the woods at the edge of the internment camp. The wood frames of the new homes for the wealthy can be see in the background. There are no lights, but dogs are guarding the edges of the barbed wire internment camp, staked to the ground. Two guards are sitting around a fire at one corner of the yard. Finegan says,

*Here's the plan. I'm setting this dynamite off
under the guardhouse. That takes out most of
'em. When that happens, those two are going to
be looking in that direction. You shoot good?*

The escapee nods his head.

Never missed, hunting.

Finegan continues,

*OK. You take this rifle and shoot them dogs
right off. Those guards ain't gonna be looking
your way, they're gonna be running to the
guardhouse. If they're looking your way, stop
shooting, so's they can't place you. If it
comes to you or them, shoot them guards too,
because that's what I'm gonna do. Send 'em to
hell. We sure can't leave them roving loose on
the landscape, and I ain't inclined to run a
prison. . . Here's a wire cutter. When the dogs
are dead and the guards are gone, you open that
yard. Use these if you have to. Let everyone
out.*

The guard house explodes. Dogs are barking, rifle shots, dogs are yelping, then more shouting, then more shots. The work camp prisoners are streaming out of a cut in the barbed wire, running in all

directions. Some of the prisoners are looking over their shoulders back at the melee. They pause, then turn around, seeing they are not being chased, the dogs are dead, and the guards are all on the ground, wounded or dead. They call to each other and come back. The prisoners are now making angry murmuring noises. Finegan points to the rifle in the escapee's hand.

*You keep that, you folks might need it going up
against them.*

Finegan is now pointing to the new housing for the wealthy. He pulls some more dynamite out of his backpack, handing this to one of the men.

You know how to use this?

Another prisoner says,

I do. Worked in demolition.

Finegan continues his instructions.

*They got any supplies, they should be yours,
for back pay, eh? Send them off without
anything. No food. No weapons. That's better'n
they did to you. They may not have been in
charge of this 'er camp, but they didn't rescue
you either.*

More and more prisoners are coming back to the group, realizing they are freed and the war has been won. The escapee is crying again, tears running down his face, a wordless, sobless weeping. Finegan says his goodbye, to the escapee, and with a wave to the rest of the prison population.

I gotta go talk to a boy now.

Bear Market

Finegan is continuing to peddle along the rocky shoreline, formerly a mountainous area such as eastern Kentucky or West Virginia. They are coming closer to the heavy population centers along the East Coast. The houseboat is approaching a mountain top resort area. The main buildings have partially collapsed roofs and a wall here and there collapsed also. The yards and bushes have not been mowed or trimmed. Sheep can be seen grazing on the former golf course. The houseboat approaches a grassy slope of land with a winding road leading down into the water. Finegan is preparing to moor the houseboat there, Joey getting ready to sling a grappling hook.

Finegan and Joey approach the former resort. As usual Barney waits for them on the houseboat, standing guard. The resort appears to be deserted, but then the sound of muffled voices can be heard from the basement area. The collapsed roof of the resort is in pieces on the floor of the lobby, but the floor held so the basement is intact. The lobby had a lofting ceiling, unstable during the quakes. Finegan and Joey come down some winding stairs leading from the lobby of the resort to a basement recreation area.

The basement has huge wooden beams and a stone floor, pool tables and a bar, stuffed animal heads mounted on the walls, and over-stuffed chairs in the corners around coffee tables and tables with lamps. A generator is sitting near the bar, with some lamps moved to the bar with extension cords, but it has long since run out of gasoline, useless.

A portly man, a former billionaire, is arguing with another portly man, their hands gesturing in the air. The second man is backing away from the former billionaire during this conversation. Lounging in one corner, on some of the over-stuffed chairs, are several young women, a couple decades younger than the men. The former billionaire says,

. . . Need to hire some new men . . .

Both men suddenly realize that Finegan and Joey are quietly descending the stairs and jerk their heads around in that direction. They stare silently at the newcomers, as though expecting an apology or explanation. The former billionaire says,

This is a private resort.

Finegan says,

*Finegan Fine here, trader. I come to see what
you might need, and what you have in trade.*

The two portly men look at each other for a minute, unspoken communications between them. The former billionaire says,

*You have food? I'm looking to get the damn
phone connected but the batteries are dead.*

His partner motions to the quiet generator and says,

And that thing don't work.

Finegan says,

*Cell phones? You need towers for those, and the
towers are down.*

The former billionaire says,

Oh yeah? How would you know?

Finegan says the obvious.

*How long you been trying to raise someone? . .
Phones don't work no more. Short wave is the
only thing and that's real spotty.*

The former billionaire and his buddy don't look surprised. The former billionaire reaches into his back pocket, pulling out a checkbook, and slaps it on the bar.

*Yeah, well, I can write you a check. Bring the
food supplies and gas for the generator in
here.*

He points to the middle of the floor and proceeds to fill out the check. Finegan says,

Paper's no good.

The former billionaire flushes with anger and looks sharply over at Finegan, his voice rising.

*Paper? This is backed. This isn't paper, this
is solid, negotiable anywhere.*

Finegan holds his ground.

*No one deals in paper anymore. It's no good.
You gotta barter goods and services.*

The former billionaire throws his pen down on the bar in disgust and turns his back. Finally he explodes in anger.

*We need something to eat! Damit. I don't care
what it takes, bring some food in here and on
the double.*

Finegan is beginning to suspect that this group had been dislodged from the internment camp, and has headed to the only location nearby where they expected to get a warm welcome as former members of the resort. Finegan winks covertly at Joey to clue him in.

*Don't you garden or tend sheep or something?
Most survivors have to do that to survive. What
you been eating?*

Finegan is pretending to look around the rec room for evidence of gardening or hunting or fishing. The former billionaire says,

*Not that it's any of your business, but our
help quit. Ran off and left us.*

Finegan motions to the several young women lounging in the corner on over-stuffed chairs, looking blaze. They are well dressed though some weed seeds are entangled in hair or on clothing, and their panty hose ripped and shoes muddy. Finegan says,

*Doen't take much to seed and weed a garden.
They break a leg or something?*

The former billionaire is twitching slightly.

We don't garden. The help does that.

The former billionaire is losing his temper again, looking around and up at the ceiling, calling out to the general area as though expecting the resort staff to suddenly appear out of thin air.

I'm a paid member. Where the hell is the help!

Joey is trying not to smile and trying to play dumb, almost biting his lip at times, in on the secret. Finegan says,

*So you had a garden but left it? Just because
the help ran off? Didn't you treat them right?*

The former billionaire is now sounding a bit desperate.

*I paid them well but they wanted more, had a
better offer. I'll pay you plenty. You'd be set
for life after this all blows over. I'm worth
billions. . . Billions.*

Finegan again holds his ground.

*I told you, paper's no good. That includes
stocks, bonds, cash. So what you gonna do now?
How you gonna live?*

The former billionaire is deflated but still trying to act in charge.

You tell me. What'll it take?

The former billionaire is jerking his chin at the young women lounging in the corner, indicating they should go over to Finegan. Seeing them start to rise from their chairs, Finegan rejects the offer.

*And I ain't interested in that either. There's
plenty of tail being offered, but food is worth
more. You can't beg, borrow, or steal these
days. Those growing food work too hard for what
they get. . . But there is one thing you can
do.*

The former billionaire is fuming again, but glances up through angry brows at Finegan, too astute at business to pass up a tip. Finegan says,

*Too late to start a garden but there's grass
and weeds to eat. Fish or set traps if you know
how. And you know, rats aren't half bad in the
stew pot.*

Joey can't hold it in any more and break out in a guffaw, then slaps his hand over his mouth and runs up the stairs. Finegan follows him, barely suppressing a smile himself.

