

WHEN THE DIKES BROKE

By Alta Halverson Seymour



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Everyone knew that a tile roof was a precarious perch. Everyone saw, too, that the steadily rising water had reached a corner of the attic floor near the stairway and was beginning to spread, slowly but surely, toward them.

Based on the great flood that swept over Holland in 1953, the gripping story *When the Dikes Broke* follows the tale of the van Rossem family as they are awakened by sirens and the clanging of church bells and soon realize that the dikes have broken. As the water rises to their roof, the family is separated, and a desperate and daring search is set in place for those who have been swept away. This adventurous story is packed with educational and moral value.



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The Sea Comes In



“If you could have any wish you wanted in all the world—just one—what would it be?”

Lisa’s question broke suddenly into the comfortable silence that had fallen for a moment or two on the little group clustered around the winter fire that stormy Saturday evening. “You first, Dirk!” she said.

But Dirk shook his head, glancing out of the corner of his eye at his father, and Lisa exclaimed in surprise, “Haven’t you got a wish, Dirk?”

“Oh, I’ve got one all right—a big one,” he said and hesitated. “Let someone else start.”

“Then you, Father,” said Lisa. “What would you wish?”

“Well, I don’t know—now that I have my new barn. Oh, yes, more acres, more cattle, an extra-big onion crop, maybe a whole new polder rescued from the sea, a—”

“No fair! No fair! Just one wish!” cried Lisa.

“Ja, ja, that’s only one wish,” he protested, laughing. “Just to have the best farm around Kuyfoort.”

“I seem to have about everything I’d wish for,” Mother said, her face serene in the glow of the fire, and Lisa gave a little sigh of content. There was something so solid and capable about Mother! Wherever she was, one felt safe. “My wish would be just that we could always be as well off and happy as we are tonight. And that’s a pretty big wish.”

“I think I’ll wish for a helicopter,” said Klaas, the elder brother, his eyes twinkling, though his voice sounded serious.

“Oh, Klaas, that isn’t a real wish,” Lisa objected. “You’re only teasing because you don’t want to tell your real one,” she added shrewdly.

“It’s a good one,” said Klaas stoutly. “There’s only one helicopter in Holland. Two might come in handy one of these times. All right, then, but anyway I’d like to see one,” he chuckled, yielding to the disappointment in her face. “Let’s say a new sailboat—a fine new one. Our old boat’s pretty banged up. You and Dirk could have that.”

Lisa couldn’t help laughing with the others at this generous offer. She was sure Klaas’ real wish was for brown-eyed, fun-loving Martje Stuyver, the elder sister of her own special friend Paula. The trouble was, too many of the other farm and village boys had the same wish. And anyway, Martje was away visiting friends at St. Philipsland, where probably other lads were finding her as enchanting as Klaas did.

“Look at Rex,” she said, pointing to the shepherd dog, who

had risen from his place near Dirk and was walking uneasily about. "He's probably wishing the wind would die down."

"Rex doesn't like storms," Klaas said. "Not that the rest of us do. Tell us your wish, Dirk."

"Well—I'd like to go to the university and become an engineer," said Dirk, and at the evident surprise of the group, he added defiantly, "the best engineer in the Netherlands!"

"For a boy of fourteen, that's quite a wish," said Uncle Pieter. He had brought his young wife Anna for a weekend visit to the farmhouse. This uncle, not so many years older than Klaas, was a great favorite with the young van Rossems, and Tante Anna, pretty and capable and gay, had won their hearts at once. "It's a good wish, too. Holland needs plenty of engineers if we're going to take more land from the sea."

But Dirk's father shook his head. "Holland needs farmers to take care of the polders we've already taken from the sea. And you are a farm boy, Dirk. Remember that."

"Klaas is the farmer," said Dirk. "I want to be an engineer, Father. Like Uncle Piet says, Holland needs engineers—good ones. It's the engineers who build the dikes that push the sea back so we can have the new polders." He knew, as all Dutch boys did, how much of the country's rich farmland—the polders—had been rescued from the sea by the dikes—how the salt water had been pumped out and the land made fertile. This agelong battle with the sea had always fascinated him. He longed to have a share in it and couldn't see why his father should object.

