

Family life with the Daltons

# WHAT COMES BEFORE

The Iceberg Trilogy continues

SHERRYL CAULFIELD

**What Comes Before** is a vignette of Samuel and Rebecca's family life during the years 1926 to 1939.

These scenes were in an earlier draft of **Seldom Come By** and would have appeared in the last section, *The Promised Land*.

They all take place before **Come What May**.

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What Comes Before  
Family life with the Daltons

By  
Sherryl Caulfield

The Iceberg Trilogy continues

Other scenes from

SELDOM COME BY  
The Iceberg Trilogy Book 1

## The Dalton Children

Samson, born 23 April 1918, lived for three days

Abigail, (Abby) born 5 May 1927

Henry, born 31 October 1929, lived for one day

Morton, born 13 March 1931

Evangeline, (Gene) born 26 August 1933

Joel, born 21 February 1935

And Jonathan, born 13 May 1918, son of Matthew Dalton and Lenore

Anderson, officially adopted by Samuel and Rebecca in 1919

## A Confession

*September 1926*

Rebecca, Samuel and Jonathan had not long returned from the most emotional, remarkable holiday in Newfoundland. Even though it had been a few weeks, Samuel was still getting his head around the fact that he'd fathered a love child with Rebecca in 1918. As well, her family was mostly alive – there had been no house fire in 1918 after all. Rebecca had learnt her father had only died the year before; her mother was living in Salvage with her sister, Esther, while her sister, Rachel, was happily married living in St John's. Meanwhile, Jonathan, much to his delight, had become fast friends with nine new cousins.

Now it was the first Saturday of fall and time for Rebecca to come clean with her Toronto family. Arriving at Leonard and Lottie's place she felt all the trepidation she first felt when she arrived unannounced in Toronto eight years earlier. But before she could even begin, Rebecca – and everyone – had discovered – to her dismay – after seven years of trying – that she quite likely was pregnant. That had lightened the mood considerably.

Still, there she was sitting by Samuel's side, saying, 'That wasn't the main reason I called you all together.' She cleared her throat. 'There are some things I should have told you a long time ago, things I should have set right, and I'm very sorry that I didn't. Please don't think that I never trusted you – it was all too hard for me at the time.'

She swallowed and locked eyes on Samuel not knowing where else to look.

'In April 1918,' she began, 'I gave birth to a son, Samuel's son.'

She paused, took a breath, felt Samuel squeeze her hand and then both she and Samuel looked around at everyone's faces to see how they registered that statement.

Randal, Samuel's brother-in-law, and Jerome, Addie's husband, blessedly gave very little away.

Addie's expression read, 'Aha,' almost as if she were about to say, 'Figures, go on.'

Analeise's face was saying, 'Oh my God, every girl's worst nightmare! Sorry, Samuel.'

Lottie's was saying, 'Ah, how sweet, a love child.'

Leonard's was saying, even though his son was a thirty-one-year old man of the world, 'Samuell!'

And Grandpa's face was saying, 'What an introduction! I like this story already.'

‘I never told Samuel that I was pregnant,’ said Rebecca licking her lips, ‘I did not want him to worry about me and the baby while he was away at war.’ She glanced at Samuel. And then with her head lowered she said, ‘I’m ashamed to say I did not tell him at all till this summer.’ He squeezed her hand. She looked up and looked straight at Mr Dalton. ‘My parents were not overjoyed with my news, though my mother took it much better than my father. For a while he was hell-bent on punishing me but then at the start of 1918 he calmed down considerably. Or so we thought. Three days after the baby was born we decided to baptise him. I had called the boy Samson. We had kept my pregnancy a secret from everyone on Chance Island so my father decided, that as the captain of a boat, his boat, he would baptise Samson. Though in the end we went out in the tender of the Nightingale.’ Rebecca stopped there. She could feel her body shaking and Samuel squeezing her hand. Her stomach was in knots and her breathing was tense and tight.

Samuel leant into her. ‘A few more minutes and it will all be over and it will all be behind you.’

Taking a deep breath, she said, ‘It was just my father and I that went out in the boat in the end. I held Samson in my arms until Father took him to baptise him and when he had finished he seemed to ever so slowly, I can’t explain it properly, but it was like he rolled him into the ocean.’

Rebecca heard the intake of breath.

‘I thought initially it was an accident but it was deliberate. I dived over board to try and rescue my baby but after I don’t know how long I had to give up. My father said he felt called by God to do what he had to do, that he was sending Samson to a better place. Three weeks after that happened I left Newfoundland and came here.’

That was where she stopped.

No one spoke. Lottie’s hand was across her mouth. She had dark trails running down her cheeks. In fact there was a barely a dry eye in the circle around them. Addie kept on wiping her face with a handkerchief.

Rebecca looked at Samuel who pulled her to him and kissed her on the cheek. She hugged him back before turning to the group. ‘I’m sorry I didn’t tell you the truth at the time. Please forgive me.’

Addie blew her nose then said, ‘I wouldn’t be in a hurry to tell a tale like that to anyone either.’

Then Samuel spoke. He told them that that was the bad news, the sad news, but how they had returned from their holiday with good news, the best possible news under the circumstances and they were sad no longer.

