

The Banks Will Break by Kyle Toscza

Was it May or June, I can no longer recall. The memory of that moment receding like water from a flood. Slowly, but with certainty. The day the banks broke on my life.

With certainty I can say, that day I was sitting on the bank of the river, deep and wide as she is. The water, higher than it has ever been in recorded memory. My cabin, my home, all that I have left, not but a few hundred feet behind me on level ground. There I sat on that muddy bank as the heavy rain pounded down around me, just as it had for the last week. In the beginning it was calming, as I've so often found the rain to be, powerful, pure, and cleansing. The feeling of ease only lasted two days, replaced steadily by dread. So I did what all men are taught to do. I laid my worries aside, and sought to work out my problem. Believing ever certain that through hard work, I could triumph over any adversity. I toiled in that drowning earth, with pick, shovel, and wheel barrow. Desperately scrambling to establish some semblance of a dike. A shield, to defend me, and all I had to hold dear. A bulwark, against the inevitable unwavering enemy. Coming to sweep it all away, from my blistered and bloodied hands. Every day I worked long from the first inkling of light, until darkness swallowed me, and choked the life from my ambitions. Every morning upon first light I rose to see my efforts had been in vain, washed away in the darkness by my new foe, who not so long ago I'd welcomed as a friend. The holes I dug to provide the earth, sloughed inward and filled to the brim with water, as if mocking me by reinforcing the predetermined outcome. Ever still I pressed on, digging new holes to pull the material I needed to craft the armor

that would keep me safe. Ever still those holes filled with water. My labors, stolen away in the darkness.

On the fifth day I gave in to despair, and accepted my fate, though I would not go unknowingly into that darkness. I tied myself off to an old stump on the bank, and waded out into the river, in my hands I carried a metal rod painted in various colors, to mark the level of water. I would know when it was time to say goodbye. Upon reaching a depth up past my waist, where only a short time ago I wouldn't have touched halfway to my knees, I dared not go any further. I raised the rod as high above my head as my arms would allow, and plunged it into the river bed with a loud scream. As if to say, no more, no higher, you will not best me, I will not yield. An act of desperate defiance, and one not taken lightly by my adversary, just then the current seemed to grow 10 fold in strength, as if this was all a trap now sprung against me. I lost my footing, and the current took me. I truly thought I was done for until my line lost all slack, and pulled hard around my waist. I was underwater spinning rapidly, I couldn't get my footing again. I did not know what direction was up or down. All I knew was that the rope led to the bank, that was one truth that could not be played falsely on me. I grabbed at the rope tied tightly around my waist, and pulled myself hand over hand closer to the bank, closer to my salvation. I soon felt my strength fade, as overworked muscles cried out in agony. All I had left was enough to hold on to my progress, though that strength was fading fast as well. Damn you I thought, I was not cursing the rain, nor the river soon to take me, I was cursing myself. I'm not strong enough, I'm not my father, and I am a far cry from my grandfather. Merely the last echo, before a sound fades forever. Strangely it was comforting having my tears washed away as quick as they formed, gentle as I resigned myself to the fate of us all. As I bobbed violently there holding on. I let go of my struggle. I opened my lungs to the water engulfing me and breathed deep, relaxing my arms and letting go of the rope entirely. Losing the light in my eyes I submitted, It was then I felt the first heave on the line from the bank.

I came to sometime later the sound of hearty laughter ringing my ears. I turned my head to find the source of joy. The never ending rain still tenderly kissing my face, like a lover pining for one more embrace. My savior, a man far past the physical condition to have pulled me from the jaws of my foe. Old, scrawny, downright decrepit, all descriptions that would feel a little too on the nose. The pain of a thousand labors dented his heavily bearded face, gnarled grey by time. His eyes though, they appeared to hold much more happiness. His hair, wired and wild. Contained only by a soiled hat, wide brimmed to keep the sun, or in this case the rain off his shoulders. His clothes, as downtrodden as the rest of him. Soiled beyond their original color surely, and held together by a patchwork of foreign fabrics. He carried a small Satchel over his shoulder, plain, brown, well used, and made better. Easily the most respectable piece of his ramshackle ensemble, if not the only thing. The eyes, his eyes, as happy as they were, they seemed to command the attention of anyone who beheld them. I know they commanded mine.

I'm awfully sorry about your rope there son. I had to cut the cord to get you breathing again, he said mournfully. Never did deliver a baby before, seen it done lots sure, but then again. Babies aren't usually born cord first, he smiled musing. Birth? I asked through labored breaths as my lungs acquainted themselves with air once more. Well sure seemed like one to me son, he said smirking. A birth symbolizes a new beginning, a change. I've been around long enough to recognize when things change, and I'd wager your on the verge of a massive one. He seemed to speak so casually, so matter a fact, like listing off the definitions of words from a dictionary. I looked then to the river. My marker had since been submerged, or had been washed away entirely. My act of defiance as pointless as my days of labor. I began to sob, Oh there's a change coming alright. I said, this river will take everything from me. The old man paused for a moment nodding thoughtfully. I know it hurts to start over son, believe me I know that better than nearly anyone. There has been more than one of my failed endeavors ending in fire, and even a situation not so distant from your own. He laughed madly, you should've seen my face, he said, to say I was upset is a gross understatement. All that said, the man's face began to contort into an expression beyond fury, as he continued. Make no mistake. you

can fail, again and again. You can fail until all the hope that drives you leaves you empty, but never give yourself to despair. All that despair can offer you is pity, pity is not compassion. The two may feel similar but one gives, and the other only takes. Furthermore, keep in mind that anger will often distort your view of compassion into pity. You remember that well young man. I sat up then, it's too late I said woefully. Where is hope, it's already gone. The old man reached forward, Compassion rooted deep in his gaze. He smacked me, hard. Knocking me from my hunched over sitting position, my head smacked against the mud.

Do you feel that son? The old man asked with stern conviction. Do you feel the pain? I sobbed out a yes, unable to remove my head from where it landed. The pain you feel means your still alive, the man said anger clinging to every word like a pet begging for scrapes. His tone softened as he finished, it means there is still hope. I looked up then to see his warm smile, eyes as kind as one ever could behold. His hand outstretched to me, he motioned for me to take it by a flick of his fingers inward. I obliged, as he pulled me to my feet I felt all my pain, my sorrow, and my doubt be pulled away from my mind. As I stood I wiped my eyes, and faced the man. So long as you live there's a chance, the old man said assuredly. A chance for what? I asked with keen interest. The overflow. I laughed, I howled mad. I cackled harder than the old man, when he recollected his own battle with water. Laughing felt good, it made me feel better than I had in years. When I finally caught my breath, I pointed towards the river, I think there's a pretty high chance of overflow old man, I rasped out between stifled giggles. I don't mean just the river son, the old man said calmly a smirk tracing his lips. See most everything in life can overflow, abundance is not always a bad thing. The man continued lecturing me with affection and admiration, like a father to his son. Even the things that seem bad at the time, really only end up bringing about a change. Allowing new, and better things to take the place of the old. I feel as though this place your home, has tied you here for far too long. You are not the dreams of those who have come before, or since left. You are your own dreams son, live them. He clasped my shoulder and smiled deeply. You need to go son, it's time. Leave and find your own dreams, and please. Some advice don't build a dike around your heart, nor your soul. Welcome the

overflow. An overflow of success, of love, and of happiness. Can you do that son? He asked, turning to leave in a tired shamble. Wait, I called out after him as he receded into the heavy rain. What was your name again? He answered as if he were right beside me. I never gave it. Be well Cesare, and from that on I was. The day the banks broke on my life.