

A young woman's fascination with icebergs
leads her to the love of her life.

LITTLE SELDOM

The Iceberg Trilogy begins

SHERRYL CAULFIELD

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An excerpt from

SELDOM COME BY

The Iceberg Trilogy Book 1

By

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This book uses British English rather than American English.

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In the Beginning

Some days she knew they were there, just by a drop in the temperature, if they were close enough, but not today. Today she saw them first, not one but two towering spectacles. In the space of one hour they had come drifting casually into sight, carried along on unseen currents, their presence more than anything marking the shift in seasons. And had she had her head down or her back to the ocean she would have missed them. These floating, breakaway giants calved from the glacial north. Frozen formations that enthralled her with their crystal palaces, soaring peaks and mythical creatures revealed in icy magnitude. How they made the seascape come alive.

She was meant to be collecting pine cones but here she was, staring out to sea, tingling in untamed anticipation, as if something monumental was about to happen. Never before had she seen three icebergs in one day.

Two years ago one had sunk the Titanic. Even before that folks called them a curse, but never Rebecca. To her they were a promise from the veiled sea: a sign of a different life beyond the bounds of the tiny island where she had lived all her fourteen years. For they were not from here. And they were not destined for here. Yet, unless she saw them or sensed them, these silent strangers would continue slowly southwards with her being none the wiser.

It was her sense of missing things that most motivated Rebecca: her fear and awareness of missing knowledge, missing signs, missing life. Once, had she not missed signs, tragedy might have been averted. As she grew older she keenly felt the lack of some thing that she could neither define nor describe, but similarly could not deny. All she knew was she had an inexplicable fascination for icebergs, as if they in some way held the key.

One day last summer her father had yelled at her: 'If you don't stop day-dreaming about icebergs I'm going to take you out and leave you on the next one that comes along. See what you think of icebergs after that!'

Silas Crowe wasn't one to make idle threats but on that day Rebecca almost dared him to do it. The thought of climbing on board and seeing where

the iceberg might take her was magnetic. If it weren't for icebergs she didn't know what she would have to look forward to.

Rebecca lived in a faded, two-storey, saltbox house that clung to the cliffs above their cove, a good three miles from any other house on Second Chance. Once or twice a year, if she were lucky, she'd get to visit Seldom Come By on nearby Fogo Island. Seldom Come By was apt, thought Rebecca. It once had been called Seldom Go By. Boats would seldom go by without calling in, but not so much now. Still, they saw more comings and goings than Second Chance ever had or ever would.

On the westerly point of their cove was a stand of large spruce trees. To Rebecca their existence was so implausible she was convinced they had taken root long before the first wind ever blew across Newfoundland. That these monstrous uprights managed to survive while other trees succumbed was a constant source of reassurance to her; a testament that unlikely things could happen in the most unlikely places. That afternoon after meandering through them she walked to a vantage point where she could see their cove and the neighbouring one to her left. The water rippled below; a glaring platinum-grey, twinkling occasionally in shafts of pallid sunlight. She sighed deeply: her ocean, her coastline – as familiar as her own hands. She loved them. The vista soothed her, yet it made her yearn for more.

Staring seaward she reminisced about previous iceberg sightings. She recalled one she had seen last week ablaze in the radiant dawn, the sun's rays painting it in a rich golden halo. She remembered the one she had spotted last May, just on dusk, sliding southwards leaving a silvery trail in the starry moonlit night. She tried to decide which was her all time favourite. Oh how she loved the ones that had waterfalls cascading over the sides! And, even more, those whose melt-pool could be seen above. But whether they had come her way on a bleached summer morn, a day fractured and grey or one rare and azure, she realised she loved them all and perhaps her favourite would always be the last luring one.

Lost in her iceberg-inspired daze, it took Rebecca some minutes to realise she was looking at something unusual in the distance. Cupping her hands around her face she squinted in the direction of Coleman's Point, one of

the headlands to her west. Within seconds her searching eyes found it: not an iceberg, but a small floating object, possibly a log, maybe a small dory. It was impossible to tell. She wandered along further peering down at the cliffs while she waited for the object to come closer. After a spell she scrutinised the sea again. Yes...a boat...but...no one in it. How odd, she thought.

Suddenly an arm appeared, a flash of white, barely distinct, but movement, someone waving something. Were they waving at her? Taking off her cardigan she waved it high above her head. There was a long wave back. She yelled, 'Hello'. All she heard in reply was her fading echo.

Still, something was amiss! 1914 was just four months old and already that spring Newfoundland had suffered two horrific nautical tragedies: 78 sealers from the S.S. Newfoundland had perished on the ice after being caught in a chilling blizzard far from their ship. The same unforgiving storm had claimed all 173 lives onboard the sealing vessel, S.S. Southern Cross, which had mysteriously disappeared, ship and men never to be seen again. People everywhere were holding their breath waiting for news of a third disaster.

Rebecca didn't hesitate. She raced back through the woods to the stony path that led to their beach and small wooden stage. Scurrying down the path, she leapt onto the stage, unhitched their dory, jumped in, fitted the oars and quickly put her back into rowing out to the open water, steering a course by keeping her eye fixed on a point on the cliffs in front of her. Every so often she'd steal a glance over her shoulder to see if her target had floated into view. As she rowed, she coaxed herself, 'Come on, Rebecca, come on.'

She paused momentarily to retie her blond pony tail and lock eyes on the approaching boat still several hundred yards beyond her right shoulder. Ten minutes later she halted again, peered behind her and started yelling. 'Hello! Hey over there!' trying to grab their attention. No response. No movement. Total silence. She called out again. All she heard was the wash of the sea and the occasional squawk of a kittiwake. Yet she was certain she had seen something.

With a few more strokes she manoeuvred herself towards the unknown tender. Turning to the side she was momentarily blinded by the glaring sun as

she reached for the other boat, knocking it against her gunnel as she brought it close. It was then she knew she hadn't been mistaken.

Sprawled out on the bottom was a man, painfully thin, salt-crusted, bare-chested, clutching a tatty white shirt in one hand and a brown coat in the other, oblivious to the goose bumps raised all over his body, eyes shut, oblivious to her. His lips were peeling and cracked. His face, half-hidden by his beard and hair, was so blistered and mottled it looked like he could have been a leper, brown in patches, red and peeling pink in others. 'Hello,' Rebecca said in greeting and again, more loudly. She tried French, 'Bonjour!' Still no response. She picked up her oar and banged it loudly against his boat. 'Hey!'

With that he finally stirred. His head jolted, his eyelashes fluttered. He looked up as she, wide-eyed, stared down at him. He made no sound while she, in her anxiety, strangled a gasp deep inside her throat. He closed his eyes, shook his head then opened his eyes again. She was on the verge of saying, 'I am real, I'm not a ghost,' when he croaked, 'Help. Please.' Then he collapsed.

Without hesitating Rebecca pulled both oars inside her boat, grabbed her painter, climbed across into his boat and tied a clove hitch around his boat's thwart. Then she pushed her boat behind them, reached for his oars and started the strenuous task of rowing home – all the time staring in fascination at the castaway in front of her. His hair was long and sun-streaked, his eyebrows dark above brown curled eyelashes. His left shoulder had a cluster of scars, his bare chest was tanned and bruised, his nipples raw from his braces. Most alarmingly his ribs were clearly visible. He seemed tall but she couldn't tell for sure nor could she tell how old he was. She only knew with certainty that she had never laid eyes on him before.

It was her forty-six year old mother, Morna, who helped her carry the rescued boatman up to their house and lay him on the day bed in their parlour. Rachel, her older sister, immediately started sponging him down with a flannel and warm water. He didn't look any better once clean. 'Do you think I should fetch Ronnie?' Rebecca asked, unable to quell her anxiety. Ronnie Evans substituted for a doctor in their parts.

Her mother studied the stranger with her warm brown eyes. 'I doubt Ronnie could do any more than what we're doing right now.' Unlike Rebecca, her voice was steady. 'Besides, your father will be home soon. He knows more about men and the sea than any of us.'

Yes...what would her father think, wondered Rebecca? Silas Crowe was part of the local fishing cooperative that worked the outer Notre Dame Bay waters in a fleet of three 44-foot schooners moored in Deception Bay. Deception could be reached from their home by a ninety-minute walk across the barrens or by skirting the eastern side of their island in a boat, sailing or rowing, depending on the conditions. Some seasons her father worked by himself as an inshore fisherman. Rebecca knew he preferred that. Like he preferred their distance from Deception. Her father was a loner. He guarded his space. He revelled in silence. They were a perfect complement to his spirituality and his superstitions. But after a few lackluster years, he decided to sign-on to the schooners and yesterday he'd gone across to Seldom Come By to a two-day fisherman's union meeting before the season got under way.

A strange sense descended upon Rebecca as she sat beside this unknown man trying to dribble water into his mouth. It felt as if she held his fate in her hands; that, by the act of claiming him, it was now up to her to save him. For having accepted the challenge of rescuing him, she now had to face a bigger, more uncertain test of delivering him through this trial. She was still by his side, her mother and Rachel in the kitchen preparing dinner, when her father came bursting through the back door, making them all wheel around in alarm.