‘Jonathan’ he called out. ‘Jonathan, come here.’

Thirty seconds later a lively Jonathan came racing up onto the verandah.

‘Yes, Dad, what?’

Samuel pulled him onto his lap. ‘Now, you can tell everyone about how you met your Aunt Rachel and your cousins and how you spent your holiday in Newfoundland.’

Late that afternoon as they were clearing the dishes, Grandpa pulled her aside. ‘Rebecca, tell me, before you met up with Rachel again, before you went back to Newfoundland, how did you feel about your father, about the trip back to Newfoundland?’

She looked at him while she pondered his question.

‘Initially, I was in fear of running into them by chance, not such a silly fear as it turned out. I was more in fear of Samuel finding out I had lied to him.’ Grandpa nodded his head slowly in acknowledgement. ‘But, even though it was incredibly difficult to tell him everything, it was such a relief.’

Grandpa’s deep-set eyes looked clear and calm as he smiled gently at Rebecca. ‘What about your father?’

‘I think in my heart I had forgiven him. I think I had got to a place where I could see that he had been taken over by something and that in his heart he thought he was doing right by me, although, I never agreed with it. But you know, as I’ve grown older and as Jonathan has grown older, I’ve realised a lot of what he and Mother gave me and taught me and how I loved him and loved them for those things. In my heart I have a hard time reconciling my love with my tormented feelings towards him. But now I feel much more at peace with him. Now I want to remember him for the person he aspired to be even if didn’t live up to his or my expectations.’

‘Then I think you will be at peace,’ he said, squeezing her shoulder.



## A Baby Girl

*May 1927*

When Samuel returned from that holiday, he returned to the newly opened four-storey Georgian red-brick School of Hygiene on College Street, the realisation of a dream for his boss, Gerry Fitzgerald, the dream of transforming Canada's health conditions. The School of Hygiene was an independent, self-sustaining division of the University of Toronto, built with the Rockefeller grant bestowed a few years earlier. For the school's faculty, Gerry assembled a multidisciplinary team of men and women that included leading experts in the emerging medical sciences of immunology, microbiology, biometrics, parasitology, virology, epidemiology, environmental health, nutritional science and sanitary engineering. Samuel headed up the public health department, responsible for training post-medical graduates who would end up directing public health services in the various departments of health throughout Canada.

The Connaught Labs Farm in Downsview continued to thrive and together with the academic arm of the School of Hygiene, they began to lay the foundation of provincial and federal health programs across Canada. Their triad of research, teaching and manufacturing of biomedical products in the name of public service was unique in the world. Within a generation, the Canadian public health system transformed itself from a colonial fledgling to a new international standard of excellence.

This was the spirited, rewarding environment where Samuel worked during his days and at night he returned to the elated atmosphere in his home in Summerhill, to his ardent, sparkling and blooming wife, and to his young deputy, the boy who filled his heart with pride and joy.

They lived their halcyon days how they were deigned to be lived. Every day and every night, except one when he came home and found Rebecca on the porch in tears. 'Oh no,' he cried out in alarm as he rushed towards her. 'Why didn't you call me?'

'Samuel, I haven't lost the baby. I just can't believe after all this time I am actually pregnant. I felt it kick today for the first time. I'm in disbelief. I still can't get my head around it.'

'Honey,' he said, 'Trust me. Take my word for it. Have you seen the size of your breasts lately? I can't even get my hands around them. Can you even see your toes?' But she had reason to cry, in joy and in relief.

Nine years and twelve days after the birth of their first child, Rebecca gave birth to their second, a little girl they named Abigail Hera, born on the 3rd May 1927, just three weeks before Jonathan's ninth birthday. He took one look at her and said, 'It's going to take a long time before she's big enough to play with me.'

'You'll be surprised,' said Rebecca. 'And besides it's not always going to be about playing with you, Jonathan. Sometimes you may have to play with her, like your Dad and I have played with you for many years.'

'I suppose so,' said Jonathan. 'Was I like that when I was born?'

'I think you were a little bit bigger even and you had dark hair, like you have now. She's hungry like you were, so she'll grow quickly.'

Abigail was an eight-pound baby, 20 inches long with fair brown hair, hazel eyes and a faint birthmark, the size of a child's pinky fingernail on her left hip. She also had the lungs of an opera singer. Rebecca couldn't seem to settle her. They thought she had colic but gripe water didn't seem to make any difference. She wrote to her mother and told her what a beautiful noisy daughter they had.

Her mother wrote and asked if she craved anything when she was pregnant.

'Yes,' Rebecca wrote in reply. 'Crabapples.'

Two weeks later a package arrived from her mother – a bottle of stewed crabapples with a note: Give her a little bit of the juice and have some yourself every day for a week.'

Rebecca fed Abigail a teaspoon of the juice every day for seven days and even before the seven days were up the girl was calmer and almost unbelievably, her birthmark had started to fade. Rebecca kept at it and after ten days the birthmark was completely gone and their troubled child had turned into a little angel.

'I don't believe it,' said Samuel. 'I wonder how old this remedy is that your mother suggested.'

'I don't know,' said Rebecca, 'but you have to admit it leaves modern medicine for dead,' teased Rebecca.