The houseboat is pulling away from the resort shoreline. Up on the hill, in the former golf course, two young women are running after sheep, their hands outstretched, trying to corral a lamb. The sheep of course are way ahead of them, flowing like water up and over the hill.

Rust Belt

A factory is on the horizon, partially flooded. Metal cranes and storage silos are among the metal-framed factory buildings. The windows are smashed and some buildings tilted sideways, but most of the structures are intact. The parking lots are underwater, only some gateposts and the rooftop of a guard hut visible sticking up above the water. Joey is on the roof of the houseboat, taking measure of the clearance over the parking lot fence. He says,

A good 4 feet I think.

The main factory building has a slightly sloping flat metal roof, with the walls coming up over the roof edge for a couple feet as a guardrail around the edge of the rooftop. The rooftop is covered with greenery, some kind of rooftop garden, with vines hanging down over the edges of the roof. There is the sound of a metal door opening on the roof, the access door to the rooftop from a stairwell.

A bent little man emerges from the stairwell door, letting the creaking door close slowly by itself. He heads over to a row of what looks like cabbage, bending over it to weed the row, not noticing the approaching houseboat. The gardener is bent, a back curved from years of working in this position and from malnutrition, though he is not that old. He has black hair and pale skin, a gaunt look, and appears to be small boned. All is still except for the sound of water splashing against the side of the houseboat.

Finegan hops up to the houseboat rooftop, standing next to Joey, for a better look. Finegan calls out a greeting.

Yo, the gardens! Good day to you. Finegan Fine here, trader. . . How you manage that, on the rooftop?

The gardener freezes at the sound of a voice so close, and so unexpected. He straightens up, as much as his bent back will allow, and looks in Finegan's direction. Then he puts his handful of weeds plucked from the row down, and shuffles over to the rooftop edge. The gardener puts a hand up to shield his eyes against the morning sun, taking a moment before he responds in a high nasal voice.

What kind'a contraption is that?

Finegan replies,

It's a houseboat. Floats. I got a water wheel in the back to push it along. Slow, but steady.

The gardener says,

A trader you say?

To which Finegan pitches his line.

What might you need?

The houseboat is tied to a post at the corner of the factory rooftop. A knotted rope ladder is hanging down onto the deck of the houseboat. Finegan and Joey are being given a tour of the rooftop gardens by the gardener.

*. . We seen the water's a'rising and dug some
good soil before it was covered. Those of us
ain't never had no land in our name. Cain't run
off with the house, but them landlords not
gonna miss some soil from a flooded yard. . .
We use rainwater here.*

The gardener is motioning along the rows as they walk.

*Tomatoes do well . . greens of many kinds . .
Potatoes if you keep 'em wet . . can't get
those carrots to grow unless they's the stubby
kind . .*

They come to the watering system where there are hoses with holes running down the length of the soil troughs, in the center of each trough. There is a water tank on the roof which had been used by the factory, raised above the roof so there is water pressure.

*This here's how we water. Wears me out hauling
the rainwater up there every time, though.
Collects in the drains over there, which'n we
blocked.*

The rooftop door opens again and the gardeners's wife and 10 year old daughter emerge. The wife has more meat on her bones than her husband, though it is clear she has lost most of her fat in recent months. Her long skirt is held up by cloth strips up over her shoulders like suspenders, sewn onto the waist front and back. The daughter is scrawny and wears a combination of her parent's clothing, one of her father's shirts and a pair of her mother's pantaloons, also held up by suspenders. Her pantaloons are tied at the ankle, they are so voluminous. They have dressed for company, and have brushed their hair for the occasion too. The gardener turns toward them and to introduce them to Finegan.

My wife and darlin daughter.

Finegan has been looking around, appraising the setup.

*We might ought fix a pumping system to lift
that rainwater. Can you give me a tour to look
for parts?*

The gardener says,

They took 'bout everything. Common.

The gardener is walking Finegan through their living quarters on the floor below the gardens. He is walking just ahead of Finegan, gesturing to the right and left, turning to walk backwards at times, pointing at this and that.

We brung just the personals. Dragged a couple mattress. Plain livin but we're making do.

They return to the stairwell, as the gardener wants to show Finegan that the lower floors are inaccessible. Finegan follows the gardener down to the next landing where the water level is visible.

. . risen to this level, and lately slowed . .

Finegan points to the rust just under the water level.

Salt water . . salt water is corrosive. This plant was never built for salt water. . .

Finegan turns to face the gardener. He barely gets his words out before the building starts to collapse.

You had any settling problems?

There is a sound of metal screeching on metal. The stairwell shutters and both men lose their footing.

A frantic scene ensues, as the gardener and his family are evacuating. The wife and daughter are tossing bundles of personal items out the window of their living quarters down to Joey, who is on the roof of the houseboat. Finegan is on the roof of the factory with the gardener, trying to harvest his crop. Finegan drops a rope with hook down to Joey.

Snag me that bundle of plastic bags . . thanks.

The gardener is harvesting potatoes, shaking the soil off when he wrenches a plant up out of the trough, and plucking potatoes off the roots. He tosses the filled plastic bag onto a pile to be lowered to Joey. Finegan is doing the same to carrots, starting to tear the greens off them. The gardener cries out,

No, no, leave some! I'll replant 'em for the seed. . . Gotta have the seed.

Finegan is hooking potatoe bags on the hook used to lower produce from the rooftop to Joey. He swings the bag of potatoes out over the

houseboat rooftop and holds the rope while Joey catches the swinging mess. Joey says,

Got it.

The wife and daughter are now climbing out the window of their living quarters below the factory roof, the daughter dropping down and then reaching up to help her more portly mother, standing beneath her to soften her fall. Her mother says,

Child! Out'en the way! I'll squash you flat.

The wife falls on her butt, but rolls to stand up and brush herself off.

Finegan and the gardener are now harvesting green cabbage, cutting this off at the root and discarding the brown and tattered outer leaves. The gardener cries out again,

Leave that'en. I'll replant for seed. . . Just those half dozen will do.

They have a pile of bagged vegetables at the side of the factory roof, ready to be lowered down. Just then the sound of metal screeching again cuts through the air, as the factory visibly shutters and lowers again by a few feet. Only inches remain until the flood waters will pour over the rooftop guard walls.

Finegan rushes over to the pile of plastic bags packed and tied and ready to be lowered. He hooks and swings this to Joey as though they only have seconds to spare. Joey signals Finegan as soon as the hook is clear.

Got it.

The daughter is now helping Joey, moving the bags to the edge of the roof and out of his way, and lowering the bags into her mother's eager hands during the off moments.

The water starts lapping over one edge of the rooftop guard. The gardener rushes over to the far side of the factory rooftop, tearing off his shift. He picks seed shoots from carrot and cabbage plants being used to grow seed and ties them into his shift, tying the sleeves together so it is a bundle. He staggers and sashes back to the houseboat side through the rising water and tosses this into his daughter's hands.

Finegan is hooking the harvested and bagged tomatoes, lowering them carefully rather than swinging them out.

These'll smash. Tomatoes.

The wife comes over to the side of the houseboat deck to catch them. Finegan turns to the gardener.

That it?

Just then, the factory settles yet again, accompanied by the sound of screeching metal and splashing water, putting both Finegan and the gardener in the water. Finegan and the gardener climb onto the houseboat and stand, dripping wet, looking over the flooded roof.