‘What’s amiss?’ he blurted out.

‘Nothing,’ said her mother. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘Why?’ His chest was heaving. ‘I come to the top of the rise and what do I see in the distance but Lucifer in the sky looming over the house.’

‘Whatever are you on about?’ asked her mother.

‘Come outside and see for yourself. The shape of a dragon with a raging head practically shooting flames to the sky.’

Rebecca had come to the doorway between the parlour and the kitchen. This was not the first time they had heard such pronouncements from their father and it wouldn’t be the last. He was forever reading meaning into clouds, patterns in the sand, fallen branches, even vinegar in a bottle. Her mother glanced at her but without stalling said, ‘We have a visitor, a shipwrecked sailor.’

‘He’s in here,’ added Rebecca.

‘God help us, he’s probably brought the plague or some other terror into our home.’

This time she and her sister exchanged glances silently acknowledging their father’s pessimism though eighteen-year old Rachel would never be the first to speak up. Rebecca let out a resigned sigh. ‘I’m sorry you feel that way Father. I didn’t think you, or God for that matter, would look too favourably on us if we left a poor stranded man to die.’

Her father glared at her with steel blue eyes, undimmed by years of squinting at the sea or snow. But Rebecca did not baulk from his glare. After a few moments he eased his shoulders. ‘We must all be Good Samaritans when called, Rebecca. It still does not make me feel any better about that serpent of Satan hanging over us.’

Biting her tongue, Rebecca spun round and went back to her patient. He was looking slightly better but perhaps his improved colour was more to do with the warm glow of the lamps and the fire in the room. She moved aside for her father. Silas stared at the stranger for what seemed liked an eternity. Under his thick salty grey hair, her father had an angular head anchored by a strong nose in a face that flaunted his mixed origins. That night, his face was mask-like, only his eyes moved. After interminable minutes he uttered three words:

‘What a sight.’ He dragged his broad hands down his own bearded face and then placed a hand on the unknown man’s forehead. Some moments later, he muttered, ‘No sign of a fever. Has he said anything?’

‘No, only “Help me”.’ Trying to keep the excitement out of her voice, Rebecca recounted how she and her mother had rescued him. While she was speaking her father peeled back the covers and gasped at the sight of the man’s bony frame.

‘Did you find any papers on him?’

‘No.’

‘Anything on the boat?’

She shook her head and felt a tinge of annoyance at her self. ‘We didn’t look,’ she admitted. He frowned admonishingly but when he spoke he called out for Morna asking if there was any hot water.

Her mother came to the doorway. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I thought you’d want to wash.’

He blinked in acknowledgement. ‘I’ll wash him first. Maybe a long soak will do him good. Then I’ll take some clean water myself.’

The women set to, hauled the wooden tub into the living room, half filled it, brought out soap and towelling then cleared the room. Hovering in the hallway, Rebecca strained to hear her father’s words as he trickled water over the man’s ravaged skin. ‘Where have you come from young man? What happened to you? What about the others?’

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. It was true, there were always others.

Over dinner her father told them he couldn’t find any serious injuries on the man other than chest bruises, abrasions, a lump on his head and a swollen and bruised right ankle. There didn’t seem any cause for alarm. But as they theorised over the identity of the stranger her father’s unease re-surfaced. ‘Enough!’ he yelled, slapping his hand down on the table. ‘We’ll find out in good time.’

‘One last question,’ pleaded Rebecca and before he could deny her, she asked, ‘Do you think he will live?’

He stared at the table pensively before raising his eyes to her. ‘That’s between him and his maker. We’ve done what we can for now.’ They bowed their heads and finished their meal in silence.

Later, when the girls were cleaning up Rebecca whispered to Rachel, ‘Why does father have to be so doom and gloom about everything?’

‘That’s just how he is. Maybe if enough things happen to you in life that’s how you become.’

‘Lord spare me,’ whispered Rebecca. Her brow creased faintly in concern as she reached for another plate to dry. The fact was the girls only knew some of the happenings of their father’s life. Only what they could glean from their mother, which was not a lot and Silas was never forthcoming himself. For all that he was their father, he was an enigma to them in many ways. Predictable and unpredictable.

Rachel interrupted her thoughts, ‘I’d say you have a fifty percent chance.’

‘Of what?’

‘Of becoming like our father. Shall I pray you end up more like our mother?’

She ignored Rachel’s teasing, but then she felt her sister’s hand on her forearm. ‘Promise me you’ll watch yourself and how you talk to him?’ She stared at her sister. ‘I fear one of these days your tongue is going to land you in hot water. You know how he can be.’

There was no escaping her meaning. ‘I don’t set out to be like that,’ Rebecca bemoaned in her defence. ‘But all of a sudden I realise I’m at that point and all I can do to save myself is to quickly say something in jest or something prophetic, something that sounds like it might have come right out of the Bible and I hope that gets me by.’

When they finished they moved into the living room where their mother was knitting and their father was leafing through their old family Bible, looking, he said, for a scripture to help the shipwrecked sailor – help them all! – pull through.

Unlike her mother, her father only went to school till he was ten and learnt most of his important lessons in life through watching and listening to other people. Aside from the Bible, he would read the odd newspaper,

thumbing regularly through a much-used dictionary. His hearing, like his eyesight, was still near perfect but his greatest asset was his keen memory, which seemed to more than compensate for his lack of education. In that respect Rebecca wanted to be like her father when she grew up.

When at last he had decided on a passage her father led them in fellowship and then they prayed for the salvation of the young man lying just a few feet away. Soon after, too soon for Rebecca, he made an announcement: 'It's time you two went to bed.'

'I can look after him,' gushed Rebecca. 'You must be tired, Father. You too, Mother. I found him, you shouldn't have to do all this extra work because of me.' She eyed her parents while silently praying for leniency.

'Rebecca!' commanded her father. 'Very soon, we will be all going to bed and there will be nobody watching over this man, understand?'

She dragged her heels upstairs where she flopped down on her bed with a huff. She desperately wanted to be below, not with her parents, but alone with the unknown.

Icebergs were far from Rebecca's mind the next morning as she made a beeline straight to their visitor. He'd had a restless night judging by the state of his covers but at that moment there was little sign of life. Before long she heard the sound of her father's footsteps on the stairs, his knees creaking, then he opened the back door and went outside like he did every morning upon rising. Twenty minutes later he returned with the words, Mme Nightingale, which both Rebecca and her mother had overlooked yesterday in their haste to carry the man up to their house. They were painted on the stern. The name meant nothing to any of them. They would ask around after church, her father announced. Suddenly Rebecca wanted it to be Saturday all over again. She did not want to be going to church that day. She quickly offered to stay home to mind their guest, but matters had already been decided: that honour was to go to her mother.

'This morning fellow parishioners our reading is from the Letter of Jude. He warns against false teachers who claim to be believers.

'Some godless people have slipped in unnoticed among us, persons who distort the message about the grace of our God in order to excuse their immoral ways and who reject Jesus Christ, our only master and Lord.'

Rebecca tried her best to be attentive, not to slide her feet back and forth. She glanced at her father. He looked worried.

'They are like the wild waves of the sea, with their shameful deeds showing up like foam. They are like wandering stars, for whom God has reserved a place forever in the deepest darkest hour.'

'I've heard all this before,' she whispered to Rachel.

'It won't hurt you to hear it again.'

After the reading came the sermon. Could it be any longer, any slower? She didn't think so. When it was over, finally!, and they were outside, Silas approached Herbie Elliot to tell him of their news and ask if he had any

reports of the missing ship Madame Nightingale. The men asked around. Everyone drew a blank. Rebecca and Rachel stood close by, keenly following the discussion.

‘Do you want me to telegraph through to St John’s?’ asked Herbie.

Silas twitched his face. ‘Perhaps in a few days, if we have no answers.’

‘What state is he in?’ chipped in Ronnie Evans. He was older than most and because of his status as the community’s de facto doctor, one to whom they all deferred.

‘When I last saw him, a deep slumber,’ her father replied. A few chuckled.

‘Do you want me to come and take a look at him?’ Ronnie asked.

Followed by, ‘Do you want me to come round in the morn and help you move him across to Ronnie’s?’ from another.

There was a muffled murmur amongst the men. Rebecca’s heart was racing. She had to speak up. ‘Can’t we leave him be? I think the poor man’s been through enough without moving him any further.’

Her father turned towards her. ‘Tom’s suggestion is not such a bad idea. We don’t know anything about that young man. He could be a thief, a murderer, or a madman for all we know.’

‘Surely you don’t think that, Father, or else you wouldn’t have left Mother at home with him.’ Rebecca twirled her head. Rachel was speaking up!

‘He’s not about to do any harm in the state he’s in,’ retorted Silas. ‘But very soon I’ll be out on the boat every day and you women will be the ones alone with that stranger.’

‘We’ll manage,’ said Rebecca. ‘Besides we shouldn’t judge him before we know him.’ She tried to suppress the fluttering in her stomach. She would be chastised when they got home for being so outspoken, but on this point she did not want to capitulate. And as always, she’d felt emboldened with Ronnie so close. He was like the grandfather she never had. But it sickened her the way she chafed her father, the way they chafed each other, neither doing it deliberately. Wishing it could be different, she braced herself for her father’s displeasure.