'Only in this instance Rebecca.'

'Come on Samuel, I'm sure there is a logical explanation for it. If you dug deep enough in medical science you could come up with the answer. Why don't you get Connaught Laboratories onto the case?'

'Logical? Don't even start me,' warned Samuel.

When he could Samuel would come home from work to have lunch with Rebecca so he could see his little girl during the day when she was bright and watchful, to have

some quiet time with her before Jonathan came home with a friend or two and the noise level was raised a few decibels. He would nurse her while Rebecca made them sandwiches for lunch and poured them tea and sometimes he would sit on the lounge and Rebecca would lie across him, her head resting on a pillow and feed Abigail while he stroked Rebecca's hair and rested his hand on his little daughter's long bare legs.

They were enthralled with their little girl. She was a delightful child and from the very beginning she had a soft spot for her Nana and Nana Dalton had a soft spot for her. Every few weeks Lottie would turn up with the latest outfit that she had seen at Eatons that she simply could not resist buying for her youngest granddaughter.

'Lottie,' warned Rebecca, 'you are going to have to stop one day. I don't want my daughter to grow up spoilt and expecting new dresses and fancy things all the time.'

'Well let me spoil her now when she doesn't know I'm spoiling her. Let me indulge her for a little while longer. Come here, poppet. Come and say hello to Nana.'

# Lake Temagami

*July 1930*

For the summer of 1930 Rebecca booked a holiday for the family on Lake Temagami. She found it in a fisherman's catalogue. "A cedar and spruce log cabin. Rustic and secluded. Back to nature," the advertisement read. "One all purpose room with bunks and one bedroom. Wood supplied. Fresh water. Screens. Own private jetty. Water access only."

They hired a little runabout boat for their four-week holiday, preferring to have their own boat for exploring, getting more supplies if they ran out, and to have in case of emergency. After they had loaded the boat, Rebecca fired up the motor, fired it up like she was lighting a match.

'You can drive a boat, Mom?' asked Jonathan, his face incredulous.

'Of course.' Rebecca smiled.

'When did you learn to drive a boat?'

'When I was a little girl, back in Newfoundland, a bit bigger than you are now.' She looked at him. 'Maybe we can teach you on this holiday, would you like that?'

'Yes!' His twelve-year old face was full of excitement. But after a while it became anxious. He kept looking over his shoulder at where they had come from. 'How much further?'

Samuel looked at the map. 'It looks like we are over half way, so maybe another twenty minutes.'

'Okay.' He breathed out uneasily.

'What's the matter, Jonathan? You got ants in your pants?'

'No, Mom, I have to go to the toilet, that's all.'

'We'll be there soon. Can you hold on till then?'

He gave her a look.

As they approached the bay, they could see the small jetty and a little cabin peeking out between two silver birch trees with a level lawn at the front that led down to the lake.

'Private,' said Samuel, looking across at Rebecca. He had three-year old Abby firmly in his arms.

'Perfect,' said Rebecca smiling back.

When they pulled up to the dock Rebecca suggested Samuel take Jonathan and unlock the house. She would unload the bags and secure the boat. She passed Abby across to him. ‘Wait there, Abby.’

Later, when they walked into the little cabin, Jonathan rushed up to her and in his most solemn voice said, ‘I don’t think you are going to like it here, Mom. They have an outside toilet that doesn’t flush.’

‘Goodness me, how will we ever cope? Is there running water inside?’

‘Yes,’ nodded Jonathan ‘only cold though. Dad said we have to boil up hot water in a pot if we want to have a warm bath. There are no showers or anything like that.’

‘Hmm.’ Said Rebecca throwing a smile over Jonathan’s head at Samuel.

‘It doesn’t have electricity either,’ said Jonathan.

‘Well if you have to boil up your own hot water than I would expect not.’

‘No,’ said Jonathan, ‘It’s got those kerosene lamps and candles like you have to use in a blackout.’

‘Oh, I’m sure we will survive.’

‘And there’s no mirror, not a single mirror in the whole place,’ continued Jonathan.

‘What!’ said Samuel. ‘No mirror? Rebecca you know how I love mirrors. I demand a refund. Let’s go and get our money back.’

Jonathan looked at his father then turned to his mother. ‘So what do you think, Mom? Do you want to bother unpacking?’

‘I think it’s fantastic.’ She gave Jonathan her biggest grin, walked into the main bedroom and fell back on the bed in giggles. ‘I love it.’

Jonathan came to the bedroom door. ‘Are you sure, Mom? You are not just saying that to make me like it are you?’

‘Yes, on both accounts Jonathan,’ she said. ‘This place reminds me of the place I grew up in. And I bet by the end of the holiday you are going to love it too.’

They unpacked and made up the beds and then Jonathan helped his Dad drag out two canvas-covered cedar strip canoes. They cleaned them down then put them in the water to make sure they didn’t leak anywhere. They swam before dinner. Afterwards Rebecca read Abby a story while Samuel played Scrabble with Jonathan and then when the children had gone to sleep, Rebecca and Samuel stripped off, wrapped themselves in towels and ran down to the lake for a moonlight swim.

