

New Fiction by Adrian Bonenberger: "King Tide"

We'd been expecting the fascists for a few days but they'd gotten hung up on Newark. Usually they moved fast. Camden had gone quiet just a week after the government had evacuated from Washington, D.C. to some secret location. Then, abruptly, the fascists flowed south, a growing mob of pickup trucks and tractor trailers bristling with guns, fuel, flags, and ammunition: to Richmond, although Baltimore was closer; finally hastening back northward after wrecking that old city, the capital of The Confederacy. Each of those cities had fallen in weeks, carved into pieces and starved, capitulating before the threat of fire and murder that appeared to have come anyway, in spite of surrender. Here and there the cities of the South and Midwest still stood, but were cut off – separate from each other, separate from us, isolated by long stretches of forest and strip malls patrolled by men in multicam holding AR-15s and shotguns, lines of utility vehicles across tracts of the largely deracinated terrain.

The suburbs across the river in New Jersey were filling up with refugees and transients, huddled between the homes of New Yorkers who could afford to live outside the city. Hedge fund managers, software engineers, salesmen, bankers, cops, lawyers, university faculty handed out blankets and food at first. Then later they became stingy, alert to any word of crime. These people were of the city but not in it – their loyalty, dubious. The thousands and later hundreds of thousands fleeing the fascists were bound for sadness and tragedy, driven from homes that would likely never be seen again. Once the center began to crumble, none but the bravest returned to their previous lives, and the bravest were not those running headlong from the hatchet and gunfire.

Many of us still half-believed the whole thing was a joke

taken too far, a mass hallucination or something illegal rather than outside the law, a matter for police or maybe the FBI. Even after D.C. and Richmond and Camden we felt that it would be stopped somewhere, by others. Certainly not by us. Psychologically we were in the denial stage of grief, preparing, though far too slowly for what was coming. In that moment they had laid siege to Newark. While we'd been waiting for the fascists to mount their inevitable northern push, the push had happened; like a bullet, or a hypersonic missile, they'd moved too fast for us to track.

This sent us into a frenzy of preparation. The George Washington Bridge came down, and the Tappan Zee. All week, tens of thousands of anxious eyes stared round the clock at the western approaches to New York. But once news from Newark slowed, it was almost a week before we saw the first movement from our perch in Manhattan, across the Muhheakunnuk River.

I'd dropped out of my fifth year at Muhlenberg college to join the 1st People's Revolutionary Corps. Academics came slowly to me so college was taking more time than it should have. My dad didn't believe much in getting a bachelor's degree. He'd done fine for himself in construction without one. But it was important to my mom that I graduate from college. That's how I ended up at Muhlenberg instead of the Army or Marines like my dad wanted. As far as I knew, my folks supported the fascists. I hadn't heard from them in months.

Now I was in a reserve detachment of scouts stationed at an observation post (or OP) in what used to be called Washington Heights. We'd renamed it Canarsee Hill. The OP overlooked the Muhheakunnuk. Mostly we were watching to the northwest but just before the weekend, Smith, another scout, who had come down from Yonkers, spotted men moving on the bluffs opposite us due west. Smith called Vargas over to the telescope to confirm.

Vargas was our leader, though our unit's military hierarchy

was still inchoate. We didn't have ranks, we were all volunteers and organized in a broadly egalitarian way. He was our leader because he'd been (or claimed to have been) an Army Scout during the 1990s, and had definitely been in the fighting that first broke out south of here. He seemed to know his business and we respected him for his quiet competence and willingness to teach us basic fieldcraft. His crypto-reactionary loyalties and remarks we overlooked with trepidation.

"That's them all right," he said, his flat, battered mug pressed squinting and grimacing against the telescope. Vargas's life hadn't been easy since leaving the military, and in addition to a scar running across his face from eye to cheek, his nose had been mashed in a fight and never fixed. He motioned to me. "Take a look kid. See how they move? That's discipline. They're out of range but they're spaced out, two by two. Way you need to remember to do things. Understand?"

In the round, magnified slice of world across the river, there they were: camouflaged shapes hunched over, moving tactically in pairs. One would stop while another moved, rifles up and at the high ready, in both pairs, presenting an appearance of constant motion and menace, rippling like a snake.

"Here, you've had enough," Vargas said, taking back his position. "Ok: total 8 troops, that's a squad... one tactical vehicle. Looks like an M-ATV. Must be another back there somewhere, or a technical. Smith, you report that up to HQ yet?"