Along the sides of the factory roof the vines holding summer squash can be seen bobbing up. The squash on the surface is bloated and yellow, oversized and almost rotting in appearance. The gardener cries out,

The squash!

He dives into the water and swims along the bobbing vines, plucking the overripe summer squash and tossing them to Finegan. Several of them shatter when caught.

Arrrrrr! These are rotten!

The gardener's wife rushes up to collect the mess in a basin. She says,

This is seed! You gotta rippen it full.

The gardener and his family are standing at the end of the gangplank. Finegan has donated his rusty wagon to the family, and it is piled high with bags of vegetables and their personal possessions. Other bags and bundles are piled around their feet. Finegan strides across the gangplank with the packet of seeds the woman at the old folks home had given him. He hands this to the gardener.

Joey is right behind him on the gangplank, one of the remaining pumpkins in his hands. He hands this to the gardener's daughter. Finegan says,

*I gather pumpkin wants a lot of room, but now
you'll have the room.*

The gardener is thanking Finegan.

*Don't know what I'd a done without y'all
stopping by.*

But Finegan says he was part of the problem.

*It was no lucky coincidence. Twas my weight
that tripped the balance. But it was gonna go
anyhow. . . Appreciate the potatoes and cabbage
and all.*

Finegan has the portable camping grill fired up with a small wood fire, a deep pot on the grill filled with burbling hot water. The lid is off the pot and he is brushing some chopped vegies off a cutting board into

the pot - carrots, an onion, several potatoes, and some cabbage. The houseboat is drifting offshore from where the gardener's family had been dropped ashore. Finegan glances in that direction as he settles back onto a box, munching on a raw carrot, contemplative and exhausted. The vegetable bins behind him are stuffed with the new produce.

Barney comes up to sit nearby, his nose in the air, sniffing the boiling vegie stew. Finegan hands a raw carrot down to Barney, who lays down to chew on it contentedly.

New Leaders

The houseboat is peddling along between the shoreline and an immense island formed by the rising water. There appears to be water on at least the three sides of the island that they can see. Joey brings Finegan a map while he pedals along, confused about their location. Finegan gets off the bike seat and comes to comb over the map with Joey, who has spread the map out on top of a box at the rear of the houseboat. Their heads are together over the map, while Finegan runs his finger along the Ohio River.

*I think we've going up the Ohio by mistake.
Hard to tell. All one big watery mess. . . I'm
thinking more and more these days about heading
back. Least I knew what I was looking at.*

In the background they hear a drum set being played, then a saxophone bleating a few shrill notes. Finegan and Joey turn their heads in the direction of the island. Now they hear a guitar being strummed and tuned. Finegan and Joey look at each other and smile.

Finegan and Joey are going over the rise of a hill, walking along a dirt road lying between fallow fields. A flea market is laid out in a pasture, dozens of blankets or tarps spread out on the ground with wares laid out for inspection. Some hold pots and pans, dish sets with many of the dishes or glasses chipped or cracked, incomplete tableware sets, racks of used clothing for both children and adults, hand tools, bags of apples and onions and nuts, chickens and roosters in cages, a calf, bicycle parts, a used shoe display, non-battery key-winding clocks including a large cocoo clock, a hair salon where a hairdresser is snipping away at someone's head, and a display of hubcaps which is getting zero attention.

On one side a band is being formed, with a drum set, sax, guitar, a violin, harmonica, and pebbles in a tin can. The band members are trying out various songs, this or that member suggesting a tune and playing a bar, then another having an opinion. Finally they settle and start to play "Happy Days are Here Again" in a disjointed manner.

Finegan and Joey are walking slowly down between the blankets laid with wares until they come to the shoe rack. Joey stops and begins comparing his shoe up against some boots and tennis shoes for children his age. Finegan asks,

Your shoes getting tight?

Joey looks up at Finegan and nods. The shoeman notes their interest and comes up.

*There's some nice boots you got on. Quality.
Make you a trade for some these others here.*

The boots he is motioning to are not the same quality as the pair Joey wears. They are scuffed, have less tread, and have clearly seen more wear and tear. Joey is laying them alongside the boots he has on, measuring the size in this way. Joey sits on the chair the shoeman offers his clients and pulls off one of his boots, trying on the larger boot. He stomps on his foot and looks up at Finegan, smiling.

On the perimeter of the flea market is a barbeque pit, which is smoking, the coals glowing, but the meat to be cooked is missing. A horse drawn wagon is approaching this spot, loaded with a large dead pig and cages holding young piglets. The dead pig has tusks, was a feral pig, and is covered with coarse hair rather than the soft pink skin of domestic pigs. It has been gutted and is ready to cook. Two men riding on the back of the wagon hop off and pick up the ends of the barbeque spit which has been driven through the dead pig from one end to the other. They heave the pig into the air and carry it over to the barbeque pit, placing it on the Y stands at either end of the pit. Now that the meat has been placed above the fire, they complete the skinning process, pulling the skin up over the pig's head and over the tusks, which are attached to the head bones and resist breaking off.



The wagon master is a young girl about 11 years of age. She is barefoot, wears bib jeans with a t-shirt underneath, and has her hair in braids on either side. She secures the reins and hops off the wagon seat, pulling a board nailed onto a stake from the wagon bed. On the board, in red paint, are the words "Wild Piglets". She walks over to a

clear area near the barbeque pit, reserved for her display, and hammers the stake into the ground there, tossing the hammer into her wagon.

One of her two men picks up a covered bucket of barbeque sauce from the wagon bed and returns to baste the now roasting pig. The other comes to help the girl unload the piglets in cages. The piglets are young, only about a foot long, and protesting, squealing. After they offload the piglet cages, she immediately turns on her heel and comes over to the shoeman, who says,

Howdy Matilda.

Matilda says,

They ate another pair.

The shoeman smiles and says,

You gotta stop kicking at them beasts.

Matilda walks into the shoe display area, scanning quickly, and leans over to pick up the pair of boots just added, the ones Joey had been wearing. She says,

Don't remember you having these.

Matilda sits on the chair provided by the shoeman for clients and slips her bare foot into one of the boots, standing to measure the fit when her weight is pressing down. She smiles and glances up at the shoeman, who says,

Consider it a donation to the campaign.

Matilda protests.

It'd only set them that can't donate to worrying. Favors and all . . . You take one a them squealers. I'll tell John. . . Not that I don't appreciate the thought, Clem.

Joey is trying to get into the conversation as he meets few children his age. He points at her new boots.

Those were my boots.

Matilda drops her gaze briefly at the set Joey is wearing, quickly understanding that a trade had occurred, and just as quickly changing the subject. She asks,

You folks new in the area? Pleased to meet you.

Stay for the barbeque!

Matilda extends her hand first to Joey and then quickly to a surprised Finegan, who is not expecting this from a girl.

Finegan is returning from the houseboat with a hammer and small box of nails in his hands as he has found a saw he wants and has worked out a

trade with the owner. He strides up to the hand tool display area and extends his offering in front of him.

These.

He places them into the toolman's hands and points to the saw.

For that.

Joey is wandering after Matilda, fascinated by her confidence and social skills. Matilda is working the crowd, on occasion offering her hand for a shake, on occasion placing her hand on someone's arm, but never lingering for more than a minute in any location. She comes up to a woman who looks like she is about to cry, talking to a man getting red in the face. The woman says,

*But you owe me a hen. You promised. We ain't
had meat ta home for a month.*

The man is fuming.

