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The Halifax Explosion

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It was on the sixth of December, nineteen hundred and seventeen,
That Halifax suffered disaster, the worst she'd ever seen;
It was five minutes after nine, those still alive can tell,
That the beautiful city of Halifax was just given a taste of hell.

Children were gone to their lessons, their mothers were busy at home,
While fathers worked on at the factories little dreaming they'd soon be alone,
When there comes creeping up the harbour a ship loaded down to the rail
With the most horrible death-dealing cargo that was ever allowed to sail.

She carried a deck load of benzoin and shells for overseas,
In her hold a new explosive, they call it TNT,
But why should this death-dealing monster be allowed to come creeping here
To bathe our beautiful city in widows' and orphans' tears?

There comes a cry from a merchant, there's a vessel afire out there,
But a few pay any attention for that is a fireman's care,
The relief ship had rammed the monster tearing a hole in her side,
And eased out in the stream again and drifted on with the tide.

It was five minutes after nine as those alive can tell
That the beautiful city of Halifax was given a taste of Hell,
The earthquake has its rumble, the cannon has its roar,
But this was worse than even those, yes, multiplied by four.

And then when the crash was over those still alive struck dumb
Turned into living statues wondering what next would come,
For no one knew what had happened, some thought the end of the world
While others thought it was the Germans marching in with their banners unfurled.

Then rushing out into the streets from their tumbling and shattered homes
Some with cuts and bruises and others with broken bones,
They were met with sights more horrible than any they'd ever seen,
For there lay the dead and dying, it was worse than a battle scene.

Houses were crushed like paper, people were killed like flies,
The coroner's record tells us the toll was twelve hundred lives,
Two thousand were maimed and wounded, hundreds more lost their sight
And God knows how many children were alone in the world that night.

From the north to Rockhead Hospital and west to the Exhibition grounds
There wasn't anything living and not a single sound,
The streets were filled with debris, with dying and with dead,
There lies a little baby's hand, there an old man's head.

There out upon the Commons that cold December morn
Tender innocent little souls into the world were born,
Women hugged their children, their hearts were filled with fear,
While husbands lay beneath their homes they all had loved so dear.

Old time went on apace, chill night was drawing nigh
And many were those whose roof that night was just the bright blue sky.
And then the following morn'ng as if to hurt them twice
There came a storm from the ocean, a blizzard of snow and ice.

From Maritime Folk Songs, Creighton
Collected from Miss Darothy Hyson, Hubbards, 1933, and by J. H. Bobbit
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