Smith gestured at the radio. "It's offline. I think the batteries are dead."

"Christ," Vargas mumbled. "Well call them with your phone. Look this is important. Tonight get new batteries from the command post."

"I'll get the batteries," I said, wanting to impress Vargas.

Also my girlfriend, Tandy, lived down near 180th. It wasn't far off the way to her place, an excuse to drop in and get some home cooking.

"You think we'll see some action?" Smith said.

"Action, action, all you want is action," Vargas said. "If you'd seen what I did in DC, you wouldn't be in such a hurry to get your gun on. But yeah, if there's one thing the fascists mean, it's action. Sooner or later."

The Revolutionary Corps at that point was mustered mostly  from New England and the suburbs of NYC itself. It hadn't seen fighting in the winter and spring since the contested election. Smith and most of the others (myself included) hadn't been there in D.C. when the fascists had made it almost to the White House and a motley, improvised group of citizens, soldiers, and loyal law enforcement had gone street to street pushing them back so the government could escape. Vargas was there – he'd been someone's bodyguard. Who – a Senator – a woman from New York? The Midwest? What was her name... It doesn't matter any more, though at the time it was an interesting anecdote...

Like everywhere, New England had seen violence when the fascists rose up, but nothing like what happened on the West Coast, the South, or the mid-Atlantic. Up in New England things had been resolved quickly. There weren't enough fascists to make a go of it outside New Hampshire, and those fascists who did rise up in New Hampshire were brutally repressed after their comrades were defeated in Boston, Springfield, and Hartford. Enough police forces and national guard units had refused to betray their oaths to the Constitution, enough of the democratic revolutionary spirit remained within the breasts of New England men and women, that the reactionaries there had floundered and failed early – spectacularly so, even.

Whether they did so as part of a plan or not, what the fascists of New England accomplished was to tie northern pro-democracy states up with fighting internal enemies instead of helping their neighbors. We didn't know that at the time, but at moments when swift and decisive help might have forestalled great bloodshed, the attention on potential local foes consumed everyone's attention. It wasn't long before a second wave of those enemies would appear at their borders, a howling, hostile army.

But in most other places the fascists had translated their quick offensive into victory more often than not and with surprising scope. Perhaps they sensed their vulnerabilities lay in us being able to organize our superior strength in manpower and industry. They'd been chewing the national and most state governments up since January, keeping the legitimately elected authorities and their forces on their heels, hitting them over and over where they least expected it. In our region Philadelphia and Pittsburgh had time to brace and fortify, so the fascists ran at Camden with full strength – wiped it nearly off the map. In their haste to capture Newark, they'd surrounded nearly 22,000 anti-fascist volunteers there, the entire 3rd People's Revolutionary Corps. Most evenings one could see flashes and hear the fascist artillery thumping in the distance.

Smith and Boucher and a few of the other guys had been excited to see the fascists arrive. To them it meant taking part in a battle. Boucher, a Marxist from New London, compared them to the Germans outside Moscow. Morale was high, and Vargas didn't do much to pour cold water on it.

A few hours after reporting their scouts up to higher, we'd observed several armored fighting vehicles and a tank maneuvering on the bluffs. The fascists put up a couple drones and tried to fly them across the river, then sent them high into the air when they realized we were outside the drones'

range. What struck me more than the size of the group was its cohesion, and its audacity. They moved up to a point and acted. They didn't ask for permission or wait for orders from higher. We had armored fighting vehicles, we had tanks, just like them. We didn't have artillery – only the Army had artillery – but we had drones. Seeing the fascists there, flying their black and white flag with a blue stripe down the middle, made me nervous. They'd reduced the space between them and us to that narrow band of water on which so much depended. A free and diverse New York City, the heart of our revolution, was exposed and vulnerable. How had this happened?

A half hour or hour later, further down the river, the fascists launched a motorboat. Vargas told me to observe its progress through the telescope and report movement to him as it crept across the sun-dappled surface. The boat circled wider and wider, seeing how close it could come to our lines. At the middle of the river at the apex of its approach it abruptly beelined for the city. An old red "MAGA" flag was visible on its stern, flapping in the wind. The boat's three occupants wore tactical vests and helmets; one was scanning our side with a sniper rifle, another was piloting, and the third was talking on a portable radio, probably doing to us what we should've been doing to them.