*They're all sitting eggs, I tell you. Cain't
you wait a couple weeks?*

Matilda is looking from one to the other, saying nothing. Finally, she sees a break in the argument and says to the woman,

*How big did you say that old coop you got on
your place is?*

The man and woman stare at each other for a moment, suddenly realizing a solution. Both talking at once almost on top of each other. He says,

*You got a coop? I'm outta space and with the
new'uns coming. . . Ya know, chicks take to a
new coop like its home after a day er so. . .
They free range, just let 'em out in the
morning and call 'em back at night.*

She says,

*Big as the house, but the hen's er all gone now
since Earl passed. He did the chickens en all.
. . We got no feed, used corn during Earl's
day.*

Matilda is walking away, smiling to herself. Finegan is again standing in amazement that a young girl is apparently in the running in a campaign, and taken seriously. He says, under his breath,

But she's a girl!

The toolman looks up, surprised at Finegan's reaction,

*Matilda? She's the only one gets folks to work
together. You otta see 'er move a crowd from
somethin plain stupid to summit that'll work.
My Mary says she's the jell that makes the
jelly set.*

He glances over and sees that Finegan is still agape with shock.

*Put a bag over your head then so's you don't
notice that she's a girl, and a young'un at
that. . . We got too many a problem to be stuck
in the old ways.*

The crowd of about 100 people is coming up to the barbeque to be served. Each has a plate in hand, with some sliced tomatoes and a piece of homemade bread, ready for a slab of barbecued pig. One of the men who arrived with Matilda is slicing pork on a board next to the roasting pig, which is now missing parts of its belly and hindquarters. A semi-circle of various chairs or overturned boxes has been assembled at the side of the barbeque, with the wagon Matilda brought stationed in the center of the semi-circle as a platform.

A man with a clipboard is wandering through the crowd, checking off names and handing out small paper ballots. The official approaches Finegan and Joey, who are in line for barbeque. He scans his list, then looks up at Finegan.

New to the area? Where you staying?

Finegan points over the hill and says,

*We're just passing through. On that houseboat
over yonder.*

Joey asks,

Does that mean we can't get something to eat?

The official smiles and winks at Joey.

*I recon you're future voters, if you decide to
stay, and that there is for everyone. That's
Matilda's stand. Them that has plenty, shares.
Helping hand and all.*

The official wanders off down the line. Joey looks up at Finegan.

One guess who he's gonna vote for.

A tall, muscular man is standing on the wagon addressing the crowd. He is wearing suit pants and a vest, with a long sleeved white shirt on under the vest, rolled up at the sleeves. He is wearing a tie, but this has been loosened at the neck, his shirt collar open a bit as the day has gotten warm. He is showing a 5 o'clock shadow. From a distance one can hear his pitch.

. . . build roads . . .

The crowd seems lukewarm, only a half dozen furiously applauding. The first candidate nods and takes a slight bow, and then steps off the wagon.

The second candidate is a stocky woman in a voluminous dress. Her hair has been piled on top of her head and she is bedecked with costume jewelry. Rings are stuffed over her plump fingers. She is helped up onto the wagon by a couple backers who stand under her ample buttocks as she heaves herself up the step. She straightens up and clears her throat.

*The rule of law must be our first concern.
There are simply no guidelines. I've taken the
initiative of drawing up statutes that give
clear guidelines.*

A handful of people in the crowd stomp their feet and whistle loudly at this point, as she unfurls a roll of paper she has brought with her and proceeds to read off her proposed statutes.

Finegan and Joey are sitting side by side in the back of the crowd. Finegan is still trying to get his head around the idea that a little girl could be in the competition.

*Her father ran a pig farm, and they all escaped
when the troubles hit. Ran off into the swamp.
. . Well they go wild after a time. But she got
'em back, is breeding 'em tame again. . . OK,
so she's got guts, I'll give her that. . .*

Finegan is shaking his head, muttering to himself. Joey says,

*I watched her. . . It's not what she says. It's
what she gets other people to do. . . I dunno.
. . I dunno, but they're fretting and fussing.*

*Then comes Matilda. Then when she leaves
they're set to go off to do somethin. But I
never hear her tell them what to do. . . She
points to this or that one and asks a question.*

That's it. . . Huh.

Now Matilda is jumping up on the wagon, to thunderous applause.

*Clem says I'm the jell in the jello, and my dad
always said I brung his mind to a focus, but to
my way of thinking it ain't me. It's you. It's
you come up with what to do, and it's you who
do it. But we rounded up the pigs now and I've
got more time. If this is what you want me to
do, then I'm happy to help.*

With that, Matilda hops off the wagon and continues to work the crowd on the edge of the seating area. Finegan is still dumbfounded.

Huh.

Finegan and Joey are walking up over the hill between the flea market and the houseboat, going home. They are silhouetted against the setting sun. Sounds of cheering and whooping are in the background. Matilda is being carried about on the shoulders of her backers, clearly having won. Finegan and Joey look back over their shoulders at the uproar, turning around to look back on the flea market for a moment. Finegan is shaking his head.

I still can't figure it . .

Joey is still trying to explain what he observed when Finegan was off trading and he was trailing along behind Matilda. He puts both hands first on one side and then the other, trying to indicate first confusion and then resolve.

You should'a seed her. First folks were looking worried. One lady looked like she was gonna cry. Some guy red in the face. Then Matilda'd come up and ask a bunch of questions. Then everyone'd be smiling and Matilda'd walk away.

Joey looks up at Finegan to see if he'd gotten his point across.

I swear.

Finegan is pondering, but finally says,

. . or it's the barbeque.

Canibals

The tide is coming in, waves slapping against the shore. Finegan and Joey are pulling in the fishing net and sorting out the catch, putting flapping fish and snapping crabs into a bucket and sweeping any twigs, seaweed, or coke cans that got swept up into the net back into the water. Gradually the incoming tide starts carrying more and more floating debris. A partially empty soda bottle, tightly capped, comes by. Splintered boards, a woven sewing basket, a child's rag doll with a smiling face, and finally a bloated dead body. The body has been partially eaten by fish, but the belly, covered by shirt and pants, is still intact and full of bloat. Finegan says,

I think I just lost my appetite.

Finegan is at the rear of the houseboat, peddling to get some distance from shore. Joey, who is sitting on a box at the rear, is looking back toward shore. Joey says,

*I think we're clear. . . Was that gross or
what.*

Finegan rolls off his bike seat and climbs up onto the houseboat roof to get some perspective, shielding his eyes with his hand. He looks back toward shore at first, then turns to look out toward deep water.

Oh Lord. . . Gets worse.

Joey jumps up to join Finegan, to see what he is looking at. They both stand side-by-side, hands shielding their eyes.

In the distance is a conglomeration of rafts, made from pastel insulation boards, pink and baby blue. The raft city seems to almost fill the horizon, spreading from one side to the next, and is floating closer to them on the incoming tide. Some of the rafts have soggy cardboard boxes on them, half melted flat by repeated rainstorms. Some items of clothing are thrown on the insulation boards here and there, as though someone stripped and didn't bother to pick up afterwards. An empty pie tin, partially filled with rainwater, stands on one raft, the sole item that raft contains.

Except for items of clothing, the rafts seem empty, and devoid of people. The rafts are looped together by construction netting used to keep the public from construction sites. This netting holds a half dozen insulation rafts together in a neat rectangle, with each rectangle then tied to the others with rope. The raft city was constructed, in desperation, as flood waters were overtaking an island.

One of the rafts has a sign laid flat, which says "Ellis Construction" in red lettering against a white background. What looks like rusty reddish/brown paint smears are amid the red lettering and on the pastel pink of the insulation board raft. An open pocketknife is laid on the construction sign.

