

CHAPTER I.

Out of a Clear Sky.



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UNSUSPECTINGLY the people of Halifax went about their usual occupations on that fateful Thursday, December 6th, 1917. Stores had just opened, business men were on their way to offices, the older grades were at morning prayer in the schools, many of the little ones were at the breakfast table for a hasty meal, the mother with loving hands preparing the food. In half a hundred factories the wheels of industry were turning and along the historic waterfront—so valuable an asset for the Allies in the War of Nations—men worked like ants in all forms of labor.

Out of a clear sky the blow fell. The French munitions steamer *Mont Blanc*, loaded at New York with a deadly cargo of T. N. T., picric acid and benzine, came up the harbor seeking a convoy and was ordered to anchorage in Bedford Basin. There was a mist on the water and this, no doubt, contributed to the tragedy which followed.

The Norwegian steamer *Imo*, in the Belgian Relief service, Captain Fron in charge, was coming out of the basin, outward bound. Both Captain Fron and Pilot William Hayes, who was on the bridge, are dead, but the finding of the Drysdale Commission, just issued as I write, relieves them of all responsibility for the collision with the *Mont Blanc*, fixing the blame upon Captain Aime Lemedec of that steamer and Pilot Francis MacKey recommending the dismissal of the latter, also proceedings against Captain Lemedec by the French government. Arrests of these men on the charge of manslaughter have just been made and the startling