I appreciated their daring. They presented a confident, professional air, like they were straight out of a movie or video game about the Navy SEALs. They knew exactly what to do. Slapping across the water at high speed, these fascists, veterans of the bigger battles to the south, were getting down to business, getting it done.

We were far enough upriver from the source that we saw the boat tossed high into the air, tumbling end over end from the explosion before we heard the shot and the boom. No forms emerged from the wreckage, and the boat sank slowly into the river. This was the first time I'd seen our side fire first. I was glad we had.

Shortly after the fascists had turned their attention to Richmond, while New England, New York, and Pennsylvania were wrestling with their own fascist problems, New York City had declared itself a free city. Run by an alliance of Democratic Socialists, progressive Democrats, anarchists, and independents, the historic agreement put an end to strikes and labor walk offs, stabilized a questionable police force, and, in short, unified and anchored what we all hoped would be a fresh start for the city and maybe for America, too. Hopes were high for a nonviolent revolution ushering in the promise of a full, meritocratic democratic polity.

Many people left the city, but many more came, attracted by the promise of a just new world. One of the first things we did was rename things: The Hudson River became The Muhheakunnuk, or "River that flows two ways," in the original Lenape. Madison Avenue became Liberty Avenue. Rockefeller Plaza, Veblen Plaza. Trump Tower became Mohican tower, for the indigenous Mohican peoples. And so forth.

Where we could reduce the damage done by naming places and things for white European settler colonialists who caused real and literal ethnic cleansing and genocide, we remedied as best we could. While the fascists were shooting and murdering, we were getting resolutions passed in bipartisan committees. As the shitlib pro-government forces were fighting desperate retrogrades, we were setting up a new way of compensating labor on the blockchain: Hours (pronounced "ours") of labor were our new, profession-blind currency. A person worked the hours they did and were rewarded based on that flat rate, digitally, plus a small bonus in consideration for specialty labor or difficult labor nobody wanted to do. My daily wages, for example, were 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ Hours per day: 12 Hours for the 12 hours of work I did for the militia, plus a 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ Hour bonus for the hazardous nature of my work (though I had, up until that point, done little hazardous duty – that would change soon).

What a sound and simple system; what a fair and just means of compensation. I'd never seen anything like it, and haven't since, though home ownership and other realities of adult life have given me a better appreciation for modern economies than I had in my youth.

The People's Council of New York had compensated those New Yorkers who had stayed in the city with Hours on a prorated basis for the dollars and real estate it confiscated in order to trade with external partners, and signed an alliance with its neighboring states, the state of New York, and the federal government. Everyone was relieved it hadn't come to shooting. Putting nearly 120,000 people under arms, such as myself, made the city by itself one of the largest standing armies on the territory of the former U.S.A. We were all proud of what we'd accomplished in such a short amount of time.

At the end of our shift, I took the spent batteries from our radio and headed down to HQ. The arrival of the fascists had sent everyone into a frenzy of activity and worry. When I poked my head into the command tent, I caught our commander, a woman who had flown C-17s for the Air Force, yelling at our XO for the comms situation. I saw that there weren't any fresh batteries to be had, then made a swift retreat from the scene so as not to contribute to the man's confusion and embarrassment.

"Where's the RT0," I asked one of the guards who was vaping and lounging outside the entrance.

"Over there," he said, gesturing upslope toward another tent about 50 meters away. I walked over, passing three soldiers setting up some sort of fortified machinegun position.

"Look downhill at the road. Now look at the sandbags. Now look at the barrel of the gun," the first soldier was saying. "Aha! Aha! Now do you see the problem? Move the machinegun around,

like so... now you see more problems. Do it again!"

Scenes like this were common. None of us had more than a week's training – it wasn't even formal training, more like pre-basic. While there were more leftist veterans than many had probably thought before the war, in general the stereotype of veterans as moderates or pro-fascist was pretty true. A small group of sympathetic veterans were running round-the-clock training ranges up in Connecticut and Long Island, and NYC's soldiery was permitted to access this as part of our agreement with our neighbors.

At the signals tent, I found the commander's radio operator fiddling with two banks of battery rechargers. "You need to get these up to your position ASAP, the CO's on the warpath about bad comms and using smartphones," he said.

"I'll be back in six hours," I said, and left the heavy green blocks on the black recharger alongside several others, while the recharge status blinked red.

