

Start with a river. Start with a river that twists and turns, that snakes 80 miles through one town to another, through people and time. Start with a river renamed by a king.

*Quinobeguin. Charles.*

Start with that river and all its spirits. How many souls lost? How much Native blood spilled? First there were settlements.

*Nonantum. Pequosett.*

There were fish weirs, grist mills, sawmills, dams, textile factories, a munitions manufacturer. Hydropower and university boat houses. Bike path. A place to hear concerts.

Always there were birds: egrets and herons, cormorants and geese. Ducks. Otters and turtles. Loons.

On this day, as on all the others, there is water, flat and clear. The sun, 70 October degrees, warms the skin of the river. There are no clouds, the sky a bright blue and wide open. On this day, at this minute, there are throngs along the river's banks, crew teams in shells, pulling and rowing like machines.

In the instant before everything changes, you might have said there was a thrum, a beat, a hyphen of space where time stopped. Looking back, you might say there was even a flash of warning, but we didn't notice it. Some said stillness. Some said they noticed nothing unusual. Just all at once, a wave of sound. Maybe a flash. Of course there was a flash, but all we remember is the boom and then after: the chaos. Even on our friends' faces, we couldn't see the looks of disbelief, the red Solo cups scattered, coolers overturned, bodies collapsed and broken, blood. We were laughing and then we weren't. All the voices, the crying and calling out. The friends suddenly missing. Gone, like that, in an instant.