"And I wish for cotton for my lace caps if I'm to have plenty ready for the market day on our spring trip to Dordrecht," said Grandmother, placidly intervening, as she often did, with a change of subject to prevent a struggle between this father and son who never seemed to understand

each other very well.

“You didn’t make a wish, Lisa,” said Tante Anna, smiling at her. “A lively girl like my Lisa must have many, I know.”

“Oh, I do,” said Lisa. Her great wish was for a room of her own, however small, instead of her cupboard bed off Mother and Father’s room. And to be treated less like a child, now that she was thirteen. But these weren’t wishes one could say aloud in front of everybody. She had another wish, too, though she hesitated to mention it because she feared it would make Dirk double up with laughter and Klaas give her his teasing, big-brotherly look. But Uncle Piet, she thought, would understand, and she felt sure Tante Anna would.

“I wish for an adventure—a real adventure,” she said, with a slightly self-conscious air. “I’ve never had even a little one.”

As she had feared, the wish was greeted with hearty laughter, especially by her brothers. “You’re likely to have one—here on a Kuyfoort farm,” scoffed Dirk.

“Well, it needn’t be in Kuyfoort,” retorted Lisa with spirit. “After all, I’m movable. I’m willing to go where the adventure is.” Then, to change the subject, she asked quickly, “What’s your wish, Uncle Pieter?”

“I have mine,” said her uncle, and he took his wife’s hand. “Right here.”

“And I,” said pretty Tante Anna, pleased but a little embarrassed, “wish for a new good big dish pan.”

This very practical wish brought them all down to earth with laughter. Mother stood up, saying with a chuckle, “While you’re about it, wish for one big enough to be used for a baby’s bathtub too. And now, how about a nightcap of hot chocolate and some of the koekjes I baked this morning? Come, Lisa.”

“Time for Rex to go to the barn, Dirk,” said his father.

Dirk stood up. It was plain that Rex didn't want to leave. He stopped at the door, looking up pleadingly. "I'll have to take him," Dirk said. "Come on, old fellow." But even when Dirk was back and Rex was safe in the barn, they could hear an occasional deep, protesting bark.

"How the wind blows tonight!" said Tante Anna uneasily. "Sounds as if it wants to tear the house up by the roots."

"Don't worry," said Father. "It's a solid brick house with good strong roots."

"The waves were so high this afternoon! Seemed as if they wanted to dash right over the dike," Tante Anna said.

"The dikes have stood against the waves for many long years," her husband assured her, "and there's a dike army of all the able-bodied men around to go into action with sandbags and all sorts of things if there's any danger."

"Sometimes in a bad storm, a little sea water washes over the dikes, but it does no harm," her brother-in-law said. "So good night, and sleep well."

Dirk's thoughts were going round and round over the evening's talk of wishes as he snuggled down between the huge feather puffs in the tiny room that he shared with Klaas.

Klaas was wide awake too. "What a wind!" he said. "Sounds as if it wants to tear not only the house but the whole farm to pieces." He was silent a moment and then asked, "Dirk, did you mean that about being an engineer?"

"Did I mean it? You bet!"

"Father won't like it, Dirk. I don't think he'll help you."

"I'll have to do it myself, then, Klaas. This farm isn't big enough for the three of us anyway, you know that."

"But there's talk of building a new dike farther out. That would mean new polders—new farmland. It's been done before, you know. That's what Father and the others around

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I'll Row With the Oars I Have



Dirk's impulse, as he watched his brother struggling toward the submerged boat, was to leap into the water and swim to his aid. He made a quick move, but his father seemed to know what he meant to do and grasped his shoulder. "No, Dirk," he said firmly. "If anyone goes in, I do."

Uncle Pieter didn't speak, but he was swiftly getting off his shoes when his sister, watchful and intent, exclaimed, "God be thanked! He is there! He has reached it! Oh, my Klaas!"

Dirk longed to be there to help. Four hands were needed, but he could see that Klaas was managing to good purpose with two. He was holding the rope with his left hand while he cut with the other, and Dirk knew his brother always kept