One of the soggy cardboard boxes begins to bump around, and a leg sticks out. The foot is bare, no shoes, and the pants frayed and tattered. The box bumps around some more and the cannibal's head comes out over the leg and knee, hands to his head, rubbing his eyes. His hair is long, down to his shoulders. A young man, he is thin and without a shirt over his tan shoulders and hairless chest. The cannibal is not making any attempt to get up, as there is no activity that would be fruitful. He is adrift without oars. He has no expression on his face, no motive, and no agenda.

Finegan and Joey are standing, silently staring in his direction.

Seems to be someone there.

Finegan turns to return to his bike seat and pedal closer.

The houseboat is approaching the side of the raft city where the construction sign is located. The cannibal has now noticed the approaching houseboat and is moving from raft to raft. He is springing with a jump from the edge of one raft into the center of another, then gaining his balance, and then repeating this process. The rafts sway back and forth during this process, a bit of water temporarily splashing over the side used as the jump-off.



The cannibal speaks in a husky voice, as though his throat is dry.

Boy am I glad to see you! Been too far from shore to swim. We'd seen sharks. Can you give me a lift?

Finegan has left the pedals, letting the houseboat drift slowing toward the raft city for a gentle landing. He is also being cautious, wanting to be sure he wants to pick this man up before making a bridge with the gangplank. He climbs to the rooftop to engage in a dialog. Joey slips

into the pedal seat and back pedals when he sees the gap of water between the houseboat and raft city closing. Finegan asks,

Where's the others?

The cannibal looks shocked at first, not the question he expected. Finally, he finds his voice.

*They died. . . We been out here awhile, no land
in sight. . . No food. . . Catch a little
rainwater now and then. . . I'm the last.*

Finegan is still highly suspicious.

How did they die?

The cannibal is realizing for the first time that he needs to concoct a story, as he has been taken by surprise by Finegan's arrival and the tide bringing the floating raft city close to shore.

*Ah . . dysentery . . got a fever and the shits
and just wasted away.*

Finegan is glancing at the bloody construction sign and items of clothing tossed around on most of the rafts and does not buy this story.

All except you, eh? You look plenty well fed.

The cannibal is getting shifty eye'd, feeling trapped, and is starting to worry that he won't get a lift to shore. He is looking over the expanse of water and Finegan can see the mental wheels turning. Finegan looks over his shoulder toward the shore, then back to the cannibal. He says,

The tide's turning again now, pulling out.

The cannibal says,

Maybe I better start swimming then.

With one last look at Finegan's face to look for a change of heart, the cannibal grabs a corner of one of the insulation rafts and jerks it toward him, breaking a corner off. Holding onto this like a phalanx, he dives into the water and starts kicking his feet, paddling to shore using the insulation piece as floatation. Joey has turned the houseboat to follow the cannibal, keeping a distance to the side.

After furiously kicking for a few minutes, the cannibal pauses to catch his breath, gasping furiously. The houseboat is about 50 feet away, moving in parallel to the swimmer as they head toward shore. The cannibal has his upper body heaved up onto the insulation board, his feet dangling in the water. He looks over at Finegan.

Not gonna give me a lift, eh?

Finegan says,

Not until you tell me straight.

The cannibal begins to relay his story.

*We were losing all land. Had to do somethin.
This was couple months back. We had no clue
about direction. . . Just floated.*

The picture he paints is of twenty people of all ages, including a little girl clutching a rag doll, climbing onto the floating raft city from the roof of a truck cab parked at a construction site. The rafts are turning in the swirling water, bringing empty rafts toward the truck cab, so each person or person with a child or couple can step onto their own raft. Those waiting to board a raft are standing back on the bed of the truck, waist deep in water. Cardboard boxes have been thrown atop some of the floating insulation boards.

The cannibal has now caught his breath. He starts kicking his legs again in earnest, moving in the direction of shore. Finegan is standing with his arms folded over his chest now, openly showing his suspicions. Joey pedals a bit to stay alongside the cannibal. The cannibal once again stops, out of breath, and glances up at Finegan.

*So after a couple weeks some that were thin to
begin with went blank, ya know. . . in a coma.
. . . The rest of us were starving, cramps. . .
There was a guy who used to be a butcher. . .*

The picture he paints is of the raft city at night, a man slithering across a raft to slip onto another raft where a thin man is lying on his back.

*One night we heard him go over there, and in
the morning we saw what he was about. That guy
in a coma had his throat slit, blood
everywhere. . . Pieces were missing.*

The cannibal is still trying to catch his breath.

*He had a knife. Said anyone wants a piece is
welcome, but if they try to take him down he'd
eat them too.*

At this the cannibal starts kicking for another few minutes. Finegan turns his back on the cannibal to speak quietly to Joey during the splashing.

*We're not taking him aboard, just so's you
know.*

The cannibal is again out of breath.

*Long story short, that butcher fed well while
the rest of us got faint. Next we knew another
and another went into a coma, no food and
little water. It'd get dark, and by dawn, he'd
be on another raft, fresh meat. . . After*

*awhile I saw that I'd be among 'em, if I didn't
get something to eat, some blood to drink.*

He paints a picture of a decimated raft city, down to a half dozen people.

*I ain't proud of it, but I ain't the one slit
anyone's throat.*

Finegan asks,

So why are you here, the butcher gone?

The cannibal turns to splash away again, kicking furiously. He is trying to maximize his progress, while still hoping to get a lift in the houseboat. He's also trying to buy time to concoct his story. Finegan again uses the opportunity to speak to Joey over his shoulder, in a quiet voice.

I'll bet he's the damn butcher!

Suddenly the splashing stops, the cannibal gasping for breath again. Then all is silent. Finegan turns to look again to the side of the houseboat in the direction of the cannibal. He sees the cannibal no longer clinging to the floating insulation piece, but swimming in long strokes toward the houseboat, closing the 50-foot gap. Finegan motions for Joey to turn the houseboat away from the swimmer. He jumps down to grab a long pole.

The houseboat is now churning away from the swimming cannibal, who is only a foot or so from grabbing the paddles on the water wheel at the back. This distance is increased to several feet. The cannibal sees that he has lost this gamble and treads water now. Finegan says,

*The butcher ate and you starved, yet you're
here and he's not?*

The cannibal defends himself, saying,

*We were running out of people to eat! It was
gonna be me, next. He had to sleep sometime.
There was a leg bone from the last carcass. . .
Jumping rafts makes a lot of noise, slapping
the water, so I slipped into the water and went
under him, tipped his raft so he slid. Then I
was up top, and had the leg bone. Every time he
popped his head up, I'd club him again.*

Finegan glances toward the floating insulation piece, seeing it still nearby.

*You made good progress toward land. You keep it
up, you'll make it. We're not taking you
aboard.*

The cannibal goes into a backstroke toward his floatation piece, glowering at Finegan as he does so, clearly enraged. As the distance between the cannibal and the houseboat increases, Finegan motions to Joey to get out of the bike seat and let him pedal.

*Let's put some distance between us. I wanna be
waaaaay down the coast. . . Watch my back,
will ya?*

Finegan shakes his head, pondering the story as he vigorously pedals away from the swimming cannibal.

Kudzu Canyons

The houseboat is peddling along a coastline where kudzu vines, covering everything in sight, are cascading into the shoreline. Mist is rising from the water, so the scene is seen through the mist, a magical view.



The kudzu has covered several trees, which formspires, and has covered the remains of some houses in an abandoned subdivision, the shape of the rooftops barely discernable. Finegan and Joey are in awe, drifting past the sight silently, with Joey on his usual place on the houseboat roof and Finegan at the pedals.

