

Steve sipped his morning coffee and gazed at the bare November trees across the Little Falls, Minnesota dam over the Mississippi River. His heart still swelled every day when he came to work because of the rich history of this place. He had studied it in detail, going all the way back to 1849 when pioneers formed the Little Falls Mills and Land company to make power from a river.

Today, 168 years later, sensors recorded history in a database filled with flow rates and other engineering data. And that data, along with Steve's twenty-eight years of electrician experience, said Generator Six needed maintenance.

A truck carrying a backhoe arrived. Steve waved and strode inside, past several generations of control stations, some dating back to 1926. He sat in front of a modern computer console and clicked a few mouse buttons, signaling a system operator in Duluth that he was ready. Somebody in Duluth would remotely shut down the generator, move its load to other generators, close the waste gate in front of it, and monitor telemetry. Steve's job would start after the waste gate closed and the pool in front of the generator drained. Like Moses when the Red Sea parted, Steve would work under the river on dry land to inspect the generator. If all went well, they could open the gate and start the generator back up this afternoon. Steve poured one more cup of coffee and moved back outside to the platform over the river to watch the gate shut.

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Two hours later, the water in front of Generator 6 was gone. An entire tree had smashed against the steel grates protecting the generator. As Steve suspected, that explained the generator output fluctuations. As the backhoe moved in to clear the debris, something else caught Steve's eye. He moved closer to the platform edge and peered down.

He signaled the backhoe to stop and ran to the operator cage.

“Lower me down there.”

“Why?”

“I see something.” He pointed to the spot.

He climbed into the bucket and signaled the backhoe operator. The backhoe arm swung out and over the empty pool toward the steel grates. The bucket lowered slowly until Steve signaled to stop. He reached toward the grates and pulled a slimy branch away.

A brown head with empty eye sockets and teeth protruding from an open mouth stared back at him.

Steve yelled and staggered to the back of the bucket. He regained his composure and looked again. The head connected to a body that looked like a skeleton wrapped in wet brown paper bags.

He waved his arms up and down. The bucket moved up and over the pool again and set down on the platform. Steve scrambled out and ran to the operator cage.

“What did you see?”

Steve shivered. “Shut it down. We need to call 911.”