Afterwards, Samuel carried her in his arms into the house, sneaking through to their bedroom, where they closed the door and proceeded to make unrestrained love in their rustic bed hewn from native timbers. What a way to start a holiday!

They rose not long after dawn planning to go swimming again but when they quietly opened their bedroom door Jonathan called out, 'Dad, can we go fishing? Do you want to go fishing?'

'Sshh, you'll wake Abby,' whispered Samuel.

Rebecca smiled at Samuel. 'Is this how you were? How Matthew was as a kid?'

'No. We went fishing without even asking. But there was the two of us.'

Walking over to Jonathan, Rebecca said, 'Yes, your dad will take you fishing this morning and lots of mornings, but some days your dad is going to take me swimming first, just the two of us.'

'Great,' said Jonathan, leaping out of bed.

'You know, you're old enough to go fishing by yourself,' Samuel said.

'I know,' his tone serious. 'But then I wouldn't get to spend time with you.'

Rebecca felt a wave of unbearable tenderness wash over her. No doubt Samuel felt the same. He walked over to Jonathan, pulled him to his chest and hugged him. 'I love spending time with you too, bud. I always have.' He kissed his son on the top of his head then lifted him up to press his face into his neck. 'Gosh, you're heavy, Jonathan. You nearly weigh as much as your Mom. Very soon I won't be able to pick you up at all.'

'Yes, you will,' said Jonathan with a chuckle.

'What do you mean, yes?'

'You still pick Mom up. I saw you carry her into your bedroom last night.'

Rebecca's eyes flew to Samuel's. As always, he was so relaxed about such matters. Then his mouth started to quiver. Before long he burst out laughing. He came up to Rebecca bending to kiss her flushed face. 'Private hey? Well at least the lights were out.'

It was a wonderful holiday: a holiday that they loved; a holiday that they needed. Three year-old Abby learnt how to hold her breath under water. Standing in the lake up to her little shoulders, she'd go, 'Look Mommy, look at me,' and she'd plunge her head under water and come back up. As she got braver and braver, she would hold her head under for longer. Eventually Rebecca encouraged her to open her eyes under water and when she did she found her mother with her head under the water, with her eyes open, smiling at her, waving at her. Abby giggled and swallowed water then came up coughing and spluttering but once she recovered she said, 'Oh, Mommy, can we do that again?'

That was so much fun.' By the end of the holiday they all had to spend some time each day with Abby as a family in a circle with their heads under the water, holding hands under the water, looking at each other, waving at each. They even kissed under the water, passing the kisses round in circles, trying to do one whole revolution before they all had to come up for air.

'Imagine if we had a big family,' said Jonathan 'Then we'd really have to hold our breath.'

## The boy spreads his wings

*August 1936*

When Jonathan finished school he struggled and erred over what to do with his future. Samuel told him to take his time, not to rush; he had been the same way. ‘Why don’t you spend a year working for Uncle Michel first, like I did,’ he suggested. Jonathan was interested in medicine but he was also keen to become a pilot. ‘Matthew always had a hankering to be a pilot as well,’ Samuel told him. But Rebecca and Samuel were anxious about rumbles in Europe and the possibility of their son being sucked into the vortex of another unimaginable horror. They were keen for him to steer clear of planes for now.

In the end, Samuel said, ‘You know what I think would be a good idea? If you became a doctor and when you finished you got your pilot’s licence. That way, you could be a flying doctor and fly to remote locations throughout Canada – the world for that matter – and help people in need. What an adventure that kind of life would be. Imagine flying in on an aqua plane. I could come with you sometimes. In fact, I’d love to come with you! Sign me up.’ He flashed a grin at his Sonny.

‘What about me?’ piped up Rebecca.

Of course, she would want to go. ‘I’m a doctor,’ said Samuel, grinning at Rebecca. ‘Besides, someone has to stay home and look after the kids.’

‘I know,’ she said, sounding despondent for only one second until her mood flipped. ‘But not forever. Besides, Jonathan won’t be flying for at least six years. Joel will be eight by then, Abigail will be sixteen.’

‘True,’ agreed Samuel. ‘We could work something out, I’m sure.’

‘What are you thinking, that we draw straws?’ queried Rebecca.

‘Folks,’ Jonathan said. ‘I have to get my licence first and maybe even a plane and some sort of commission so maybe we are getting ahead of ourselves just a tad.’

‘Just dreaming, Jonathan,’ said Samuel, ‘No harm in dreaming. So what do you think? Once you get through medicine we’ll gladly pay for your pilot training.’

Rebecca and Samuel were relieved that it was a scenario that appealed to Jonathan. In 1936 when he left Toronto, said goodbye to his family and his grandparents and went off to McGill University in Montreal he became the fourth generation of medicine men in the Dalton family.

The children missed him most on the weekends, particularly their youngest daughter, Gene and their son, Morton. Even Joel, at eighteen months noticed his



absence. Abby seemed to be in a different world, a world full of her Nana, her Aunty Leise, her cousin Catherine and her girlfriends. She was always wanting to have Friday night sleepovers with Louise or Peggy or Sarah, separate or altogether.

