

## The Day the River Spoke

by Nisar Kakar

The morning carried the smell of wet earth and mold, thick and damp as it rose from puddles scattered along our street. Our house stood on a slightly raised lane at the edge of Killa Saifullah, close enough to the river that we could hear its distant murmur during the monsoon, but far enough—until that day—to feel safe.

Overnight, the water had crept in.

It seeped through the cracks beneath the door and gathered along the walls, spreading across the floor in a slow, determined advance. Standing barefoot on the slippery surface, I could hear the river now—not distant, but deep and restless, its rumble rolling like a warning.

My father, his shirt soaked and sleeves rolled high up his arms, pushed buckets of water toward the door. He worked in silence at first, then began murmuring to himself—a soft, steady rhythm meant to reassure us. But I could tell he was trying to steady his own nerves.

I stepped outside. Mud clung to my sandals with every step, pulling me down as if the earth itself did not want to let go. The street sloped gently downward toward the houses, now half-submerged, that were closer to the river. Neighbors struggled through the rising water, balancing salvaged belongings on their heads—mattresses, pots, bundles of clothes. The current tugged at their legs, insistent and unyielding. I descended the hill to offer assistance.

A sudden cry cut through the noise.

A little boy had slipped.

For a moment, his small body vanished into the muddy current, his scream swallowed by the roar of water. Instinct took over. I lunged forward, my feet sliding beneath me, and caught his arm just as the current began to pull him away. His grip tightened around mine, his wide eyes filled with a mixture of terror and disbelief.

I pulled him upright and guided him toward the raised part of the street, where others were gathering, breathless but safe.

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By noon, the sky had faded into a dull, exhausted gray. The water had risen to our knees.

Inside the house, we tried to fight it back. With buckets and mops, we pushed the water toward the door again and again. But for every bucket we emptied, more water seeped in—through the cracks, beneath the walls, as if the river had found its way into the very bones of the house. The floor remained slick, the effort endless.

Then a voice called out.

From a house downhill, partially swallowed by water, an elderly woman cried for help.

My father moved first, wading toward her against the force of the current. I followed close behind. The water pressed hard against our legs, making each step uncertain. When we reached her, she was trembling as she tried to steady herself against the wall.

I took her hand. It was cold and fragile.

“Slowly,” my father said.

Step by step, we guided her upward, away from the deeper water, toward the higher street where others had gathered. Her breathing was uneven, but she did not let go of my hand—not even when we reached safety.

In that moment, something shifted.

The urgency of saving belongings, of pushing water out of the house, suddenly felt small compared to the simple act of helping someone stand.

When we returned, the house had surrendered.

Furniture lay overturned, papers floated across the floor, and the water moved freely through the rooms. Among the scattered belongings, I found my old notebook. Its pages were damp, the ink smudged in places, but the words were still there—poems, fragments of songs, unfinished dreams.

Proof that something remained.

As the afternoon wore on, the rain began to ease. The higher street became a place of quiet gathering. Neighbors brought steaming cups of tea, shared blankets, and sat together in weary silence that slowly softened into conversation.

Someone laughed—quietly at first—over a spilled pot. Another joined. Soon, even in the aftermath, there was a fragile, hesitant warmth.

We spoke of what the river had taken.

We spoke of what it had left behind.

And somehow, that mattered more.

By evening, a faint stillness settled over everything. The water no longer rose, though it had left its mark everywhere—mud clinging to walls, the sharp scent of crushed leaves lingering in the air.

Inside, my father moved slowly across the floor, pushing water out one last time. His face was streaked with mud, his movements heavy with exhaustion. Yet when he looked at me, a small, tired smile appeared.

“We will be okay,” he said.

“We always are.”

That night, I lay on a mattress pushed into the highest corner of our home and listened—not to the chaos of the river, but to its quiet aftermath.

It had been terrifying. Relentless. Unstoppable.

And yet, in its force, it had revealed something I had not fully understood before.

Not the strength of our walls.

Not the value of the things we tried to save.

But the quiet power of human connection.

The hand that reaches out without hesitation.

The grip that refuses to let go.

The voices that call out—and the ones that answer.

The same current that threatened to pull us apart had, in those moments, drawn us closer together.



**Nisar Kakar** is an undergraduate student of English at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. He is from Killa Saifullah, Balochistan, Pakistan, a region shaped by recurring natural challenges that often influence his writing. His work explores themes of resilience, human connection, and the quiet strength found in adversity, with a particular focus on education, gender equality, and access to learning opportunities for girls. He currently serves as Assistant Coordinator for Literary Prose at the Quaidian English Debating and Literary Society and previously served as President of the Literary Society at Cadet College Killa Saifullah. Alongside his academic pursuits, he is a poet and singer with a strong passion for storytelling and creative expression.