But before her father could rail at her Ronnie spoke, “Silas, if you think that the young man needs more medical attention than you can provide then I am happy to take him, or come check on him every day. But if not then why don’t you keep him at your place till he wakes up and you get some answers.’

Rebecca’s eyes met Ronnie’s in a silent offering of thanks.

Silas waved him off. ‘We can manage. We’ve been trickling fluids down his throat. He doesn’t have a fever or any major injuries that we can tell, aside from a swollen ankle. He wasn’t any better or worse this morning. We may have missed something, who knows?’ Silas shrugged.

‘Well, if he shows no sign of improvement by the morn, send Rebecca to fetch me.’

Rebecca tried to silence her relieved sigh. To think if she had got her way earlier and stayed home her father would have had his way just now and the unknown man would soon be unknown and unavailable!

She left her father to talk to the men while she doubled home with Rachel on Mica, riding in and out of patchy fog. The mare was a part-time workhorse, part-time play horse, named after the pearly flakes that flecked the granite rock scattered throughout Newfoundland. Mainly she was bought for Rachel to shorten the trip between home and Deception, for Rachel had been born with one leg marginally shorter than the other. Consequently she limped, not excessively, but noticeably, and at times her awkwardness pained her but she never complained. The family made unspoken allowances for Rachel, giving her less taxing jobs, while Rebecca, Miss Hewer of Wood and Drawer of Water, carried a heavier responsibility. She never complained either.

‘Any change?’ asked Rebecca, coming up to her mother in the kitchen.

‘Not really,’ she replied, ‘though he has been a bit delirious at times, mumbling words I can’t even catch.’

Rebecca looked for herself. The man was practically lifeless. Privately she worried if he would ever waken. While her mother and Rachel prepared lunch she sat next to the stranger trying to dribble water into his mouth, willing her rescued boatman to waken and swallow, stir and swallow, anything and swallow.

Sunday afternoons in their home were spent resting – her father being the very definition of a God-fearing man, God-serving man. Usually the family would retire upstairs to their rooms, lie down and try to sleep – in Rebecca’s case read – sleep was always a lost cause. Some Sundays her mother would sit at the kitchen table and write letters. That day both her mother and Rachel were writing letters. There was no way Rebecca was going up stairs to lie down. ‘I have to finish that Les Misérables book Miss Drysdale lent me,’ she announced. ‘I thought I would read to our patient.’ Her mother said nothing. Her raised eyebrows said plenty. Rebecca didn’t care.

Ten minutes later, she was engrossed in a passage: *‘All sorts of reveries reached him from space, and mingled with his thoughts. What a spectacle is the night! One hears dull sounds, without knowing whence they proceed...’*

When Rebecca paused in her reading to drink some water, she was surprised to find the man looking up at her. Not just looking – staring – his eyes glazed and dreamlike.

‘Don’t stop,’ he murmured.

Her eyes flew wide open. Before she could stop herself she said, ‘It lives!’ Her face flushed. ‘I mean he lives,’ she stammered. What a dimwit! She bit her lip and tried again, this time with a wide, elated smile and placid eyes. ‘You’re alive.’

‘I am,’ he swallowed, ‘though God knows where I have been.’ He spoke slowly, his voice deep and rough, faint from lack of use. ‘Where am I?’

‘You’re in our home.’ Rebecca smiled.

‘Yes,’ he drawled, ‘and where might that be?’

‘Second Chance Island.’ His squinting eyes and furrowed brow told her he needed help with his bearings. ‘Near Fogo, Seldom Come By. In Notre Dame Bay. Newfoundland.’

‘Is that so?’

Rebecca nodded, wanting to look at his eyes again without him noticing. After a pause he cleared his throat. ‘How did I get here? Did your father bring me?’

‘No, I did.’

‘You brought me here?’ His voice sounded disbelieving.

‘Uh-huh,’ Rebecca nodded again. This time she risked a glance. They were unusual. A tawny gold, with flecks of brown or was it green moss, the whole iris outlined in a dark ring, the likes of which she had never seen before. She looked away but then steeled herself to meet his gaze. ‘You were in your boat waving and I thought you were in distress, so I rowed out and brought you back to shore.’ Then she admitted, ‘My mother helped me carry you here.’

‘Is that so? Well, I must thank you and your mother for rescuing me.’

She smiled shyly at him. Lowering her gaze to her lap she muttered, ‘It was nothing.’

‘What is your name?’ he asked, peering into her face.

‘Rebecca,’ she whispered.

‘Rebecca,’ he repeated. ‘Thank you, Rebecca, for coming to my aid.’

‘You’re welcome,’ she said almost inaudibly, holding his golden stare for two seconds before looking away.

He cleared his throat. ‘Do you live here with just your mother?’

‘No,’ she smiled, ‘with my father and my sister too. Would you like to meet them?’

‘Yes, but I don’t think I can get up just now. Would it be possible to have a glass of water?’

‘Sure,’ said Rebecca, looking at her empty glass beside him. ‘I’ll bring you one straight away.’ Walking into the kitchen, Rebecca was unable to hide her delight. ‘Our guest is awake and asking for water.’

‘Hallelujah,’ said her mother, clasping her hands. ‘What did he say?’

‘Nothing much, just wanted to know where he was.’

‘So he speaks English?’ asked Rachel.

‘Uh-huh.’

‘What happened to him?’ asked her mother.

‘We didn’t get that far.’

‘Well what’s his name then?’

And it was then that Rebecca realised in her pained timidity she had forgotten to ask one of the burning questions on her lips.

When they returned to the room, he had fallen back into a deep, still sleep; the satisfied sleep of a satiated man, even though he was far from it.

They moved around the living room quietly, content to give their guest his peace, relieved he had at last awoken if for only a short while.

In the middle of the night a snowstorm arrived from the north – not that common in Newfoundland for that time of the year, but not unheard of. Outside the wind was nearly gale-force, the world a complete whiteout of wild turbulent snow. No one was going anywhere.

‘Did you pray for this weather?’ mused her mother when Rebecca came down the stairs the next morning.

‘No’ she replied, beaming with joy. There would be no going to school that day. Normally Rebecca enjoyed everything about school, even Latin! Like Rachel, she was very bright and loved reading. So much so that her teacher, Miss Dyrsdale, would lend her books from her personal library which her father, through her mother, would deem suitable reading for his daughter. Her father was not too fussed about schooling but when he married her mother she had extracted a promise that all of their children would go to school at least to the age of fifteen. Morna was a strong believer in education and in this Silas obliged, even though Rebecca had once overheard him mumbling that education made children more impertinent.

Rachel’s school days were well over. If they had money her parents could have sent her to boarding school at Gander or St John’s. If she were stronger, she could have worked in the saltworks or the cod liver oil press but they didn’t want her to have a job where she was on her feet all day. So she helped her parents and did odd jobs for people, more often in exchange for something other than money.

On gloomy days, Rebecca would wonder what was going to happen to Rachel and herself. She was just a few weeks off finishing school for good. Were they going to stay on Second Chance all their lives? Marry some local fisherman or cooper and bear a tribe of children? She knew one family who had fourteen! That was not the life she wanted. She groaned at the thought. She wanted to run away and have adventures, be kidnapped even! But to where? And to do what? And who with? Once, she asked her father if she

could join him on a fishing trip. His reply: 'No, Rebecca, it's no place for young girls.'

'When I'm older then?'

'No, not even then.'

Where did that leave her? She feared her life was going to be like the unchanging rocks she walked over every day, taking an eternity to vary or break away.

In the parlour, her father was stoking up the fire, coughing and spluttering along with it. Rebecca watched from the doorway.

'Hello,' ventured a strange voice. He was awake again! She wanted to move closer but held back waiting for her father.

'Good morning,' said her father as he squatted by the day bed. 'How are you today?'

'I've been better,' came a raspy reply.

'We'll get you better.' Her father held out his hand. 'Silas Crowe.'

'Samuel Dalton,' said the man offering his hand and trying to sit up.

Ah, Samuel Dalton, Rebecca's heart sighed. Lost in her thoughts, she missed hearing Samuel's quick intake of breath, but not her father.

'You got some bruises on your chest. Perhaps you cracked a rib or two. Nothing much we can do about that – they'll heal in their own time. We can strap them, but mostly you just need to take it easy.'

Samuel nodded. 'Thank you for having me in your home sir, for looking after me.'

'Och, think nothing of it. Just get well. Are you up to some breakfast, some porridge or eggs or something?'

'Yes thank you, I'll try a little bit.'

'That'll be it, little meals for you for starters. What about some tea?'

'I'll get it.' The two of them looked towards her smiling face.

She returned with her mother and sister in tow. 'I believe you met Rebecca yesterday,' said her father. She smiled again. He nodded. 'This is my wife, Morna, and our other daughter, Rachel.' They all said hello and rearranged the pillows to help Samuel sit up. He was finding it hard to get

comfortable and feed himself, but before Rebecca could offer any assistance, Rachel limped to his aid. 'Here, let me'.

Samuel slept throughout the day waking on and off to take food and drink as it was proffered. The bad weather continued its barrage on Tuesday, benefiting nobody bar Rebecca. Samuel continued his rhythm of rests and refreshments until finally he was up to having more than one line conversations.

