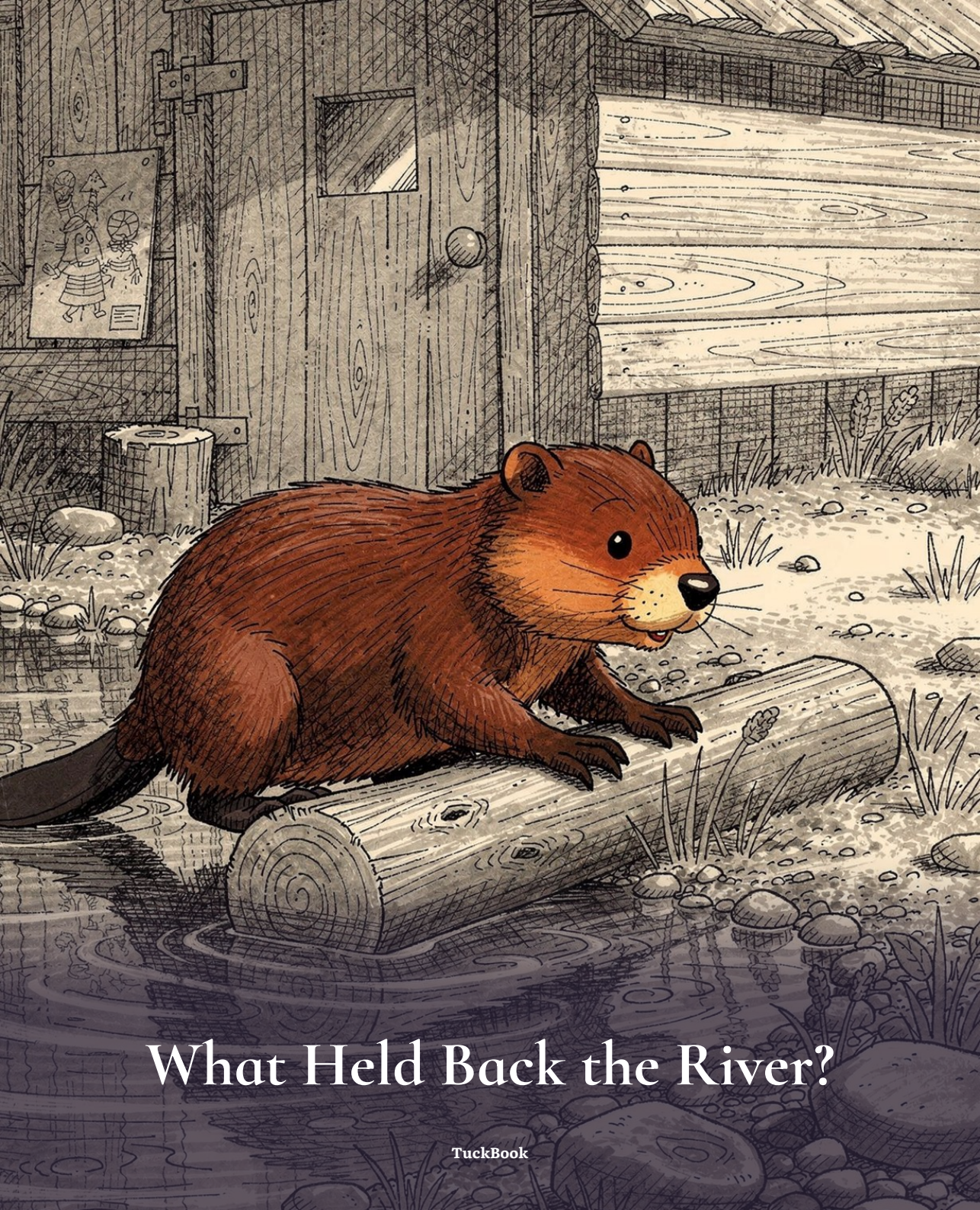




What Held Back the River?

Jasper shoved a smooth log into the shallow edge of the river and planted both back paws in the pebbly bank. “Stay there,” he told it. He wanted to build a small, sturdy dam beside his family’s lodge, where the rushing water could make a quiet pond. But the current slipped beneath the log, lifted it with a bubbly tug, and carried it downstream.

Jasper splashed along the safe, ankle-deep edge and dragged the log back by its wet bark. He chose another spot between two flat river stones. This time he pushed hard with his nose, then held the log until his whiskers trembled.





The river did not care how hard Jasper tried. It rolled around the stones, caught the end of the log, and pulled it away again. Jasper watched it bob past the willow roots. His tail slapped the water once. “I can build it myself,” he muttered, though the words felt thin.





From the lodge doorway, Dad Beaver called, “Keep to the shallows, Jasper!” Jasper flicked one ear to show he heard. He did not go after the log. Instead, he sat on a sun-warmed stone and stared at the rushing water, wishing it would stop hurrying for just one minute.

Then a bright green reed brushed past his paw. It did not float away. Three more reeds had snagged against a small stone, and a thin willow branch lay across them. Bits of leaf and grass had gathered in the crisscross. The water still passed through, but more slowly, in tiny silver threads.





Jasper leaned close. Upstream, a forked branch had caught against a root. Downstream, two stones held a bundle of reeds in place. Nothing there was one big wall. The river had helped make little catches, one after another. Jasper's tail stopped twitching. "Maybe the first thing doesn't have to be a log," he said.





He gathered long reeds from the bank, choosing the bendy ones instead of the brittle dry stalks. He tucked their muddy ends between three river stones near the shore. Then he wove two willow branches over and under the reeds. The low barrier was only as high as his paw, but it did not drift away.