Next I headed north to Tandy's building, a fin de siècle mansion that had been converted to high-ceilinged apartments, and was now housing for students and workers. It was a 10 minute bike ride from our positions, or a 25 minute jog, easily accomplished if the sirens signaled an attack.

I checked my Hours on my phone which promptly updated on the hour with my day's work, plus the bonus for military service. Then I stopped at a bodega for provisions. One of the best-managed parts of the city was its city-wide revolutionary food cooperative. Food came in from upstate and Connecticut, and was rationed. There was enough of it on any given day, but hoarding was strictly forbidden so what was available was whatever happened to be on hand, often local produce.

The proprietor of this bodega was an Iraqi man who'd immigrated to the U.S. after the war there, Ahmed. Together with his family he supervised the bodega's co-op labor, and

had a keen eye for organizing. He greeted me when he saw me walk in, much as he greeted everyone in uniform.

“My friend, thank you for protecting us! You must be hungry: what would you like? Eggs, corn from Poughkeepsie, sausage? Please, take what you need, eat, stay strong and healthy! And say hello to your beautiful girlfriend! You’re a lucky man!”

Ahmed may or may not have known me, but he certainly *seemed* to know me, and that was appreciated in a strange city. I picked up a couple sausages, a quart of milk, and a half dozen eggs. There wasn’t any cheese, so I had to hope Tandy or one of what she called her “mates” had some at their place. Then, in the back, I procured a glass bottle of Long Island red wine.

“Five and one half Hours,” Ahmed said. “Did you hear our forces repelled a fascist invasion today? Maybe you were part of that?”

He was talking about the boat. “We spotted them,” I said. “It wasn’t anything serious.”

“Please, it wasn’t serious, you sound like me when I was in the Iraqi Army. I helped liberate Mosul from ISIS, you know. It’s never serious. Until you’re in the hospital!” He raised his shirt, and pointed at several scars near his abdomen. “Here, take some chewing gum, free. It helped me stay awake during long nights. When you don’t have your girlfriend around,” he said, winking conspiratorially.

Tandy was still at class when I arrived. James, a PhD candidate in Political Science at Columbia greeted me at the door and when he saw what I was carrying he invited me in, shepherding me to the kitchen where Vince, a militiaman from Danbury, Connecticut, gladly took my contribution to the dinner. “You’re always welcome here,” Vince said, “when you have food and wine!

This was one practical way in which being a militia volunteer

translated into good social standing, but I didn't lord it over people, just showed up with what I had and got whatever amounted to a single portion in return.

This particular collective was mostly students, so my portion was usually appreciated, in spite of my taking part in what was a violent endeavor. Only the most radical students felt that in defending our political ideals, I was participating in an immoral and unethical war, but even they sat down to eat with me. The main course was a cabbage- and barley- based soup with my eggs and sausages as a garnish— again, no cheese — food wasn't in short supply, but the variety had significantly diminished thanks to the war. The Californians and Midwesterners were probably eating great.

Seven of us sat around a small round table. I was briefly the center of attention as I talked about the motorboat reconnaissance, and the arrival of the fascists. Before I offered my eyewitness account, I was treated to another more outlandish product of the rumor mill I'd first encountered at Ahmed's: the fascists, I heard, had attempted a crossing in force, and were driven back only by the killing of their general in the lead boat. I was glad to correct the record.

My much more prosaic account of the fascists' arrival was held up to the various perspectives present at the meal. Some felt as my fellow militiamen did, that this was an opportunity to strike back while the fascists were few, that we should take the fight to them. Others that the fascists were too strong — that they'd make their way across the river sooner or later and so we should head up to Canada while we still could. Most held the opinion that nonviolent resistance was the way to resolve this, that fighting would only lead to more fighting, that perhaps the situation could be resolved through discussion and diplomacy. Reports of atrocities, this last group dismissed as liberal, pro-government propaganda.

The apartment's owner, who also owned the building and had

been well liked and admired before the war for his egalitarian and attentive approach to ownership, asked why we couldn't come to some accommodation with the fascists.

"Let them have their wretched dystopian hell. Let them live in the rot that accompanies dictatorship, fascism, and all abominable authoritarian places," he said. "Give them the land they have and tell them not to come any further."