'Do you remember what happened?' asked her father.

'To a point, though I feel I'm missing a large chunk of it.'

Rebecca was hovering in the background, keeping busy but quiet, trying to catch what was being said, snatching glimpses whenever she could. She wasn't alone: her sister and mother were doing likewise.

'Whose boat were you on?'

'My Uncle Michel's. From Montreal.'

'Where were you headed?'

'To Cartwright, then up to Goose Bay, then we were going to come back and stop off at Tilt Cove.'

'So you didn't make it to Cartwright then?'

'Not that I remember.'

'You would have been one of the first boats through.'

'That was the plan.'

'What did you hit? A berg? Some rocks?'

'No.' He shook his head. 'Maybe a whale.' Samuel's brow was furrowed. 'But I'm not certain. I was up on watch and the night was black as tar. It was a 52-foot rig and it practically crumpled in half,' his voice tapered off. 'I never saw anything like it. There were four of us on board, lots of supplies for the fur trappers and the miners. I yelled out below for all hands on deck. I knew we had to abandon ship. I rushed over to loosen the tender and lower it overboard. Something crashed on my head from behind. I don't know what—maybe the mast. I remember coming to on the deck, the dinghy's rope still in my hands. The boat was going down fast. I was thigh-deep in water yelling for the others, for Seb, for Louis and for Luc.' He licked his dry lips then sighed heavily. 'I don't know what happened. At the very last I jumped into the

dinghy. I think that's when I hurt my ankle, hit my head once more, was out of it again for a while.' Only the day before had Samuel discovered his injury when he tried to go outside to the privy.

'What about the others?' asked Silas.

'When I came round there were bits and pieces of flotsam, the odd large barrel,' Samuel swallowed, struggling to find his way. 'No sign of life.' His eyes glazed over.

Silas squeezed Samuel's hand. 'You can't help that so don't go tearing yourself up over it. The sea's a hard taskmaster at times.'

Samuel was silent for such a long time Rebecca thought he had drifted off until he stirred. 'I should send word. To Michel. Let him know what happened. Is there a place around here I can do that?'

'They could send word through Deception, her father said. 'It's not too far. Do you know where you were when you went down?'

'We were two days north of Belle Isle.'

'What date was that do you recall?'

Samuel stared off in the distance trying to remember, absent-mindedly rubbing his cheek. And then he stopped as if he saw something very clearly. Once more he sighed heavily.

'What?' her father asked as if reading Rebecca's own mind.

'I didn't have this beard then,' said Samuel, his voice deep and certain. 'It must have been a few weeks ago. What day is it today?'

'The thirty-first of May,' sang out Rebecca.

'Well, the middle of May,' said Samuel. 'At least.'

'Hmm,' said her father. After several moments he added, 'There's no point rushing bad news. It can wait. Your crew wouldn't have lasted long in those waters.'

The man raised his troubled eyes to her father. But before he said anything, her mother spoke, 'You've come a long way, Samuel, over two weeks at sea by yourself. Did you have any food or water on board?'

'Everything happened too fast for that. I had some water. It ran out after a week and then I only got by on what I could catch from the rain.'

'Did you catch any food?'

‘I only had a small knife with me, no tackle or anything. I tried to kill a gull once, but I only managed to frighten it away.’

‘Too bad it wasn’t June,’ noted Silas. ‘The capelin would have been jumping into your boat like fleas.’

Rebecca watched her parents exchange glances, and heard her mother faintly say, ‘No wonder you’re wasted away,’ but she couldn’t hold back any longer.

‘So are you from Montreal? You don’t sound very French.’

Rachel shot her a look – a look that said, ‘What would you know? You’ve never been to Montreal, never met a person from there.’

‘No, I’m from Toronto,’ he replied, ‘but I have grandparents who are French and live in Québec. I speak French. We all do in my family.’ Rebecca could hardly contain her excitement; despite his tale of devastation, she had never met someone so well-travelled!

‘Is your family still in Toronto?’ Silas asked.

‘Yes, sir. My father, mother and sister. I have an older brother, Matthew,’ Samuel swallowed, ‘he’s in Montreal.’ After a pause he added, ‘I’m the youngest.’

‘How young would that be?’

‘Nineteen, sir.’

‘And what does your father do?’

‘He’s a doctor.’

Her father’s eyebrows shot up at that. They weren’t the only ones.

The gull's cawing woke Samuel. It took some effort, but he managed to prise open his weary eyes, to steer a line through his mind's haze and focus on the small black eyes of the creature in front of him. How long did he lie there gazing at the seabird gazing at him? No feathers rippling. No breeze. His bleary mind still registering. Just. Did the gull's appearance signal the proximity of land?

Struggling with untold exhaustion, he slowly raised his head to peer overboard, to stare into the face of nothingness. Nothingness masked as non-descript greyness. Lazy, forlorn, fog. Absolute silence.

Days of drifting helplessly – but not hopelessly – had robbed him of many things. But through it all he still believed. Believed he was too young to die. Too young to be lost at sea. Too young to depart this life when he felt he was only starting to live it. And so he convinced himself that his time had not yet come. And he blocked everything else out. The cold. The aches. The ceaseless hunger. The almost unbearable thirst and willed himself to live. To save himself or be saved.

Samuel lay in the dark of night trembling. He wasn't dreaming. He was remembering – recalling the random details of his misadventure as they became more and more lucid. He had spent all night and all day rowing around the area where he thought the boat had gone down, but to no avail. He'd only managed to exhaust himself and then he had spent the next day simply lying in the tender, not wanting to row away and give up on his friends but not wanting to admit they had gone. Then on the third day he decided to make a point of rowing towards the Evening Star, towards sunset every night and away from the sunrise, away from the Morning Star every morning, if he could see his bearings through the fog and the mist and the squalls. He believed his salvation lay due west. But he was like a tiny cuttlebone bobbing around in that vast endless sea, helplessly subjected to the errant waves and the currents of the ocean. Eventually it took all his energy just to keep afloat. But movement was good. He could never remember being that cold or hungry. He had a knife, a

water canteen and a piece of flotsam he had scooped up which he carved into a rough pail to bail out the water from the waves. He tore part of the sleeve from his shirt, secured it to the pail and an oarlock. Likewise his canteen, afraid he might lose those two pitiful tools overboard, into oblivion, along with his remaining strands of hope.

DAD. MOM. SHRIPWRECKED BUT SAFE. WITH CROWE FAMILY, SECOND CHANCE ISLAND, OFF FOGO ISLAND, NEWFOUNDLAND. WILL WRITE SOON. WIRING MICHEL NOW. SAMUEL.

That message was relatively easy. It was the one to his uncle that he deliberated over. He had never been the bearer of such onerous news. Finally he settled on:

MICHEL. BOAT & MEN LOST. SORRY. HEADING TOWARDS CARTWRIGHT AROUND MID-MAY. SUSPECT WHALE. WITH CROWE FAMILY, SECOND CHANCE ISLAND, OFF FOGO ISLAND, NEWFOUNDLAND. WILL WRITE SOON. HOME KNOWS. AM RECOVERING. KEEN TO HELP. SAMUEL.

On her way to school Rebecca delivered the messages to their merchant, which served as their local telegraph office. She returned with a pair of crutches from Mr Evans. Samuel thanked her for carrying them all that way particularly through the fresh snow.

‘It’s melting quickly,’ she said with a shy smile. ‘You’d better hurry up and get used to those crutches else you’ll miss it.’

He didn’t feel like trying them out just then with an audience but as she had gone to such an effort he felt he needed to make some attempt. His Friday morning practice around the living room and the kitchen went much better. On Saturday he ventured outside for some fresh air. The last two days had warmed up quickly. Aided by a constant southerly the snow had practically disappeared. They set him up in a chair near the step-less front door. As the

day got warmer he started to walk around. He came across a large barn, the smokehouse, the outhouse, the woodhouse and their cellar. Above the barn, working a garden bed, digging in sheep droppings and kelp, he found Rebecca.

‘What are you going to plant there?’ he asked, coming up to her.

‘Potatoes, turnips, cabbage,’ she replied. She looked up at him. ‘Do you have a vegetable garden in Toronto?’

He told her they did but they bought most of their food from the market in town. ‘We’ve got a large herb garden though. My mother uses lots of rosemary, bergamot, thyme and the like in her cooking.’

‘So your mother is French?’

‘Oui. Yes. French Canadian. Some say Canuck.’

‘What about your Dad, is he French too?’

‘No,’ he said shaking his head.

She paused to wipe her right palm on her skirt as she looked directly at him. ‘Most French people are Catholics, are they not?’

Samuel smiled at her mild interrogation. ‘Yes, but we are not strict Catholics and our parents didn’t make us go to Mass that often, only on special occasions.’

‘What about praying? Do you pray in your home?’ she asked.

Was she merely curious or worried about his eternal life? ‘We say grace, but no we don’t pray – not like your family.’ He threw her a sideways glance.

‘Did you pray when you were lost at sea?’

So serious he thought. ‘I was out for most of it and when I wasn’t I was yelling and begging through the fog to whoever would hear me – does that count as praying?’ He raised his eyebrows at her, a smile toyed at the corner of his mouth.