Water pressed through the weaving and made it bow. Jasper nearly grabbed a heavy log right away. Instead, he added a second willow branch, then packed small smooth stones at the bottom. Each piece gave the next piece something to lean on. Behind the barrier, the water made a round, slower swirl.

Mom Beaver came from the lodge carrying a peeled willow branch, and Dad Beaver followed her along the bank. “That is a clever beginning,” Mom said. Jasper’s chest gave a hopeful bump. “The reeds are holding each other,” he explained. “Could you help me anchor the biggest logs? I know where they should go.” Dad looked at the low woven barrier, then nodded. “Show us, builder.”





Jasper chose two smooth logs that lay above the waterline and pointed their thicker ends toward the stones. Mom and Dad eased them into place while Jasper guided their ends against his reed weaving. Together they pressed river stones around the logs. Jasper fetched more willow branches and threaded them through every open gap he could reach.





The river pushed and whispered. One small stick popped loose, so Jasper did not panic or try to hold the whole dam at once. He pushed the stick back, laid a reed across it, and tucked a stone beside it. The little barrier held. The logs held too. Water spread gently behind them, widening into a clear pool where pebbles shone beneath the surface.





Jasper stood beside his family at the riverbank and watched a yellow leaf turn slowly in the new pond instead of racing away. The lodge reflected in the calm water, wiggly but whole. Dad bumped Jasper's shoulder with his. Jasper touched the woven reeds with one paw. They were small, but they had known where to begin.





Good night.



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After the story



WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Jasper learns that a sturdy dam begins with small pieces that support one another. With patient practice and help from his family, he turns rushing water into a calm new pond.

TALK ABOUT IT AFTER READING

After reading, ask which moment felt the warmest or bravest today.

AND TOMORROW...

The next morning, Jasper notices a tiny channel beside the new pond and wonders where it might lead.



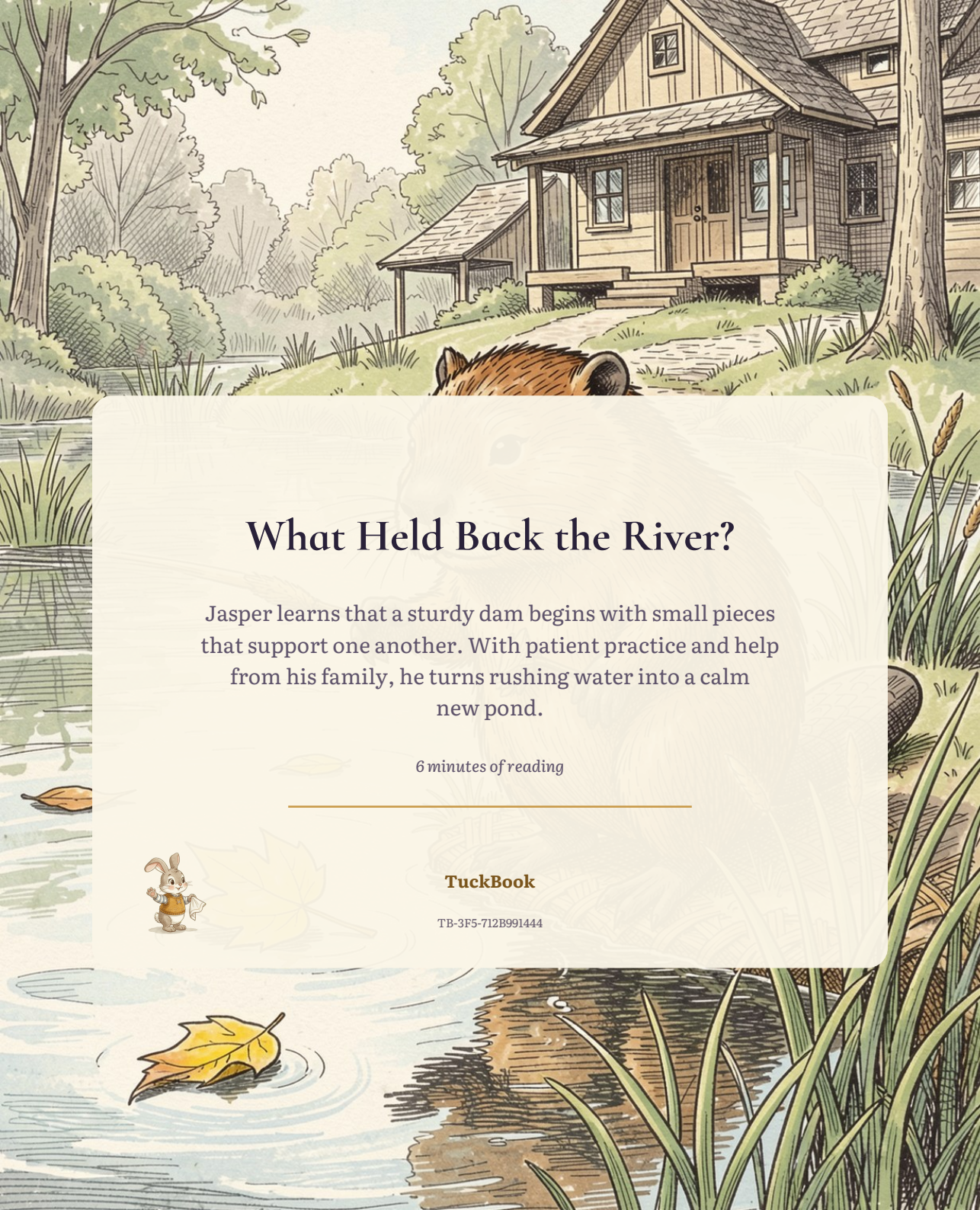


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6 minutes of reading



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