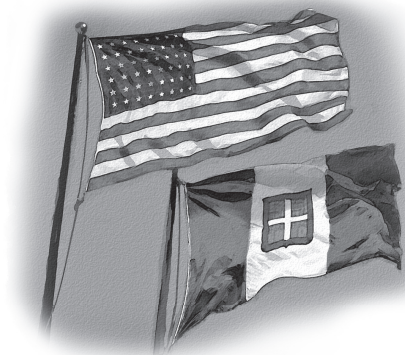


CHAPTER 1



WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 1919

AROUND 12:30 P.M.

THE NORTH END, BOSTON

Twelve-year-old Carmen Grasso was drowning.

She was caught in one of the deadliest disasters in the history of Boston. A gigantic wave had crashed in to the streets — a swirling, raging monster moving faster than a train. It turned buildings to rubble. It smashed wagons and motorcars and tossed trucks into the harbor.

Twenty-one people would soon be dead. Many more would be fighting for their lives.

This killer wave wasn't made of water. It didn't come from the sea. The monstrous wave was made of a thick brown syrup: molasses. For years, millions of gallons of sticky molasses had been stored in a building-sized metal tank. The hideous tank loomed over Carmen's neighborhood, blotting out the sun.

And in one ear-splitting moment, the molasses tank had exploded apart.

Carmen and her best friend, Tony, had watched in horror as the tank began to shake, as its rounded steel sides bulged in and out. The tank seemed to have come alive, as if it was boiling with fury, ready to destroy.

And then suddenly, thousands of the steel bolts that held the tank together let go.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

They blasted through the air like bullets fired from a machine gun. Seconds later, the metal

tank blew apart completely. Jagged chunks of metal whirled through the air like knife-winged birds.

The molasses hovered in the air like a black, roiling cloud. And then, with a thundering crash, it hit the ground. Instantly, the streets became raging rivers filled with wreckage — chunks of wood and metal and glass, overturned motorcars and wagons.

Horses whinnied in fear.

Screams of terror rang out.

“Run!”

“Get out of the way!”

“Help me!”

Carmen ran for her life, Tony right behind her.

But the wave was moving too fast. Within seconds, the swirl of thick syrup had caught them. The molasses wrapped itself around Carmen’s legs, like millions of powerful snakes dripping with slime. It rose up to her waist, to her chest.

She had to do something!

And then she saw it: a broken wagon, floating toward them. She and Tony both managed to climb on . . . until a huge hunk of metal from the tank rammed into the wagon.

Carmen tried to hold on as the wagon nearly flipped. But she slipped off and sank into the swirling flood of ooze.

“Carmen!” Tony screamed.

It was the last sound Carmen heard as the molasses rose up over her head and swallowed her whole.