‘Don’t tell father that.’

‘Wouldn’t impress him?’

‘Uh-uh,’ Rebecca said shaking her head and looking back to the garden bed. She slid her hoe under a grey spider crawling over the dirt and transferred it to the grass.

‘Bad luck to kill spiders, eh?’

‘Yes. Though they say if you kill these rain spiders they bring rain – sometimes that might be good luck, don’t you think?’ She smiled and with her smile something changed.

‘True. Why do they say it’s bad luck to kill spiders? Do you know?’

‘Of course I know. Everyone knows.’

‘I don’t. Tell me.’

She wiped her hand across her brow before glancing at Samuel and looking back to the soil in front of her. ‘It was a spider who saved baby Jesus from Herod’s wrath when he ordered all first-born male children to be killed.’ She took a breath and continued almost as if she were prophesying. ‘After the decree, Joseph, Mary and Jesus fled to Egypt and on the way they came to a forked road. They went down one road and when they had gone a spider spun her web across the path they had taken. When Herod’s soldiers came to this fork they wondered which road they should take, and while trying to decide they discovered the spider’s undisturbed web. “No one could have gone this way,” they said, so they took the other road, and that’s how Jesus escaped.’ She pressed her lips together and looked at him.

Samuel was six two, although perhaps not today leaning on his crutches. Rebecca was the tallest of her womenfolk but even she was still a good deal shorter than him. He put her at five six. He ran his right hand through his hair. ‘Thank you, for enlightening me. My father was adamant we had a well rounded education but it obviously didn’t cover everything.’ Keeping his voice even he asked, ‘Tell me, do you believe that?’

Rebecca looked straight ahead considering his question. ‘It’s possible,’ she murmured. She turned to him. ‘What do you believe in?’

‘What do I believe in? What sort of question is that?’ He gave way to a laugh, not wanting her to take his response as a put down. He glanced at her and could tell she was waiting for an answer, wanting something from him, but what? He gathered himself. ‘Let me see, I believe in life, that’s for sure. I believe in myself. I believe in the value of education and experience. I believe in possibilities and in being rescued.’ He gave her a warm smile, which she returned in kind. ‘And lucky for you, I believe in questions and the right of people to ask them.’

‘Do I ask a lot of questions?’

‘Does the name Nellie Bly mean anything to you?’

‘No.’

‘Never mind.’ She gazed at him, a puzzled look on her face. ‘Go ahead,’ he said, laughing and opening his hands to her in a welcome gesture.

She averted her eyes. ‘I’m sorry if I’m being rude and impolite. It’s just...well...you are so new and different.’ Her eyes darted to his then peeled away. ‘You are the first real visitor we have had to our home in years. And you’ve seen and done much more than I’ve ever done in my life – probably more than I’ll ever do.’

‘Whoa, Rebecca! You have your whole life ahead of you. Anything could happen. Don’t you have dreams? Don’t you believe in possibilities too?’

‘Oh I have dreams.’ She spoke the words with quiet certainty. Then in a resigned voice added, ‘My dreams are way too fanciful that’s all. I doubt anything will ever come of them. It’s just that life here is so...’ she hesitated, searching for the right word, ‘...suffocating at times.’

‘So what are you going to do when you finish school?’

‘Work.’ She quickly added, ‘I don’t have a problem with hard work. I can do it.’

‘I can see that.’

She sighed heavily. ‘Work here though doesn’t inspire me. Maybe if I could do some sort of men’s work it would be different. Like go to sea.’ Now she looked at him, almost in a silent plea.

‘Maybe when you’re older you can.’

She held his gaze for a few moments, glanced away then brought her eyes back as she asked, ‘Did you always want to be a sailor?’

‘No,’ he said shaking his head lightly.

‘What did you want to be?’

This girl, he thought, almost in exasperation. He couldn’t believe that here he was fifteen hundred miles from home and he was still getting asked the same questions. She had her father’s penetrating eyes, but where his were cobalt blue, hers were turquoise, striking in their rarity, but more than that she had this openness and innocence about her that was rendering him completely

malleable around her. He'd never felt like this with a woman before, or anyone for that matter. Perhaps he was still suffering from his ordeal, but, he could only respond with raw, unmasked honesty himself. Her forthrightness demanded that from him, and he owed her that – hell – he owed her a lot more for saving his life.

‘Rebecca, let’s sit for a while. Too much standing for me right now.’

She helped him onto the grass then sat a little to the side waiting for him to speak.

‘Well,’ he began, ‘as you know, my father is a doctor, so too is my grandfather. My elder brother Matthew is also a doctor – he graduated last year. When I was in my last year of school I felt this overwhelming pressure that I was expected to follow in the family tradition. It was crazy. Now I see the pressure came more from me than them, but I didn’t realise that at the time. I just couldn’t see myself stuck inside four walls dealing with sick people all day. That didn’t seem like living to me. My father had said, “Well, son, the choice is yours. What would you rather do?” And I couldn’t answer him.’ Samuel paused remembering the exchange.

‘I had a schoolfriend, Billy Sarginson, who had distant relatives living up at a place called Thunder Bay. Have you heard of it? It’s almost a thousand miles northwest of Toronto. They work as lumberjacks for most of the year up there. We hatched a plan to run away and live life in the wild and earn our keep felling timber. I was sixteen. I could hunt well enough. Our father taught both my brother and me to shoot when we were growing up. So I started stashing things away, getting ready for our escape when one night my father came into my room, quite unexpectedly and caught me with my kit lying around.’

Rebecca gasped lightly. ‘Did you get into trouble?’

‘No. I thought I would, but he just asked me lots of questions and then he said to me, “I’m not giving this trip my blessing just yet but I promise you, your mother and I will talk about it. Don’t run off until we do.” Then a few days later he said, “We think your going away for a while, having a change from here, is perhaps not a bad idea, though we’d rather you were around people who could keep an eye on you.” He suggested I go and work with my Uncle Michel – he’s my mother’s brother. He lives in Montreal, has a merchant

trading business there and in Québec. I had never thought about this option but the idea appealed. So I agreed. I had to finish secondary school first though.'

'Do you like sailing? Is that what you want to do with your life?'

Samuel brushed his hair back off his face. 'I'm not sure now's a good time to answer that.' He inhaled deeply. 'Certainly till now I've enjoyed it. It's hard work and there are many sleepless nights. But I've had some great adventures and I've met people completely different to those I grew up with. My uncle's got a few boats in his fleet and after working with him for twelve months I more or less had my pick of jobs. Last summer we sailed this tall ship all the way down to the Bahamas. What a trip that was. Water, the most beautiful teal-colour, so warm you could swim in it all day. Sand like alabaster, glittering like crystal, grove after grove of green swaying palm trees. Great clumps of rainbow coral, tropical fish and food, some of which I'd never seen or tasted before. It was summer there too and I'd never been so hot. The heat of the tropics is a completely different heat to summers in Toronto. A wet, hanging heat. You're in a sheen all day waiting for the moment when these big dark voluminous clouds burst and the heavens break loose and when it does, the downpour releases you – not just from the heat but from the build-up as well. It's kind of like a birthing every day. You really have to experience it to know what it's truly like. It's...'

He broke off, suddenly aware of his insensitivity. What was he doing regaling her with such far-away fantasies when she had just told him of her despair with this place? It was the way she had looked at him all the while he was speaking, taking in every word, rolling them around like a ball of twine, building it all up inside her so that any moment she too was going to hurl it out, just like his story – but most likely in tears. How heartless of him. 'I'm sorry, Rebecca. I got carried away.'

'No, don't be.'

'No, I am. I wasn't thinking.'

'No, it's fine, really. I want to hear all your stories. Promise me you'll tell me all your stories, Samuel.' She looked at him in a way he found beseeching.

'Do you like to torture yourself?'

‘No!’ she shook her head. ‘It will give me something to think about when you are gone.’

And that was the moment, the seminal moment. Years later he would look back and remember that moment, remember the two of them sitting side by side, their eyes searching, he deciding to stay, rather than rush away as soon as he was well, as a kind of a thank-you gift to her, hoping his presence would postpone her passage into a life of dreary domesticity. Exhaling, he turned to gaze at the sea. ‘It’s not that bad here. The air is clean and fresh. You’re surrounded by nature. Trees, ocean, sky, wide-open spaces. It’s got its own kind of beauty.’ He thought briefly of quoting a few lines of Keats’ *To Solitude* but having never lived in a city the distinction would probably be lost on her.

Rebecca sighed heavily. After a few moments she said, ‘Yes, it is beautiful, particularly this time of the year. Winter sure drags on though and the fog can weigh you down, weigh everything down. But it’s sometimes on the clearest, bluest days, when the whole world is fully revealed, that you most feel it calling.’

Samuel sat there pondering her words, but he was no longer looking out to sea. He was staring at Rebecca, amazed at this girl, young woman rather, who could speak of such longing and such loss for things yet to be discovered, yet still mourned for. How was it that he should find such a kindred soul here in the midst of nowhere? Or was it merely the voice of youth, echoing his own sentiments?