As they round a curve in the shoreline, they see an even more amazing sight - the remains of a car recycling junkyard where cars have been piled high after being crushed. Atop the piles are cars, which are not yet crushed. Kudzu vines have climbed up almost to the tops of the car piles, so the roads between the crushed car piles have become kudzu canyons.

People are living in the cars atop the piles, using the broken down cars as a type of rainproof shelter. The trunks have been popped from some of the cars, propped open as bedrooms for children. Some children are leaning out of one trunk, waving at the houseboat as it drifts past. Most of the cars have at least one door open, with an adult sitting inside. The front seats of some cars have been pushed all the way back to be used for sleeping, and have pillows and blankets tossed about, an unmade bed. In others, the front seat has been removed but the back seat is being used as a bed.



A Confederate flag is hoisted on a car radio antenna, but there are other flags indicating independence. These flags look almost like tie-dye, the paint and lettering faded, and are a variety of colors and faded lettering. one flag that has "Kudzu Nation" painted in green lettering. This flag lettering is fresh, not faded.

As the houseboat drifts toward the end of the car recycling plant, there is a cleared area where a campfire is burning, a large pot hung over the fire, burbling away. Several picnic benches are placed here and there on a level spot nearby, with residents of the Kudzu Nation lounging. Some wear baseball caps, cutoff jeans or pants, and t-shirts with the sleeves torn off or rolled high. This is redneck country. The men have beards. Several of the lounging residents wave and tip their baseball caps toward the houseboat drifting by. Finegan says,

. . Seem friendly enough . .

Finegan pedals toward shore, then backpedals to slow the houseboat, then comes forward to help Joey moor the boat. Joey is already swinging one of the grappling hooks. Children and adults are climbing down the vines, hand over hand and putting their feet against the rusting crushed cars underneath the vine cover. Some adults are climbing just below their young children, so if the child falters they can catch the child, blocking its fall. An old man is climbing down with his cane slung over his back.

The piles of crushed cars, topped with cars as living quarters, and the kudzu cascading down the sides of the piles, all now covered with creeping and hobbling residents, look a bit like an anthill under an evacuation. Finegan comes across the gangplank, followed by Joey.

Finegan extends his hand to the apparently leader, the Kudzu King, who is approaching with an extended hand and broad grin. Finegan says,

Finegan Fine here, trader.

The Kudzu King says,

*Ain't you the clever one! You got access to all
what's flooded. Be damned.*

The Kudzu King has a tanned face, a beard that has been crudely trimmed to be only a few inches long, hair that looks just as butchered by scissors, and is wearing well worn jeans, scuffed brown leather boots, and an undershirt with a short-sleeved plaid shirt on top. His shirts look grimy and sweaty, and are torn in several places. The Kudzu King adjusts his baseball cap, and can hardly stop grinning. He slaps Finegan on the shoulder, welcoming him, and walks alongside him as they walk to the campfire. He says,

*We're just setting up breakfast. Yer welcome to
share what we got. You like kudzu?*

Finegan is seated at a picnic bench, talking to several adults either seated on the bench or on the ground in front of Finegan. They are all telling tales. Joey is kicking a ball around on the ground with some other boys his age in the background. In the foreground a woman is preparing a picnic table, clearing dishes that have been washed and dried from the last meal away and handing them to a girl to set them aside on a rack.

Four men walk up with a kudzu tuber in a sling, one man on each corner of the sling. An immense 100-pound kudzu tuber conglomeration is in the middle of the sling, roots sticking out in every direction. The men heave it onto the empty picnic table, while the woman and girl bring buckets of water from the shore to slosh over the tuber mass, scrubbing any dirt away with brushes. A man comes with a machete knife and begins to hack at the tubers, breaking the mass into potato sized chunks. Periodically they step back and let the woman and girl collect the chunks in their hands and walk to the boiling pot, tossing the chunks in.

The Kudzu King says,

*. . Been our salvation. Like taters. And the
leaves too. That's fer supper. Kind'a plain but
steady. I still miss biscuits 'n gravy. Dream
on that.*



A dairy cow is lead past on her way to being milked. The Kudzu King says,

*. . About ate all them cows. . . Ate everything
in sight. But BillyBob took a stand when they
came for his prize bull. Said they'd have ta
take him first. Good thing too. We still got
milk for the kids.*

The Kudzu King flashes Finegan a grin.

*BillyBob lived like a king on stud fees too,
fer awhile. Had saved the last damn bull.
Them cows pasture in the kudzu patch too.*

Finegan asks,

No downside, eh?

The Kudzu King responds.

*Um . . A patch of this stuff can be home to
snakes and vermin. Can't see 'um. I'll show you
after breakfast. We'll go on patrol.*

Joey comes up with a plate filled with what looks like mashed potatoes and a glass of milk for Finegan, while the girl helping with breakfast brings the same for the Kudzu King. While the Kudzu King is stuffing his face, Finegan poses another burning curiosity question, waving his fork in the direction of the crushed car piles.

*How'd you come to be living up high. I mean . .
you didn't drive 'em up there.*

The Kudzu King looks up through his eyebrows and swallows, pausing in his ravenous eating, waving his fork in that direction too as he explains.

*We saw the waters a'risin. An the kudzu eating
the trees. Them cranes still had some gas in*

*'em, so we lifted the hulks waitin to be
crushed.*

Returning to his mashed potatoes again, he gives a final wave of his fork and a glance toward the car piles.

*We got the air. And the snakes don't bother us
cause the vermin don't live there. Nothing to
eat.*

The Kudzu King swings his fork toward the woods behind them.

*They like the woods. The rats eat the bugs and
the snakes eat the rats and bugs don't live on
metal.*

The Kudzu King shakes his head while he returns to stuffing his mouth.

*That's where we'd be, if'en it twern't for the
car piles. Hell of a place. I'll show you right
after breakfast here.*

The Kudzu King and several other men are ready for patrol. They are carrying knives, machetes, an ax, a boomerang, and a length of chain - any weapons they can find. One of the men has a large empty net thrown over his shoulder. Another carries a couple shovels. And yet another carries the sling used to bring the kudzu tubers to the breakfast table. Finegan walks up armed with the houseboat club. She asks,

Are we going to war?

The Kudzu King says,

That about says it.

An outdoor school is being conducted behind the men. The schoolmarm has a chalkboard to the side and is writing words down, having the children recite the words and discuss their meaning. Joey is sitting among the children who range in age from 3 to 15. The schoolmarm has written "sympathy" on the board. All the children say "sympathy" in unison. He asks,

Who can tell me what this means?

The schoolmarm nods at one of the older children. The student says,

It means feeling what the other person feels.

The schoolmarm says,

*Very good! Sympathy has a similar sound to
another word, which is . .*

One of the younger children leaps up with the answer, hand in the air.

Empathy!

The schoolmarm writes the word "empathy" on the board and under this the word "pathos".

*Excellent! They both have the same root -
pathy, sympathy, empathy, or from the Greek
word pathos. Pathos is pity or suffering. See
how we can often figure out what a word means
by knowing a common root?*

The patrol is marching off toward the kudzu forest, the sound of singing insects drowning out the sounds of the classroom. The group of men on patrol are walking along a well-worn path through the kudzu forest. On either side are towering kudzu covered trees, which stand like spires as the branches of the trees have rotted, only the trunk remaining. They come to the area where the kudzu root and the greenery the root system supports have been harvested. A large open area of sandy red clay soil the size of a suburban back yard has holes and piles of dirt where the digging recently occurred.