Rebecca and Samuel looked forward to Christmas and Easter when all their family could be together again. They made a commitment that each Easter they would take all of the children to Montreal to save Jonathan a trip home and go to church in the Notre Dame Cathedral on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, Catholic or non Catholic. It was such a beautiful building that held wonderful memories for both Samuel and Rebecca and in their own way they offered up their thanks for what had brought them together. They would stay with Uncle Michel Sibonne and Aunty Marguerite. Like Samuel's father, his uncle was showing no interest in retiring. Although his sons, Jean-Paul and René, worked alongside him in his merchant business, he was still running the show.

Samuel and Rebecca told their children how they had lived in Montreal for three months when Jonathan was little before they had moved to Boston for two years, and then back to Toronto. In April 1937, the first time they went to Montreal after Jonathan had left home, Rebecca played tour guide for her children, having remembered all of those places Jonathan had been fascinated with seventeen years earlier.

Gene's favourite outing was the marketplace. While the other children were goggled-eyed over what was on offer, Gene's eyes were only for the people. She would stare at the Indian woman in a patterned cotton dress wearing a man's black panama hat and the nuns draped in black with a crown of white wimple around their heads.

'Who are they?' she asked.

Before Rebecca had time to reply, Abby said, 'They are God's angels.'

'No they're not,' countered Gene. 'If they were they would be wearing white.'

'That's right,' Rebecca said. 'They are nuns. They belong to the Catholic Church.'

Gene was fascinated with them. She said to her mother, 'They look a bit like that statue back home, Mommy. Maybe they have wings under those dark outfits.'

'Yes they do look a bit like that statue on top of the pillar but no they don't have wings underneath their outfits,' Rebecca replied.

'Maybe if I became a nun, I would grow wings,' Gene mused.

'I don't think so, honey,' said Rebecca.

## Lake Temagami once more

*July 1938*

Eight years after their first visit, three years after their youngest child, Joel, was born, they went back to Lake Temagami for another holiday, a month long holiday, just by themselves, to the same house they had rented years before with four of their five children. A week earlier, Jonathan, a young man of twenty, had gone to Lake Algonquin on a reunion adventure with a number of his high school mates after their second year of university.

The children, especially Joel, had moped about his absence for the first two days. They couldn't understand how he could choose his friends over them. Samuel told them when they were twenty they would understand. When they were sixteen or seventeen even they would understand.

'How old are you, Dad?' asked Gene. She had been baptised Evangeline but Morton had called her Gene and Gene she became.

'Forty three,' said Samuel.

Abby exhaled. 'Gees, that's old, Dad.'

'No it's not,' said Morton. 'Grandpa Dalton only died last year and he lived to – how old was it again, Mom?'

'Ninety-eight, honey.'

'Yes, but Morton, ninety-eight is ancient. Old comes before ancient. If I were to add up my age, nine, and your age, six, and Gene's age, five, and Joel's age, three, I'd get twenty-three and that's about half of Daddy's age.'

Samuel gasped. 'Is it? It can't be.' He pulled Gene and Joel onto his lap and smiled at Abby and Morton standing in front of him. 'How about this?' he said. 'If you add ten years to all of our ages, collectively you'll be sixty three but I'll only be fifty-three.'

'Even so, that's old, Dad,' said Abby.

'Don't be ridiculous,' said Rebecca. 'Your father is still a young man. He's got the body of twenty-year old and could out run, out paddle all of you kids put together.'

'Thanks my nubile wife,' said Samuel giving her a smile.

'What's nubile?' asked Gene.

'Yeah, what's noobile?' echoed Joel.

'Young and attractive,' said Samuel looking at Gene. He raised his eyes to Rebecca and said, 'Young and attractive, the eternal Goddess.'

Rebecca smiled in return. ‘Thank you, Samuel. I’ll reward you for that.’

‘Oh, I look forward to that,’ said Samuel smiling at her. The children looked from their mother to their father dimly aware they were witnessing something special pass between their parents.

They played cards and Scrabble and hopscotch and skipping games and hide and go seek. They had canoe races with one adult and two children in each boat. They fished early in the morning, but not every morning, and they fished on dusk. Samuel taught them how to make a fire and how to grill fish over coals. He came across a beaver wall one day and told his children the story of their Uncle Matthew and the beaver wall they had found many years ago. He showed them the faded scars on his shoulder and they touched them in awe, like Rebecca had done years earlier. He pointed out deer tracks and they searched for native birds. One day they saw a peregrine falcon. At night he took them outside to look for falling stars. He told them that Venus, the evening star, was his favourite star and how his heart rejoiced whenever he saw it. He pointed out other stars to them and then they would go back inside and draw the constellations. Some nights they could hear the howl of a timber wolf. Samuel told them they were beautiful beasts and that they should never kill a wolf, only if their life were in danger. The woods and lakes belonged to the native animals and birds before humans, he said, and he’d like to think that his children’s grandchildren could come there in 100 years time and still hear the wolf and see the falcon and spot the beaver walls.

At night when all the children were asleep, Samuel and Rebecca would sneak out and go swimming naked under the stars, in the glittering lake. They would make love in the water and sometimes they would make love on the small jetty. They became immune to the midges. While the world was teetering on the brink of another world war, Samuel and Rebecca were still fully immersed in their love for each other. He told her how he always loved the smell of salt water in her hair. And she said, ‘But we’re miles away from the ocean.’

