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Narrator: The Mississippi River, it flows down the middle of the North American continent over 1600 kilometers to the Gulf of Mexico. The river, and the people who have made their living on it, have become legendary through the writings of Mark Twain. Twain himself navigated steamboats through these waters over a century ago. Although the old passenger steamboats have vanished from the Mississippi, the river still thrives with barge traffic, which provides one of the major means of freight transport in the United States. The *Martha May* is moving a three-barge tow downriver, its red metal flags indicating dangerous cargo. Victor Freeman is the *Martha May's* first mate.

Freeman: My mother, she's from Texas and my great, great grandfather was born [...]