"What about our comrades in Newark?" said one of his tenants, Jenny, a black girl whose parents had moved to New York City from South Carolina in the 1960s for work. Jenny worked at a small factory sewing uniforms for the militia, and was one of the more prescient of us when it came to the threat of the fascists, and the importance of fighting. "If we abandon those like us in the South, or in Newark, why did we abstain from voting for Biden? If we don't fight for our convictions, to help each other, shouldn't we just join the fascists?"

"I voted for RFK Jr.," said the former apartment owner to good natured jeers and boos, "*I voted for RFK Jr. and I'd do it again*" he yelled, with similar good-natured energy. Here, having voted for RFK Jr. was far less objectionable than voting for "Genocide Joe Biden," which was tantamount to heresy.

Vince spoke in the lull that followed the yelling. "Anyway the fascists have started and they won't stop. The real choices are Canada – assuming they don't roll up there next – or fight. Fight or flee and hope someone else beats them. They'll chase us to the end of the earth, they'll never halt. Might as well be here."

"They'll negotiate when they're punched out," said Christina, a journalism student at City University of New York and one of the more moderate people in the collective. She was a bit older, in her 40s, and had been a public school teacher during an earlier life that hadn't quite worked out on Long Island,

near one of the Hamptons. "If we make a deal they agree to – ceasefire, a demarcation of borders – they'll just rearm and keep going. These people are always the same – Hitler, Genghis Khan, Putin, Alexander the Great. Read history. They stop when they're stopped, which is when they die. Because they know stopping means dealing with the violent energies they've unleashed, and they want to be fighting external enemies, not internal enemies."

"It would have happened sooner or later," added Jenny. "The moderates, the Democrats and shitlibs spent the years since the end of the Cold War selling everything as fast as they could, and supporting global racism and genocide. They're as responsible for creating this movement as anyone else."

Sometimes I wished I was confident and practiced in my public speaking, like the students. My first day with the unit I'd brought this line of reasoning, about Biden and the Democrats and the shitlibs, to Vargas, and he'd scoffed at what he called my naiveté.

"What happened in D.C. was, when they couldn't get to the people they said they were mad at – the government, the globalists – the fascists made do with the vulnerable. They headed right for the poorest neighborhoods on their way out of the city and just about wrecked them," he'd said. "As bad as Biden and the Democrats were over the years, I've never saw the suburbs where most of his supporters lived reduced to a smoking ruin, their inhabitants murdered, captured, or fled."

I didn't mention that perspective here at the table. It didn't seem like the time or the place for it. Besides I wasn't sure what I thought about it all. Sometimes in describing the fascists as intolerant of other viewpoints and dogmatic in their application of violence, I thought maybe we were guilty of that, too, in some ways. Certainly nothing like what the fascists did, but still... when I thought about our project, sometimes I questioned its wisdom or justice.

"You'll never convince me violence is the answer," said James. Soft-spoken and charismatic, when he spoke, people listened. His father was a first-generation immigrant from Cuba, and his mother, a Chinese immigrant. They'd met in Flushing, Queens, a real American love story. "Violence begets violence. Without anyone to fight, the fascists will fight each other. Ultimately they'll lose interest in the cities and fall to quarreling among each other. You'll see."

We did see, just not in the way James meant. But those dark days were yet to come.

After dinner I waited around for Tandy, but she still hadn't come home. After an hour, still restless after the day's events, I decided that rather than hang around and look desperate, I'd put in some volunteer time. It was still too early to get the batteries. I picked up my rifle and wandered down to the Muhheakunnuk. It was summer, and the weather wasn't bad. Ideal for nighttime strolling provided one had the proper identification so one wasn't accidentally shot.

At the river's edge I stopped and stared at what remained of the George Washington Bridge. The moon illuminated the ruined structure's contours, rendered its demise somehow more tragic, more human. Its skeletal wreckage jutted up from the river's calm surface, like ancient ruins. In places, the bridge had twisted as it fell, partially damming the river's flow. Now it resembled nothing so much as a memorial to America, the ruins of a vision for peace and prosperity that could not last forever, because nothing in this universe ever does.

Destroying the GW made sense from the perspective of guns and firepower; the fascists had an edge in that department owing to personal stockpiles as well as those seized by various police and traitorous military units, but weapons require people, and they had far fewer volunteers than we did. In

spite of their military successes, their victories over larger but poorly-led, poorly equipped units, everywhere they went they engendered fear and hatred, an occupying force that looked and talked like your racist neighbor. The strategy, then, was to attrit them, draw them into the cities, grind them down until there weren't enough of them to the point where we could start pushing back. Of course as I mentioned earlier the hope at that time was that some disaster or calamity or miracle would forestall our having to fight them at all.