‘I know,’ he said, ‘but I don’t think I’ve ever told you that when I smell salt water in your hair it takes me back to you when you were fifteen years old and I go weak in the knees when I remember you at fifteen.’

‘Right,’ she said, ‘next summer we are having a beach holiday, I want to see you weak at the knees.’

‘Haven’t you seen me weak at my knees this summer?’

‘I’ve seen you kneeling on your knees this summer, I felt you kneeling on your knees this summer. And they’re strong knees, hard knees like everything else about you is still hard Samuel,’ she said, caressing his chest, his shoulders.

‘And does that please my wife?’

‘It pleases your wife immensely.’ She sighed in sweet surrender. ‘I love you,’ she kissed him passionately, parting her lips. ‘I always have. I always will.’

‘Everlasting,’ said Samuel as he kissed her back and continued to kiss her while he flexed his pelvic muscles so she could feel his masterful control deep inside her.

He told her for their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary he wanted to take her to Greece, just the two of them and they would make love through the night till dawn drenched the Acropolis in amber hues.

‘Only six years to go,’ she murmured.

## True to her nature

*July 1938*

One late afternoon Samuel and Rebecca were enjoying some quiet time in a canoe by themselves. They had stopped paddling and were drifting peacefully. They had moved to the end of the canoe. Rebecca was leaning back into Samuel, her legs draped over the side. He was running his fingers through her hair. She wore it shorter these days, sitting just on her shoulders but long enough so she could tie it back during the heat of Toronto summers.

‘Samuel’ she said, ‘do you ever worry that something is going to come along and snap up our happiness, suck it up like some tornado?’

‘No.’ He paused. ‘Don’t you think we have a right to be happy?’

‘Yes, but we’ve had a good run of it now for many years. The only blight on the horizon has been your grandparents dying. Some days I can almost feel myself trembling inside wondering if something bad is going to happen. I can’t seem to stop myself from dreading what next?’

‘Something like 1918, 1919 all over again?’ asked Samuel.

‘Exactly,’ she said.

‘Rebecca, you sure you aren’t Catholic because I think you’d make a damn good one. This conversation reminds me a bit of the one we had in the Nightingale once when you were what, fifteen years old if I recall, about you wanting to get off the island and the only way you thought you could get off the island was if ...’ his voice halted before he softly finished, ‘something bad happened to you.’

‘Yes, something bad did happen to me.’ Her voice was sombre.

Samuel nuzzled her head. He caressed her arms. ‘Let me understand this. Are you feeling guilty because of where we are in life, what we have in life? We have worked for this, and life is meant to be joyful and uplifting. I refuse to live my life thinking I don’t deserve to be happy. Please don’t spoil it for me by turning into the Queen of Guilt.’

‘Me, the Queen of Guilt? You are the King of Guilt in this family. May I remind you of how you were when you came back from the war?’

‘Please don’t.’ But a few seconds later he said, ‘In the overall scheme of our lives I felt that way for a year, not even that and then I put it behind me. And I was feeling

guilty about something major and specific that happened in the past, not something nebulous. You need to do the same.'

'I know,' she sighed. She ran her hands up and down Samuel's forearms. After a little while she said, 'Maybe when Joel goes to school I should work for a charity. Do something to help people less fortunate than us. Balance the scales more.'

'You don't think we do enough as it is? Day in and day out, Rebecca, I'm working to try and make Ontario and other parts of Canada, a safer, healthier place for everyone to live. You must feed half the children at our kid's school judging by the amount of food we go through each week. The depression's over and has my wife got rid of her cow. No, she's milking a second one for the all local waif's.' They had fenced and put a cow on an empty neighbours block, sharing the milk with them.

'What's wrong with that?'

'Nothing is wrong with that. I'm just trying to show you some perspective. You have a good life because you do think of other people, you live your life generously and you are rewarded for that by all those around you who appreciate what you do: your husband, your children, our friends, our families and our neighbours. You are the linchpin for all of us so please just enjoy your life and don't spend your days wallowing in the unlikely possibility of an unpredictable and ghastly future.'

'I don't, Samuel. It's just occasionally I have these fleeting...I don't know what you would call them...panic attacks, maybe. I think it's because I realise how much I love you all, how much you mean to me, how much love you all give me and the thought of something happening to any of you just terrifies me.'

'I know.' Samuel's voice was thick with feeling. They continued to lay together in silence, Samuel nuzzling her hair. Eventually he said, 'On one level being so conscious is admirable because you are not taking your life for granted, but beyond that it serves no positive purpose whatsoever, so just don't think about it. Please don't turn into a pessimist. Please don't surrender your fearlessness. That is one of the things that I have most loved about you. One of the things that attracted me to you when it was almost improper for me to being attracted to you.' He paused as he his hands roamed over her breasts. 'Set your mind to a challenge.' His hands roamed over her hips. 'Think instead of the next time you are going to be alone with your husband and what you are going to do to him.'

'Like now you mean.' She lifted her to face him, unable to contain her smile.

'There's no time like the present,' he said, lowering his mouth to hers.

