Why had the neighbours left their farm?

The river, which forms the eastern boundary of our farm, has always played an important part in our lives.

Without it, we could not make a living.

There is only enough spring water to supply the needs of the house, so we have to pump from the river for farm use.

We tell the river all our secrets.

We know instinctively, just as beekeepers with their bees, that misfortune might overtake us if the important events of our lives were not related to it.

We have special river birthday parties in the summer.

Sometimes we go upstream to a favourite backwater, sometimes we have our party at the boathouse, which a predecessor of ours at the farm built in the meadow hard by the deepest pool for swimming and diving.

In a heat wave, we choose a midnight birthday party, and that is the most exciting of all.

We welcome the seasons by the riverside, crowning the youngest girl with flowers in the spring, holding a summer festival on Midsummer Eve, giving thanks for the harvest in the autumn, and throwing a holly wreath into the current in the winter.

After a long period of rain, the river may overflow its banks.

This is a rare occurrence as our climate seldom goes to extremes.

We are lucky in that only the lower fields, which make up a very small proportion of our farm, are affected by flooding, but other farms are less favourably sited, and flooding can sometimes spell disaster for their owners.

One bad winter we watched the river creep up the lower meadows.

All the cattle had been moved into stalls and we stood to lose little.

We were, however, worried about our nearest neighbours, whose farm was low lying and who were newcomers to the district.

As the floods had put the telephone out of order, we could not find out how they were managing.

From an attic window, we could get a sweeping view of the river where their land joined ours, and at the most critical juncture, we took turns in watching that point.

The first sign of disaster was a dead sheep floating down.

Next came a horse, swimming bravely, but we were afraid that the strength of the current would prevent its landing anywhere before it became exhausted.

Suddenly, a raft appeared, looking rather like Noah's ark, carrying the whole family, a few hens, the dogs, a cat, and a bird in a cage.

We realized that they must have become unduly frightened by the rising flood, for their house, which had sound foundations, would have stood stoutly even if it had been almost submerged.

The men of our family waded down through our flooded meadows with boathooks, in the hope of being able to grapple a corner of the raft and pull it out of the current towards our bank.

We still think it a miracle that they were able to do so.

One winter, the river rose alarmingly, and we were worried about our new neighbours.

The floods had put the telephone out of order, so we couldn't contact them.

We were watching their land when we saw the first sign of trouble, a dead sheep, and then a swimming horse.

Then a raft came down, complete with the family and animals.

They had clearly been frightened by the rising flood.

Our men waded out and pulled the raft to the bank.

It was a dark and gloomy street.

I was on my way home from a friend's party and had decided to take a shortcut.

I had just turned the corner from the main street and had started walking towards the light at the end of the short street.

Suddenly, almost by magic, I thought, there was someone standing at the far end, under the lamplight.

Most people would have been frightened, perhaps terrified.

I wasn't at all frightened.

Perhaps I should have been.

There was someone there.

I felt somehow that the person - and I couldn't see whether it was a man or a woman - did not mean to harm me.

Although I wasn't frightened, I still wasn't sure what to do.

Should I walk on towards the end of the street and towards the light, and towards the person?

Or should I go back the way I had come?

I decided to walk on towards the light.

The 'guide', as I called the person later, stood and seemed to wait until I was halfway down the street, and then started walking ahead of me.

Even now, I couldn't describe him or her: he or she seemed to be dressed in a long gown, but there was a dim glow all around him/ her.

Certainly, I felt safe and followed the person down several streets that I did not know.

It was a part of town, I realized, that I had been warned about- but nothing happened to me-and as soon as we were near the bright lights of the main road, my 'guide' just disappeared.

The following day I heard that a young person had been killed while walking home alone, not very far from where I was that night.

I don't care what other people think.

I am sure that the 'guide' was my guardian angel and that he or she looked after me.

People whose property was less favourably situated than the writer's farmed land, which for the most part lay on a level with the river banks.

The writer's family suspected that their nearest neighbours might have trouble managing as their farm was liable to flooding, and they had not lived there long.

When the writer's family saw a raft appear along the river, they managed to get down to the river in time to save their neighbours.

The water from the spring is only enough to supply the needs of the house.

We have parties at the boathouse, built in the meadow by one of our predecessors at the farm.

After it has rained for a long time, the river may overflow its banks.

To this day, we think it a miracle that they were able to do so.