The Kudzu King cautiously approaches the side of this open area, ax in hand. The rest of the group hangs back, but appears to be at the ready. The Kudzu King grabs a vine where it comes out of the ground and hacks at it, stepping backward toward the group, dragging the severed vine with him. A bird flies out of the kudzu patch, startling some of the men, who are tense. The man with the net spreads the net open while those with knives slice off the green leaves, collected in the net. The kudzu vine itself it cast to the side. The Kudzu King steps forward to hack another vine, but quickly steps back. He says,

Whoa! Snake. Nemind, just a grass snake. Baby.

The group now have their shirts removed, are sweaty and covered with dust as the tubers have been dug up. Some are sitting around the edges of a hole, catching their breath. The tubers have been heaved up and onto the sling, also at the side. The Kudzu King is still pulling vines, a separate operation from digging tubers. The vines are interconnected so many are pulled down during any tug.

Finegan is standing close to him, ready for some sort of threat, club in hand. As the Kudzu King leans into tugging he steps back and loses his footing, falling on his butt. A family of frightened baby rabbits scurry out from the burrow he has stepped into. One of the men grabs the club Finegan is holding and clubs away at the baby rabbits which are zigzagging in all directions, attempting to evade and escape. One of the babies does not make it and lies dead and bleeding. Finegan is trying to take this seriously, but has yet to see a threat and is suppressing a grin.

Guess he won't hurt no one no more.

Finegan puts his hand out to help the Kudzu King up onto his feet.

*You could use a break. Let me do that for a
spell.*

Finegan picks up the machete and wades into the tangle of vines, slashing at whatever is preventing the vine they are pulling down from dropping. In the shadow of the kudzu forest just beyond Finegan's feet a copperhead is slithering away. There are salamanders scurrying away as well, typical food for a copperhead. Finegan steps back.

Whoa!



Several men armed with the ax, machetes, and the club spring forward but Finegan waves them away. Finegan says,

He's well gone now. Copperhead. . . Damn.

Finegan returns to slashing vines but is more cautious now, poking the vines aside before sliding his leg into a space.

Finegan is sitting at one of the picnic benches with Joey at his side and the schoolmarm on the other. He has several old National Geographic magazines on his lap, one of them open. Joey is watching the interchange intently, as this pertains to his future.

*Guess in all this we forget the young'uns.
They're growing up with no schooling, cain't
read nor write most of 'em. This 'ere 'll perk
their interest, far away places and all. Some
nekked women in there too, just so's you know.
Lots of big words in there too, with, ah, . . .
Greek roots.*

The schoolmarm is smiling as she accepts the pile from Finegan. She asks,

Does Joey have a school?

Finegan says,

Not lately, but he's goin to from now on.

Finegan has pedaled the houseboat away from the kudzu shore, into deep water. They are heading for a small island nearby, a clump of flooded trees, to moor for the night. Joey is at the rear of the houseboat, talking to Finegan, as they are clear of flooded objects at the moment. He has an open book on his lap with a copperhead snake skin being used as a bookmark. Finegan says,

That school marm, she was thinking past the troubles. We're all so caught up in what's to eat, what we lost an all. Kids get lost in the shuffle.

Joey says,

I promise. I'll read a book every day. Out loud, even.

Finegan sighs and looks momentarily distressed.

You know that lady did your set of clothes? She and I, we . . . well, what we done could'a made a baby. Not saying it did, just could'a. . . What kind a life would a kid have, trying to learn to talk and all, where none do any talking? . . . I keep thinking, mehbe, mehbe we should go back there and check, ya know?

Joey nods.

And no copperhead snakes there either.

Both Finegan and Joey laugh and grin at each other. Joey picks up his book and starts reading "Moby Dick", chapter one.

Homecoming

Finegan is sitting cross-legged atop the roof of his houseboat, a map spread out on his lap. He is pondering. Joey's head pops up on one side. Finegan says,

Seems to me it was about here . .

Finegan waves his hand in the direction of the open water where the dawn is breaking.

But the land ashore looks different.

Joey climbs up on the rooftop and turns 360° around. He says,

*The water rose since we been here last. . . I
think we were a bit more this direction.*

Joey is pointing down along the shoreline, to his right as he faces the shoreline. He says,

*Mehbe so. . . I'll go out to deep water and you
look afar out there. .*

Finegan is pointing out into deep water, where they expect to find the seamstress's island.

Finegan is peddling away, almost out of sight of the shoreline, but moving parallel to the shoreline. Joey is atop the houseboat roof, hand shielding his eyes from the Sun, which is rising over the open water, peering out into deep water for any sighting of the island. Suddenly Joey is animated, pointing with one arm and calling back over his shoulder to Finegan.

I see it! I think I do. Ahead and to the right.

The houseboat is approaching the island where the seamstress and the other deaf/mutes lived, working with sheep and wool and gardening at the Institute for the Deaf. The island looks smaller than when visited last, over a year ago. The water level has risen. But the buildings, which were atop the hill, are still above water. No sheep can be seen grazing on what is now a limited grass area around the remnants of the main Institute buildings.

The seamstress, carrying a bundle in her arms, can be seen running down the slope toward the spot where the houseboat will be mooring. There is a rowboat with oars pulled onto the shoreline there also. Finegan is walking across the gangplank toward the seamstress, who is standing on the shore. The seamstress is smiling broadly, very happy, with tears in

her eyes. She holds the bundle forward slightly, with both hands. A four-month-old baby girl is in the bundle, looking up at her mother and waving her free arm a bit. Finegan is choked up.

Oh my . . .

The baby suddenly jerks its head in Finegan's direction, looking startled. Finegan smiles and looks at the seamstress.

It can hear! . . . Ah, not an it . . . a boy or a girl?

The seamstress is placing the baby girl into Finegan's arms. She points to the baby and then to herself, meaning, a girl. Finegan is all smiles, goggling and cooing to the baby, who is cooing and blowing bubbles in kind.

A deaf man is walking down the path, carrying a suitcase and a bundle of cloth diapers. He has a smile on his face also. He begins telling Finegan the story, in sign language. He puts the suitcase and bundle of diapers down, and motions in a sweep from the hilltop to land, indicating that everyone moved to the mainland. He points to the water then raises his hand slowly, indicating that the water kept rising.

The deaf seamstress, seeing that Finegan is looking over her shoulder steadily, only now becomes aware that the deaf man has arrived. She turns to watch his story too. The deaf man points to the seamstress, then frowns and crosses his arms, shaking his head in the negative, meaning that she had refused to go. He points to Finegan, then to the seamstress again, holding his hand over his eyes and scanning the horizon, indicating that she was waiting for Finegan to return. Finegan says,

Well, we're here now, and not leaving until she comes along.

Joey has come round behind Finegan, a big smile on his face too, and picks up the suitcase and bundle of diapers, taking them onboard. The deaf man points to the rowboat nearby, then points to himself, then a sweeping gesture from the mainland to the seamstress, then opening his arms to encompass her and himself swooshing back toward the mainland. He is relaying that he came for her. Finegan smiles affectionately one last time at his baby girl, then hands her back to her mother, stepping toward the rowboat.

We'll take this along.

Finegan points to the deaf man, indicating with a wave of his arm that he should get onto the houseboat.

As the houseboat approaches a narrow inland bay, the dark, dead trunks of trees can be seen sticking up here and there at the entrance. Waves are slapping the pontoons of the houseboat, the wind is starting to whistle. The sky is darkening. Joey is standing on the roof in his usual position, his clothes starting to whip now and then in the wind. He is signaling Finegan, pointing to the water to the side and motioning with his hand to move in the other direction when he sights a flooded tree that could snag the houseboat.