## Worrying about war

*April 1939*

For Easter 1939 they went once more to Montreal to spend time with Jonathan and the Sibonne family. After the children went to bed they sat round Uncle Michel and Aunty Marguerite's large dining table with Jonathan, Samuel's cousins, Jean-Paul and René, and their wives, drinking wine, playing records and talking of many things but mostly only one thing: Hitler.

On 16 March 1939 – less than a month earlier – Germany had invaded Czechoslovakia, Hitler clearly showing the world how much respect he had for the Munich Agreement he had signed with England and France the year before. The ink was barely dry. When Samuel read about the signing of the Munich agreement he said out loud, 'That Hitler can't be trusted.'

His three year old son had parroted him, 'That Hitler can't be trusted,' and it became Joel's automatic response every time he heard Hitler's name mentioned. 'That Hitler can't be trusted.'

In their attempts to avoid another world war, the Allied Powers had given Hitler a long leash during the 1930s as he abrogated the Treaty of Versailles, as he re-militarised the Rhineland, and increased the size of the German army, navy, and air force, under the auspices of Germany having to combat the evils of the depression. Then in 1938 Germany annexed and immediately occupied the German-speaking regions of Czechoslovakia. The allies responded with terms, which effectively said, 'Okay, Mr Hitler you can have the German speaking parts of Czechoslovakia as long as you don't take any more.' With their populaces still remembering the cost of World War I, they were loathe to enter into another European conflict. Herr Hitler said, 'Okay.' For now. That was until March just gone.

A few weeks later when they were back home in Toronto and when developments in Poland were headlining the papers, Rebecca said in exasperation, 'What's going to happen if there's another war and Canada has to go to war?'

'Your husband stays home,' said Samuel looking directly into her worried face. 'He has five children and a wife to look after. And he will do whatever he can from this side of the Atlantic to help the war effort, as will his wife.'

'What about Jonathan?'

'I hope Jonathan will have more sense than Matthew and I.'

‘Oh I can’t even bear the thought.’ She looked away from him.

‘Good,’ he said. ‘Don’t bear the thought. It’s not worth thinking about. Let’s just get on with our lives and enjoy our lives before war starts, before rations start all over again.’

‘You think that possibility is so real.’

‘Rebecca the wall is plastered with the writing.’

‘No’ she groaned. ‘Don’t tell me that.’ Her arms went around her body. She leant forward as if she were hugging herself.

Samuel stood up. ‘Rebecca, come with me?’

She followed him out of the kitchen. ‘Where are you going, Samuel?’

‘To our room.’ He was at the bottom of the stairs. ‘Come. Come, lay down with me.’

‘Now, Samuel? What about the children?’

‘What about the children? Abby’s not here and the other three are happily playing outside. So come with me now. I want to wipe that worried look off your face.’ He gently caressed her face. ‘I want to lie on top of you and make you forget – forget Hitler, forget Europe, forget Paris. You need to feel my naked body next to yours to remind you what is real. Me. Us. Our one and only life here in Toronto. Lay with me so I can reaffirm life with you.’

‘Daylight love,’ said Rebecca wistfully.

‘Yes, daylight love,’ said Samuel huskily. They nearly ran up the stairs.

Later, as she was pulling on her dress, she said, ‘Do you think Germany could attack Canada? They have all those war planes now and I’m sure their U-boats are so much more advanced.’

Samuel stared at her.

‘What?’ she said.

‘I’m obviously losing it. I didn’t make you forget for long. Was that a wasted effort?’

‘No,’ she said soothingly as she went and wrapped her arms around his neck. ‘You forget, Samuel, I’m a woman and I can think of a million things at once.’

‘How can I forget you are a woman. Hello, did we not just make love?’

‘Samuel, answer my question about Canada please? I won’t make love to you again until you do.’

‘Will you make love to me as soon as I answer your question?’



She gave him a look.

‘Rebecca, they have to get past France and England before they attack us. It’s a long way off. I think you can assume we are reasonably safe for a while.’

‘Maybe we shouldn’t go to Prince Edward Island for holidays this summer.’

‘We are going,’ said Samuel. ‘Haven’t you been looking forward to this for years? Hasn’t Rachel?’

## Water babies

*July 1939*

For their holiday to Prince Edward Island, Rebecca had booked two bungalows next door to each other on the Gulf side near Cavendish for three weeks in July. Morna would be joining them as well. But then fate intervened and Rachel had to pull out as her mother-in-law had been diagnosed with aggressive leukemia.

Rebecca cancelled the holiday completely and decided that all the family – sans Jonathan who was staying behind in Montreal – would go to Newfoundland instead. After five days with Rachel, the family piled into their hire car and headed north to Salvage to stay with Esther for two weeks. About halfway into the journey they stopped at Arnolds Cove for a swim and picnic lunch. The cove was shallow and calm, just the way four-year old Joel liked it. The year before he had learnt to swim doing the dog paddle and this summer he was determined he was going to turn into a real swimmer. Joel would swim between Samuel and Rebecca and when he got to one of them he would cling on for dear life till he got his breath back and then he would wipe his face and say, ‘Further,’ and one of them would take a step back, so the next time he could swim another foot further.