After a little while, he returned his gaze to the ocean and in the far distance saw a vague white spot where the sky and the water fused.

‘Hey, is that fog rolling in over there do you think? Or is it a cloud? Maybe even an iceberg? Just before that headland to the right.’ He raised his hand and pointed to the east.

‘I see it,’ she said staring hard at the skyline. ‘I think it might be a berg, but it’s too far away to tell right now.’ She paused, her eyes far off, peering at the horizon. ‘That’s how I found you, you know?’

‘No. How? Tell me. Was I carried here on an iceberg?’ He smiled faintly.

She laughed softly. He liked her laugh. It was gentle and assured. He wanted to hear more of her laughter. He hadn’t heard enough laughter lately.

'I don't know about that,' she replied. 'No, watching icebergs is my favourite past time. It's what spring and early summer are all about. I just love them. They're the slow-moving mistresses of the sea, don't you think? Ancient and wise yet graceful and unique. It's as if they each have their own story to tell about what they are, where they've come from, where they're going. It's almost like I hear them calling for me to climb on board, "Come sail the seven seas with me",' she gushed. Then she stopped. 'You probably think I'm foolish, childish,' she shrugged, looking uncomfortably at the grass.

'Not at all.' He wanted her to lift her head, to look at him, to know he did not think her callow. 'So did an iceberg tell you where to find me?'

'No.' She threw a twig at a small stone and watched it bounce away. 'I was scanning the sea for icebergs and that is when I first caught a glimpse of your boat, near Coleman's Point.'

'Where's that?'

'Over there.' She pointed her face and hand to the left. 'I'll show you one day.'

'Did you see me on board?'

'Yes, you were waving your shirt. I thought perhaps you had seen me on the headland?' She looked at him, her expression hopeful.

He almost hated to disappoint her. 'I have no recollection of that,' he said at last.

'Maybe one day you will.'

'Have you ever been up close to an iceberg?'

She shook her head. 'I heard tell how some folk on Fogo, that's an island not far from here, well they had their bay sealed in one year when a giant iceberg ran aground. They had to wait three months till it melted enough before they could get their fishing boat out into the open sea. They weren't too happy apparently.' That half-laugh again. 'What about you?' she asked turning towards him.

'No.' His gaze still levelled at the horizon. 'I've only had about eighteen months at sea and this is my first time this far north. Our major objective was to steer clear of icebergs. But you know it would be something, to be able to get up close and have a look at one, don't you think?'

‘Yes,’ she sighed, in a way that was more an inhalation than an exhalation.

That night at dinner after Rachel said grace and everyone said Amen, Silas looked down the table at Samuel and said, ‘Rebecca tells me that you’ve sailed as far as the Caribbean.’

‘Yes, sir. Last year. It was fascinating.’

‘Was that on the Nightingale?’

‘No, it was on a much bigger vessel. La Paon – The Peacock.’

‘That’s a masculine name for a boat!’ exclaimed Silas.

Samuel faintly smiled. Michel would be enjoying himself right now. ‘My uncle likes to snub convention.’

Silas huffed.

‘Where did you go?’ asked Rachel.

‘We left Québec and headed out through the St Lawrence. When we hit the Atlantic we headed due south to Guadeloupe, Martinique, St Lucia.’

‘What did you bring back?’ she asked.

‘Pineapples, sugar cane, cassava, sweet potatoes, plantains, rum, oranges...’

‘Rum! That’s the devil’s drink.’ Silas’s disapproving eyes glared at Samuel. ‘Did you have that on board the Nightingale?’

‘Yes,’ drawled Samuel, wondering where the conversation was heading.

‘You see, maybe that was the problem with yon boat that went down. Someone up above was not too pleased with what you were carrying.’ Silas pointed to the ceiling with his fork as he spoke.

Samuel halted, thinking, I hear what he’s saying, but I just don’t believe it. He glanced around the table. Only Rebecca’s clear eyes met his. Her eyebrows were slightly raised, her eyes wide. They weren’t full of warning – rather they held a look that said, ‘This is what he is like sometimes.’ I could let this slide thought Samuel, running his fingers through his hair, but maybe... ‘Well Jesus didn’t seem to have a problem with alcohol. He drank it at the Last Supper.’

‘A very solemn occasion,’ noted Silas.

‘And at other times,’ continued Samuel.

‘That was wine, not rum.’

‘Perhaps so, but it was still alcohol. Besides, alcohol also has its medicinal purposes. It has relieved a lot of suffering in its time. My father would vouch for that and raw alcohol is one of the best sterilisers available.’

‘That’s different, that’s for a very specific use. Tell me, is your father a drinking man?’

‘My father drinks from time to time...as does my mother.’ Perhaps not a good time to say everyone in my family drinks, thought Samuel.

‘Well, the French are known for that.’

‘Tell me, Samuel, how long did it take you to sail to the Caribbean?’ inquired Morna.

‘About a month ma’am. Some days we made good time if the trade winds were in our favour.’

‘Did you like being out on the open water for that length of time?’ Morna smiled in encouragement.

‘You get used to it. I’m sure Mr Crowe would agree.’ Samuel was hoping there were some things they could agree on or else he’d be out on his ear soon. ‘The stars at night are wonderful. You see some different ones down there than you do up here.’ He looked up from his end of the table. ‘Mr Crowe,’ he said, ‘can you tell me about some of the voyages you’ve had at sea? The waters around here are still a big mystery to me.’

Everyone turned to look at Silas who eyed Samuel intently while he continued to chew, as if he were weighing up whether to indulge or deny the request. Samuel had no idea that for Silas, being the centre of attention was like a voyage into strange and uncharted waters. After a very protracted period he swallowed and much to everyone’s relief, obliged. He started gingerly at first, it appeared he was choosing his words carefully – not wanting to cause the women too much alarm, or perhaps overly entice Rebecca. But after a while he answered their eager questions. Like any old salty dog, Silas had his share of tales and as the night wore on, Samuel was inclined to think that what Silas didn’t know about seafaring didn’t bear thinking about. In Samuel’s estimation, he held under lock and key a trove of stories as rich and as infamous as the

Grand Banks. He couldn't help wonder, not without a touch of irony, what might be revealed if Silas was well-oiled with half a bottle of good ol' Jamaican rum.

Next morning before breakfast, Silas said to Samuel, ‘Would you like to accompany us to church? Are you up to it do you think?’

Was Silas testing his faith or inviting him into the fold? He cast around for Rebecca, like a blind man seeking guidance. ‘How far to the church?’

‘Oh, about ninety minutes by foot, the same in the boat on a good day.’

‘He can ride Mica with me,’ Rachel said, coming in on the conversation.

‘That’s what I had in mind,’ said Silas.

Samuel looked at Rachel. ‘Don’t worry, she doubles Rebecca and me all the time.’

The trip to church was a welcome respite from the days he’d spent lying inside going over events in his head. Being outside, seeing the rustic, unfamiliar landscape made Samuel feel like he was starting to breathe again, see again, live again. The whole countryside was scattered with outcrops as if a meteorite had exploded.

‘I see why you fish here rather than farm,’ said Samuel loudly, hoping to engage Silas in a conversation. ‘This is one of the rockiest places I’ve ever been to.’

‘Oh we don’t mind the rocks,’ said Silas. ‘God was being extra thoughtful when he made Newfoundland.’

Rebecca called out, ‘Samuel, do you want to know how the rocks ended up here?’

‘Yes, why?’

‘Well,’ she said, turning around to walk backwards as she looked up at him. ‘The story goes that the rocks were the ballast that Noah used for the Ark and when he was passing over here the waters were getting lower so he started throwing out the ballast and this is where he dumped most of it.’ Her cheerful upturned face was daring him to believe her.

Shaking his head Samuel smiled back at her. After about an hour they came over a rise where nestled below was the fishing village of Deception Bay.

To the right were some thirty buildings straddling rocky slabs and buttresses, many single storey, a few two storeys high with steep pitched gabled roofs and dormer windows. With the exception of the red boatsheds along the waterfront they were all white, the majority with charcoal-coloured roofs, the occasional one draped in the same boatshed red of the foreshore. There were no trees in sight, only shrubs and grasses.

The largest building was at the head of the bay, obviously the salt works. At its front a large jetty jutted out into the sea. The same structure hugged the shoreline for a few hundred yards either side, covered in thin flake structures. He could see other stages, smaller ones with dories leaning up against sheds and neat stacks of wooden lobster pots. It was undeniably quaint and, on this still blue morning, undeniably serene; no motors humming, no clanging or hammering, everyone observing the Sabbath. Samuel could not help wonder if little had changed here in over a hundred years.

Half turning to Rachel he asked, 'Why Deception?'

'See how far the wharf extends?' He nodded. 'Even though it may not look it from here, the Bay is deceptively shallow and before they built that wharf any boat that was more than half laden would ground itself at low tide. Even today very few large boats come in. They go to Seldom Come By just across the way. See you can make out Fogo Island in the distance. Everything is plied back and forth.'

Samuel was wondering where they got the timber from for the upkeep of the jetty when he noticed a solitary church on a rise to the east, its tall black steeple the highest man-made mark in sight. Behind it, flanking the hillside, almost casually strewn, were tombstones and crosses, more than he expected to see, given the size of the township. After they dismounted, Silas led him towards a group of suited men and made introductions.