The fascists fielded excellent soldiers and combat leaders. Their units moved quickly and punched hard, and wrecked or absorbed local and state law enforcement organizations wholesale. Their units hung together well, and were led (mostly competently and capably) by veterans and former police officers.

Further down toward the bay loyalist Army units kept the Verrazano intact and were fortifying our side. I didn't understand the logic behind keeping that bridge but taking out the much larger GW and Tappan Zee. Maybe the destruction was partly for the symbolism. The fascists claimed to stand for law and order and tradition, and part of how it had all started (insane as it sounds to say it now looking back over the great Golgothas we made for each other during the fighting) was over statues and names. What was an iconic bridge between New York and New Jersey, named for one of America's founders, if not a statue, a monument to an idea like traffic, interstate commerce, a community based on trust and the exchange of goods?

Then again, it was also a symbolic loss for us—if we couldn't control the George Washington Bridge, what did that say about our long term prospects? Vargas said slowing the fascists down was our best shot and the people who were placed in charge of our efforts at first – people who as time would demonstrate were not up to the effort – were a little too enthusiastic

about doing so, and less enthusiastic about actually preparing us for what came next.

Loyalist Army units had sealed the Lincoln Tunnel, which was similar to blowing it. The decision had been made with some procedure for removing concrete in mind, but when you walked down near midtown and saw the familiar entrance, saw the white and gray spill as though trolls had melted the world's biggest marshmallow, it was hard imagining that tunnel ever working again.

From the bones of the fallen GW, I walked south for 5 minutes until I came to one of our fortified positions, down near the water, forward and downhill from HQ. It was crewed by my unit, but not one from the scouts, conventional infantry. We all had the same challenge and password. I didn't know this group, but stopped in to chat about the motorboat, ask if they'd seen any other movement. They hadn't. Didn't have thermal scopes down here, were worried about night landings and infiltration. I was shocked – I thought frontline positions would have thermals for sure.

“One every 5 positions,” said the duty sergeant. “We rely on them and tracers to figure out what's happening. Moonlit night like tonight, seems unlikely we'll see any more action. Especially considering the tide.”

I asked why the tide was significant. Prior to the war I hadn't spent much time near the ocean.

“Oh, a full moon corresponds with high tide. This particular high tide is what they call a “king tide,” get them in winter and summer,” the sergeant said. “Higher water means a longer distance to cross, and stronger currents. Groups trying to cross in boats would be pulled far upriver or downriver of where they were hoping to cross – maybe even swept out to ocean.”

“You think the fascists know that?”

"Oh, I'm sure of it... they're mostly country folk, people who know things like the tides, and hunting. No that's not going to throw them. Sad to say it. That's the sort of thing our generals would probably fuck up."

We stood there quietly in awe of the sergeant's demoralizing statement, one we both felt to be true, the GW's shredded metal beams and cables clanking and squealing upriver. A rumble of artillery in the distance and flashes of light roused us from our reverie.

"Won't be much longer. No way they can hold out without reinforcements."

"How do you know? How do you know they won't grind the fascists up street by street and block by block?"

The sergeant gestured toward the southern end of Manhattan. "Brother works at one of the fish markets. Buddy of his is a fisherman, solid American and New Yorker, told him he's been in touch with fishermen out of Newark. Apparently they're getting pummeled. Never seen the fascists put so much work into destroying a city."

"You think we should move down, try to help them?"

In response, the sergeant now nodded up at the GW's ruins. "Not part of the plan. Anyway, we barely know how to hold a defense. Most of the guys here have never fired their rifles, it's all we can do to point them in the right direction. How are we supposed to move to the attack?"

For this question and all the others, I had no answers. I'd joined the movement, I was a scout, and all I knew was that if the fascists wanted a fight, we ought to give it to them. Even then I sensed that simply to accommodate their desires would be a mistake. I looked out at the river, to where the boat had been earlier. The fighting would get so much worse in the days and months to come, far worse than almost anyone could

imagine. But on that day, the thing that I noticed was the water – how high it had come up the pier – how close we were to it, lapping at the moorings and the concrete stairs, closer to our boots than it had ever been. And what terrible creatures teemed beneath its opaque surface!