‘You are a little otter,’ said his mother as she hugged him.

‘No, you are your mother’s son,’ said Samuel, smiling at Rebecca. ‘Do you know, Joel, that when I was Jonathan’s age and your mother was much younger she could beat me in swimming races.’

Joel looked at his father then his mother then back to his father again. He shook his little head and smiled weakly.

‘It’s true,’ said Samuel. ‘Joel, don’t you believe us?’ Samuel pressed his fingers into him.

‘No, Dad.’ he giggled and squirmed.

‘I’m affronted,’ said Rebecca.

‘Maybe we’ll have to have a race and prove the point.’

‘We’ll prove his point, Samuel. I’m so out of condition, if I race you now you will definitely win.’

‘Not if I race slow.’

‘That’s not a race,’ she said.

Abby and Gene were floating on two rubber tire tubes that Samuel had organised for the holiday. The kids wanted one each but Samuel had told them they couldn't fit four of everything in the car as it was. 'We've got six people, plus look at that luggage and foodstuff we have on the roof. Some things we will just have to share and have turn about.'

Joel was looking longingly at the floating black rings. 'Can I have a go?' he called out.

'Yes,' cried Morton, 'it's the boys turn now.'

'We haven't been on them that long,' yelled Abby.

'Come on, Abby and Gene, you can go back on them in a little while. Let the boys have a go,' said Samuel. 'Come over here and swim with us.'

Later they all ventured onto the sand to dry off, warm up and play hopscotch. Then the children wanted to play their version of an obstacle course – jump over a log, run through a small saltwater pool, circumnavigate a castle they had built, run between Rebecca's spread legs, leap frog over Samuel, sprint into the water up to their waists and then dive under. They did that countless times. Eventually Samuel said, 'Okay, that's enough. Have one more swim and then we're getting out.' He and Rebecca dived under and swam out until the water came up to their chests then they turned around and faced the beach to keep a close eye on their children, Rebecca clinging to Samuel's back.

'Hmm', said Samuel putting one arm behind him and pulling Rebecca in close. 'This almost reminds me of another time we went swimming together in Newfoundland, when you were eighteen.'

'I remember,' whispered Rebecca. 'Except that time we were completely alone.'

'Yes,' said Samuel, 'and still you didn't swim naked. You see? That's why you need to take advantage of opportunities when they come your way. You never know when they will come again.'

'Well aren't you lucky that now sometimes I do.'

'Eternally grateful.' He whispered.

'Dad, Mom,' Abby called out. 'Come and play the underwater circle game with us.'

'Soon,' Samuel called back. 'You play it a few times by yourself first. We're watching.'

He turned to pull Rebecca in front of him and wrap his arms around her. Kissing her nape he whispered, 'Have I told you lately that I am a happy man?'

‘No,’ she said, ‘but I’m pleased to hear that. It makes me happy to know you are happy, that my children are happy.’ She was smiling and though he couldn’t see her smile Samuel could hear it in her voice.

‘Oh I like my women and my children happy,’ said Samuel, squeezing her tight.

‘You mean woman, Samuel’ She elbowed him. ‘You know my father and mother never played with us like we play with our children. Father taught us to swim but I can’t recall a time when they played with us, maybe at nighttime around the table at Christmas. They didn’t laugh much my parents. They didn’t enjoy their children, or rather they didn’t enjoy their children like they could have.’

‘Their lives were different,’ he said. ‘Circumstances were different, but I’m glad our children can have a real childhood and we have at least one holiday a year together where we can celebrate being a family. Sometimes I get overwhelmed at the pile of medical papers beside my bed to read, but I would rather spend my Saturday’s playing with my family, reliving my childhood, than always being up to date on the latest medical breakthrough.’

Rebecca pressed her head into Samuel’s shoulder. ‘I’m so pleased you are my husband.’

He kissed her nape once more. ‘Have I told you lately I love the smell of salt water in you hair?’ he whispered.

‘I don’t think you have this year.’ She smiled up at him as she twisted in his arms to face him.

‘Have I told you how much the salt water makes me hungry?’ he whispered to her. He looked deep into Rebecca’s blue green eyes. He knew she knew the look he gave her.

‘You just mentioned your children. Have you noticed they are all within ten yards of us?’

‘Hungry, Rebecca.’

‘Later, Samuel.’ There was no log cabin they could disappear to that day, no older brother to mind the children.

Samuel sighed. After all the years and all the loving, he still preferred to make love to Rebecca during daylight, to not just feel with his fingers and body but to see with his eyes. Sadly the opportunities for that were so rare. ‘Later then, but first.’ He bent his head and kissed her salty lips, parted her mouth and with his tongue tasted the salt on her tongue, explored the evenness of her teeth, and felt like he always felt when he surrendered to the pull of his wife – adrift in the seven seas of Rebecca.

‘Stop kissing you two,’ called out Abby. ‘Come and play with us like you promised.’  
‘Yeah, cut it out,’ called Joel.  
They clung on for a few salivating seconds more then reluctantly broke apart.  
‘So few opportunities.’ Samuel sighed.

# # #

Don’t forget The Iceberg Trilogy continues in Book 2,  
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