When he met Ronnie, Samuel said, 'I believe I have you to thank for the crutches.'

Ronnie inclined his head ever so slightly. 'How is it?'

'On the mend,' Samuel replied.

'Good to hear. I told Silas last week, I'm happy to take a look at things for you if you want. I'm no expert I might add.'

‘Thank you,’ said Samuel, looking him straight in the eye. ‘Perhaps later.’ People had started moving.

He sat between Silas and Rebecca and shared Rebecca’s hymn book. Each time the organist struck up a new song, she looked at him with raised eyebrows as if to say, ‘Do you know this one?’ He only knew one hymn. Had he failed some test?

When they came round to reciting The Lord’s Prayer Samuel realised with a jolt he was still to write to his parents and his Uncle with the full details of what had happened. On Friday afternoon, Rebecca had returned from school with two telegraphs.

After the service he ambled outside feeling overwhelmed at all that was still ahead of him and all that was behind him...all the losses from his misadventure – not just life, that was tragic enough and three weeks later time had done little to ameliorate his despair, but the boat and now being here he was conscious of people in places even more remote, who counted on supplies and news getting through. They had lost out as well. Being here with these islanders, somehow brought it home to him, in a way that drifting aimlessly in the tender never had. He knew he was unbelievably fortunate to be alive, yet he felt no sense of elation whatsoever. He was just awash with failure and powerlessness. He still seemed to be enveloped in a shroud of incredulity – at what had happened and at his own survival. The fleeting feelings of optimism he had earlier were just that – fleeting.

As he mounted the horse, Ronnie called out. ‘Don’t forget to come and see me, I’m the fourth house on the right past the coopers.’ All Samuel could manage was a nod.

The outing and the subsequent letter writing exhausted him. He wanted to lie down, but first he needed to talk to Silas. He was outside checking some canvas bags he’d been drying. Samuel hobbled up to him. ‘Excuse me, Mr Crowe.’ Silas lifted his eyes and cocked one tufted eyebrow. ‘Can I talk to you for a minute?’

‘I’ll just finish this and I’ll be with you directly.’

Samuel turned towards the sea, that afternoon a gunmetal grey swelling in the shadows of darkening clouds. A little while later he heard Silas say, 'Right, what can I do for you, Samuel?'

He turned back. 'I just wanted to acknowledge everything you have done for me sir. You have been very good to me, your whole family has. I want you to know I appreciate everything you are doing for me and I will organise to repay you. Please know that.'

Silas's eyes flicked over Samuel's face. 'That's very kind of you to offer, Samuel, but it's not necessary. We may not be wealthy folk, but we can manage.'

Not wanting to insult, Samuel said, 'I know you can manage. But I am responsible for the situation I'm in and to me that implies financial responsibility as well.'

Silas sucked in his cheeks giving serious consideration to Samuel's words. 'Well, I don't know about that,' he said at last. 'Seems to me Rebecca had something to do with it too.'

Samuel couldn't help but break into a semblance of a smile at Silas's joke. Silas even smiled a little himself.

'Samuel,' he said, 'if our situations were reversed and by some stroke of foul weather or bad luck, I was homeless and penniless and stranded on your doorstep, would you not help me out in the way we have helped you? I know you and I are different, but I don't believe we are that different.'

'No, we are not that different,' agreed Samuel.

'Well then it's settled. Best get yourself well. That's all you need to worry about.'

Samuel had been on land for over two weeks. His ankle was going down and his appetite was increasing along with his restlessness. Ever since Sunday's outing to church, he made a point of going outside on his crutches and walking further each day to build his strength. Most days there was a steady onshore breeze from the northeast that added an extra challenge to his walks. He'd go once in the morning and again in the afternoon so he wouldn't be there when Rebecca arrived from school, wanting to give the family some time alone without him.

Yet each afternoon when he returned from his wanderings Rebecca would be outside doing something, almost as if she were waiting for him. 'Did you see any icebergs today?' was the first thing she would ask. And after they talked about icebergs or the lack thereof, she would inquire, 'Where did you get to today?' He would tell her how far he walked, what he'd seen and then ask her, 'What did you learn at school today?' and let her carry on. But it wouldn't be long before she turned whatever she was talking about into a question about his life or his views or his plans or his likes. She had a way about her, vicariously trying to eke out her existence, through his experiences.

One day when he was feeling better Samuel decided to pay Ronnie Evans a visit. He hitched another ride with Rachel into the village. During their forced proximity on Mica, Samuel was able to ask Rachel all manner of questions about her life that he couldn't seem to broach in her home. He noticed she talked freely but not enthusiastically. She had a calmness about her that her younger sister lacked. Where Rebecca was restless, Rachel seemed resigned. Resigned to what, he wondered? While Rebecca wanted to live a lot, Rachel needed to live a little more, or so it seemed to Samuel. What sort of life did she see for herself? In another place, perhaps another life, she would have significantly more choices than what she had here.

Rachel had inherited much from her mother. Now that he thought about it she, and for that matter Mrs Crowe, actually reminded him of portraits he'd

seen of Nellie Bly, the American journalist his mother followed with keen interest, one a younger, the other an older version of the photograph in her book *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days*.

Rachel was a more petite, darker version of her mother, with large brown eyes that seemed to glow in certain lights setting off her brown hair, fringed at the front and permanently tied in a bun at the back. She had her mother's oval face and her mother's round cheeks, gentle, even lips, in fact he would have to say perfect lips. She would not be out of place in some nineteenth century European painting.

Rebecca on the other hand had been stamped with many of Silas's features; an oblong face, a clear strong brow, a defined jaw line, a long slender neck and there was no avoiding it – his eyes. They weren't so much deep set or protruding; they simply stood out because of their striking colour and the way they were fringed in golden brown lashes. A blue forged with copper and cobalt like the teal blue waters of the Caribbean. Alluring. But she also had another intriguing feature, one his eyes were drawn to more and more. Her philtrum, the two fine lines that ran from her top lip to the bottom of her nose – in most people barely visible – was carved clearly on her face like a Rodin sculpture. Between the two lines was a pronounced indentation, which seemed to emphasise the curve of her lips even more. To top it all off she was crowned with the soft flowing hair of a young girl, a light chestnut blonde. The overall impression was one of startling originality.

Samuel suppressed a wry laugh. Thinking about these women as he had was surely a sign that he was coming back to the living. It certainly would be for his brother.

In Deception Rachel introduced him to Jonah, Toby and Michael, three lads around his age who worked in the cooperage and had gone to school with Rachel. Toby asked after Esther, Rachel's sister, who years earlier had married his cousin, David, from Salvage. They chatted amicably for a few minutes until Rachel excused herself to run some errands and Samuel excused himself to go find Ronnie.

Ronnie sat Samuel down on a chair on his porch, grabbed a footstool to rest his leg, pulled on a pair of wire-framed glasses and proceeded to peer and

prod gently at Samuel's ankle while waiting for a pot of tea to arrive. He was easy to talk to, much easier than Silas. Ronnie had done several ocean voyages himself when he was a lad, working as an assistant to a medical officer on board large seafaring vessels that traversed between the eastern seaboard and Europe. That was the extent of his medical training. That and whatever books he could lay his hands on.

'Where's the nearest doctor?' asked Samuel.

'There is a doc over at Twillingate. But it's a few hours by boat and if they can last the trip maybe they should have stayed behind, you know what I mean? And more often than not you have to deal with what's immediately in front of you. Stop the bleeding, stitch a person up, bandage a break. The doc keeps me well-supplied. Sometimes you get a visiting quack working for the Grenfell Mission who will come through on a steamer and leave you some bits and pieces. Mostly they're young doctors and nurses come here from America for the summer, their 'down north' experience they call it. The very sick they take on to St Anthony's at the tip of the big island. It's easier to get there in summer. You don't want to get sick in winter I tell you. You have to deal with dogsleds and then in spring, icefloes and growlers.'

'My father's a doctor,' Samuel volunteered, 'and my brother.'

'Well I'll be. You should be treating yourself, lad. Where's that then?'

'My father is in Toronto. Matthew's in Montreal.'

'No doubt your father has seen some things in his life.'

'I imagine he has,' agreed Samuel.

'He would have seen some things if he doctored here, I'd wager you that.' Ronnie stroked his aging brown beard. 'It's not for the faint-hearted. The young ones are the worst. Silas knows plenty about that.'

'How's that?'

'Hmm, well, a couple of years back, late April if my memory serves me correctly, Silas went to check on the Wright family. They lived about four bays around from the Crowes. Bill Wright used to fish on the same boat with Silas. Anyway, a group of them had planned to go to Seldom Come By and Bill didn't turn up so they went without him. And when they got back a day later, there still hadn't been any word. That's what you go on round here, you know.'

You tell people what you are doing and you stick to it, then if you miss a date, people come looking. So Silas set out the next morning, pulled then rowed his boat out of his bay and headed north. The bays don't freeze up completely here, only around the edges, even so there are lots of ice pans floating around. Well anyway, Silas approaches the Wright's bay and what does he see jammed up against some rocks but an upturned boat.

