**Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses (Proverbs 10:12)
A Proverbial Story
By Ted Hildebrandt and Chatgpt**

In the heart of a small, sun-baked village, two families had feuded for generations. No one quite remembered how it all began — a disputed goat, a broken fence, perhaps a careless word overheard and misremembered. Whatever the cause, the Gales and the Morans lived in a bitter dance of suspicion and revenge. Their mutual hatred stirred up continual strife between the two families. Fences were cut, crops were trampled, and at every village gathering, sharp glances and harsh words flew like arrows.

In the midst of this quiet war lived young Eli Gale and Mira Moran. They had grown up with warnings — “Don’t trust a Moran”, Eli’s father would say, and Mira’s mother would hiss, “A Gale’s smile hides a dagger.” But life, indifferent to old grudges, kept throwing them together: at the market, at the river, under the wide, endless sky. At first, they scowled and muttered, trading the insults inherited from their elders.

Yet over time, those barbs softened. A shared laugh over a mischievous goat. A hand offered when one stumbled. Something began to grow between them — something tender and stubborn as a spring flower sprouting up through hardened soil.

When old Mr. Moran’s barn caught fire one blistering afternoon, the village watched. Some shook their heads, some whispered that it was surely a Gale’s doing. But none stepped forward to help.

None, except Eli.

Without hesitation, he dashed into the smoke. He helped wrest frightened animals from their pens, called for water, and beat at the flames with his jacket. Mira, though terrified, joined him. Together they fought the fire until they collapsed, coughing and sooty, under the charred frame of what was left.

The village buzzed. Eli’s father shouted at him that night, furious that he’d disgraced their name by aiding a Moran. Mira’s mother wept bitterly, begging her daughter not to be fooled by "Gale tricks," still stoking the flames of hatred.

In spite of that, something had changed. Word spread. If Eli Gale could save Moran livestock, if Mira Moran could risk her life beside a Gale — maybe the feud was not carved in stone after all.

Not everyone was pleased. One evening, a group of young men from the Gale clan, fueled by old hatred, confronted Eli by the river. They hurled slurs, accusing him of betrayal, of cowardice. When Eli refused to fight, they beat him, leaving him bruised and broken among the reeds.

Mira found him there. She wept as she washed his wounds, her tears mixing with the blood on his face. He only smiled through the pain.

"I don't hate them," he whispered. "I pity them. They are prisoners of anger."

It took time — seasons turning, harvests rising and falling — but the village could not deny what they saw. The love between Eli and Mira grew like a slow, stubborn tree, its roots sinking deep into once-barren soil. Their kindness spread, a quiet rebellion against the old ways. Slowly, grudges were abandoned. Apologies, awkward and halting, began to be offered.

And where hatred had once stirred up endless strife, love — patient, persistent love — covered all offenses, and healed a village’s broken heart just like the ancient proverb had observed: Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses (Proverbs 10:12).