The seamstress and the man who vacated the island had been sitting in the rear, facing Finegan, but now go into the house on the boat. The seamstress covers the baby's face with the blanket edge. The baby can be heard starting to cry due to the wind in its face.

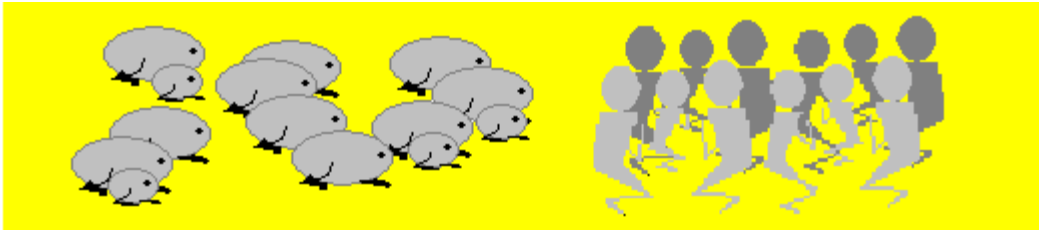
The houseboat is now moored well into the inland bay, where the waterway is so narrow the houseboat barely made it between the flooded trees. Finegan is tying the houseboat as well as mooring via the grappling hooks, anticipating a hurricane. The gangplank has been lowered.

The seamstress and baby are hustling up the hill toward a farmstead in the shelter of the hills. Joey is carrying her bundle of diapers and the deaf man from the island is at the lead, carrying the suitcase. Their clothes can be seen blowing in the wind now and then, but not to the extreme as out on the open water. Finegan is pulling the gangplank back onto the houseboat and jumping down into shallow water, wading ashore, hustling to catch up to the group going up the hill.

Twenty or so people are huddled under the shelter of a barn roof, which has been hoisted up by posts to form a large lean-to. The group includes children of all ages. The straw that had been in the upper floor of the barn has spilled out onto the ground, so forms a soft seating area. Twenty or so sheep are also huddled under the roof, to one side, a section of fence pulled around them. This fence had been pulled from a field, is made of posts and wire fencing between the posts, and has been rolled up to make it portable.

The sheep are lying down, almost on top of one another, and include spring lambs. Blankets have been thrown on top of the straw in the seating area for people. The people are likewise very crowded, trying to stay out what is becoming hurricane force winds and torrential

rains. The wind can be heard whistling and moaning amid the thunder of raindrops on the roof.



The seamstress is in the middle of the group, which includes normal folk as well as the deaf that came from the island. Several women are crowding around her, admiring the baby and cooing at the baby. There is a particularly strong gust of wind and the seamstress pulls the blanket up over the baby's head, moving her body to shield the infant. Finegan is to the open edge of the lean-to, trying to pull some planks up to create a windshield. He finally gives up as the planks keep blowing down, and comes to join the group huddled further in under the roof.

The storm has blown over and sunlight can be seen beyond the shade inside the homestead barn. Birds are singing again. The seamstress is sitting alone on a blanket in the middle of the straw, nursing her baby. The afternoon sunlight is shinning into the barn, so mother and child are in a beam of sunlight. The sheep have been released to return to grazing, and no one else is around. It is a madonna and child moment.

Finegan and Joey are being given a tour of a community of survivors, numbering around 300 folks. This is a rural area, so the makeshift homes are of various materials and styles. One has stacks of used tires for walls, with a piece of plywood over the top as a roof. Over the plywood is a tarp, to keep it all waterproof. The doorway is simply open, with a cloth tied up at top to be dropped at night for privacy or for warmth. This is true of a couple window openings on either side, where the top tires are missing but a cloth can be dropped as a curtain.

Several homes are bermed into a hillside, a former pasture. The earth that has been dug out is used to form walls on the open side of the houses, hobbit style. The walls are braced by various boards taken from the sides of collapsed barns or farm buildings. Doors and window frames

from these buildings are in place, packed with dirt all around. The roofs are sections of tin roofs, likewise scavenged from collapsed farmhouses. One of the bermed homes has a complete corner taken from a farmhouse, moved to form this corner.

Yet another house has been formed by parking several cars and vans into a rectangle, with an open communal area inside these cars. The communal area is covered by planks taken from a collapsed barn, rough wood with a piece of straw here and there stuck to the boards. The car doors are open in good weather along the outside of this commune, closed at night or during rain. None of the cars have tires, so are sitting on the ground. The doors of the cars and vans have been removed on the inside so the complex is like a large dorm area for sleeping.

Yet another house is formed by bales of straw that are secured by wire wraps, leftover from before the troubles hit. The farm wagon used to haul the straw bales has been tipped over on its side to form one wall, with a portion of a farmhouse roof pulled over the center for protection from the rain.

Yet another house is an old tractor, long out of gas, with all manner of plastic sheeting thrown over the top and pulled taut and staked and tied at the edges - one large tent. Boxes and stored items are stuffed under the tractor body, with sleeping blankets laid out in all directions like the spokes of a wheel from this center.



The village folk are milling around a central area preparing a communal supper. A cooking fire has been started and a large pot hung over the fire. Several women are chopping vegetables and a man is cleaning fish on a table nearby. The communal dining area has every type of table and chairs imaginable, collected from the area - kitchen table and chairs, picnic tables, stools and benches from barns, and tables made from boards held up by broken concrete blocks. All the tables have been covered by tablecloths tattered and of all colors but the tablecloths are clean. In the centers of these tables are dishes and tableware, also of every kind and color, many chipped. The glasses and pitchers of water are primarily plastic ware, children's durable drinking glasses.

In the distance can be seen an extensive garden area, running up one slope and over the top of the hill. The sheep can be seen grazing on yet another hilltop. Free ranging chickens are dashing about, underfoot. There is lots of chatter going on, friends calling out to each other to ask about the windstorm that had blown through and how their homes were affected.

. . How'd you fare?

Another answering,

Nearly tore my roof off but it held.

Finegan and Joey are walking down a row of shops, off to the side of the sleeping and eating areas. These are primarily just open areas, covered by tarps and left open at night as any tools or goods are packed away at night. The shops are mostly closed due to the storm that passed recently. One shop is a shoe repairman, who is seated on a contraption that is a chair with a post in front of the chair, atop this post a wooden foot. Alternative wooden feet, different sizes, are in a box at his side. He is waiting for customers, his box of tools beside him including cutting knives, glue, a hammer, and various pieces of leather.

A communal library is next, a woman putting books back onto shelves that had been taken from several different collapsed homes. These shelves are of every size and shape. She is handling the books with great care, almost in an affectionate manner. She has a couple tables, one small for children, and several chairs in the library too.

A furniture repair shop is next, and woodworker setting up shop, continuing to repair a chair he had been working on before the storm. He has woodworking tools - a plane, hammers, saws, nails, glue, clamps, and a hand drill. Some wood shavings are on the ground underfoot. He is sitting on a stool in front of a low sturdy table, the chair to be repaired atop this table. Finegan approaches the woodworker.

*Could you make me a cradle? One that could hang
from a ceiling yea high?*

Finegan has his hand over his head, indicating the height of the houseboat roof.

The houseboat is again on the open water, drifting along toward the sunset, with the shoreline off to the right. Finegan is not at the pedals, but Joey is sitting cross-legged on the rooftop, reading to

himself. All four lines from the corner posts are covered with cloth
diapers, drying in the breeze.