

It was a long, sturdy wall of packed earth and stone. It wasn't tall like a castle, and it wasn't beautiful. It was a humble protector. For generations it had stood as a silent shield between the town and the power of the water.

On the night the great storm arrived, the sky changed quickly. Clouds stacked themselves thick and low. Thunder rolled in the distance like the beat of far-off drums. The air felt heavy, as if the world itself were holding its breath.

Twelve-year-old Matthew and his younger sister Anna were walking home from their grandfather's feed store when the first gust of wind swept across the fields.

"The storm's coming fast,"

Anna looked toward the river. It didn't look like copper anymore. It looked dark and restless. They remembered Grandpa Eli's warning from supper the night before:

"River's been rising upstream. Keep your eyes open."

They climbed the steep side of the levee to take the shortcut home. Halfway along the ridge, the wind suddenly died down. Anna stopped.

"Do you hear that?"

Matthew listened. It wasn't thunder. It wasn't the wind. It was a thin, steady hiss.