'As he gets closer he sees the Wright's nine year old daughter strapped to the top. Miraculously she was still alive, but her legs were buried to the shins in the frozen ocean.' Ronnie snatched a glance at Samuel's disbelieving face. 'True.' He nodded emphatically. 'It seems Bill's wife and two sons had succumbed to a mystery illness and Bill was not about to wait round for him and Charmaine to follow. So he piled her into their dinghy. From what we can put together the boat must have hit a rogue wave or something, upturned and Bill couldn't seem to right her, so he lashed Charmaine to the top, climbed on board himself, who knows what he was thinking, maybe that the boat would drift back to shore and he could start out all over again.

'Well, he slipped away at some point, and Charmaine slipped a bit too judging by where her feet ended up. What a sorry mess it was. And Silas had to deal with it, all by himself.'

'What did he do?'

'Well, what could he do?' Ronnie replied, his palms upturned. 'He didn't have much choice did he? He had to chop her legs off. He tied tourniquets around her shins, put her stumps in a bucket of icy cold water and they landed here about three hours later.'

Samuel was speechless, his stomach turning as if he had just witnessed Silas committing the brutal act. After a spell he managed to say, 'The poor girl, she must have been in agony.'

'It wasn't too bad actually,' said Ronnie. 'Her legs were already numb and he saved her life. That one we did send through to St John's. I believe they had to take some more off her legs but she came through and was sent to live with her mother's sister down near Carbonear.'

Shaking his head in wonder, Samuel asked, 'How did Silas cope with all of that?'

Ronnie licked his thumb and with it rubbed a dry red spot on the back of his hand. 'Ah well, you know Silas, he doesn't say much. I suspect he prayed about it. But often it doesn't pay to think about these things too much.' He glanced at Samuel when he said that. 'Anyway,' he tapped Samuel on the thigh, 'he won't be chopping your legs off any day soon.'

'Thank Christ for small mercies,' mumbled Samuel.

Chuckling softly, Ronnie continued, 'Even so, I think you should stick with the crutches for another week. Most likely you've damaged your tendons. Keep your ankle strapped and start to walk on it with the aid of just one crutch and take it from there. How's everything else?'

'Alright,' said Samuel with a nod. 'I was sore here on my side for a while.' He touched his ribs. 'But that's not bothering me now.'

'You're looking alot better, even if you are a bit scraggy. You seem to have lost that drawn look you had when I first saw you. You must be getting plenty of fluids. Is there anything else I can do for you?'

Samuel hesitated. There was something he wanted but he hated to ask. He felt like a beggar. But Ronnie had already touched on it. 'I don't suppose I could borrow a razor?'

'No problem,' said Ronnie slapping Samuel on the back as he stood up. 'Let's get you cleaned up.'

An hour later when Rachel returned, not only was Samuel clean shaven, he was clean all over, sparkling from his head to his toe and sporting a newly donated and well-fitting shirt, jacket, trousers and braces. They were a gift from Ronnie. Samuel had refused at first but Ronnie insisted saying they were passed onto him for the very purpose of giving to people in need. Little did he know they had belonged to the long departed Bill Wright.

Samuel broke into a wide grin when he saw Rachel. He couldn't help himself. She reminded him of how startled Rebecca was the day he first awoke. 'It lives,' he joked. Yes today he did feel alive, as if he was coming out of some long self-imposed exile.

'Why Samuel, I hardly recognise you.' She blushed as she tried to snatch quick glances of his clean hair, his beardless face, his generous grin. When

Samuel grinned, really grinned as he was doing today for the first time, he showed all of his teeth, not just his top row but his bottom row as well.

‘Do you approve?’ he asked, holding his hands out wide.

‘Yes much better. But now you look like a stranger to me all over again.’

‘Well do you fancy a ride with a tall not-so-dark stranger?’ he teased.

His suggestiveness rendered her speechless, not so Ronnie. ‘Get on up, Rachel, before he changes his mind.’

‘Come on now, don’t be shy,’ teased Samuel.

They mounted Mica, Samuel at the front holding his crutches across his lap, Rachel behind, with a knapsack on her back. Tapping the crutches, Samuel said in farewell, ‘I’ll return these in a little while and we can talk some more.’

‘I’m not going anywhere.’ Ronnie waved them off. ‘I’ll be here or down at the forge.’

Samuel was in such good spirits he felt like cantering home – a dash bareback to totally awaken his senses. ‘How does Mica handle a canter?’ he asked.

‘With you she’ll probably buck us off and run all the way home.’

‘You’re just having me on. I’m sure you and Rebecca race her all the time.’

‘Rebecca might, I don’t. Besides,’ she said, ‘I have some things in my pack that I don’t want to damage – including a package for you that I collected from the merchant.’

‘Great, but you’re changing the subject. Let’s offload everything and go for a gallop.’ Samuel turned his head and grinned at Rachel in invitation.

‘So it’s a gallop now is it?’

They decided to go home first, unload, then walk Mica back up the slope beyond their house so they could canter along the plateau. Despite the two of them, the horse had no problems breaking into a canter. Rachel and Samuel kept on bumping into each other. At one point the horse shied at a rabbit and they nearly lost their balance, but recovered in time squeezing their legs tightly around the mare. Rachel got the giggles. ‘See I told you she would try and shake us off. Now do you believe me?’

When they stopped to gain their breath, they saw Rebecca off in the distance, racing along then slowing down to gather herself before breaking again into a run. She was in her own little world, blowing along like a thistle flower in the wind.

‘Is she always like that?’ asked Samuel. ‘The only way I’d ever race home after school was if I were late for dinner.’

‘Well, that’s Rebecca for you,’ said Rachel, her voice a quiet study of pride.

Rebecca had been counting down the days left before she was finished with school for the year, for life. It was a bittersweet ending. She had no illusions. The end of school would be the demarcation line between growing up and the rest of her life. And until Samuel had floated in like flotsam, she wasn't in a hurry to get on with the rest of her life.

However with Samuel's arrival she felt torn. She wanted to leave school tomorrow so she could spend every waking moment of every day with him. She was Robinson Crusoe and he was her treasure chest. And as the days passed and Samuel's body and spirit returned, she started to worry that before long he would head back out into the wild blue yonder and not only would she not have spent enough time with him, there would be absolutely nothing she could do to prevent his leaving.

Lost in her thoughts she didn't notice Samuel and Rachel until they charged past, Rachel yelling, 'Woo hoo, Rebecca.' She lifted her eyes and watched Samuel rein Mica to a halt.

'Are you two trying to kill me?' she yelled. She knew it was out of character for her but she was completely unsettled. The two of them were delirious with the speed, with the wind, with laughter. While she was at school they were gallivanting around having a good time.

And as they approached, Rebecca saw a new Samuel: a vividly alive, dazzling with the day new Samuel. His hair shone as if it had been dusted in silver and gold. His eyes sparkled, his teeth gleamed. His whole face just glowed in beautiful, captivating, cheerfulness. She had never before seen such a good-looking young man. As she stood in front of him, she was flustered in a way she had never been. Before, with his beard, he was this gentle, well-considered, older brother person whom she held in awe. A man, whom, once she got over her initial shyness, seemed to be her new best friend; her confidant; her first real life teacher. Even though he was only nineteen, with the beard he looked much older, and oddly, far less intimidating than he did

right now, in front of her, astride their horse, grinning from ear to ear. Grinning with his clean-shaven face, his confident jaw, his square chin and his sensational smile. She had never seen such a transformation.

What's more, standing before him, Rebecca felt her own body opening like a sunflower facing the sun, enlarging, changing inside and out, of its own accord. She could feel her skin tingling, her legs shaking. She didn't know what to make of this new Samuel. It seemed her sister had no problems coming to terms with his latest reincarnation. Rebecca had rescued the old Samuel for her own. Now it seemed Rachel had claimed the new one.

'What's the matter?' asked Samuel.

Her breath caught in her throat. He had detected something amiss! She wanted to instantly flee but knew that would betray her unease even more.

'Nothing,' she said, dryly

'How was school today?'

'Fine.'

'Learn anything new?'

'Not much.'

'Want to go for a ride?'

'Another day maybe.'

'Rebecca, want us to carry your bag for you?' That was Rachel.

'No thanks, I can manage.'

'Anything we can do for you?' asked Samuel.

'No, I'm good.' Please leave me alone. I need to understand what I'm feeling and why. I can't do that with you standing there looking at me.

'Alright, see you at home.' He turned the horse's head and gently kicked her on.

As Rebecca watched them take their leave she knew she didn't understand what was going on. Not so much with them, but with her. How all of sudden she felt she couldn't breathe properly when she was standing there looking up at Samuel. How for some inexplicable reason she had felt scared and exposed, as if he could look inside her and see things there that she couldn't even see.

Setting off again, this time walking slowly, she tried to relax, tried to reassure herself that while she may have not been herself just then, Samuel was hardly to know it was because of him. But how was she going to be the next time she was around him? Was she going to have more awkward moments punctuated by monosyllabic replies? Why was she so uncomfortable around him all of sudden? Why was she upset? Was she angry? Angry at whom? Somehow she needed to sift through these thoughts and make peace with herself and with them, before she walked through their back door. She prayed. She prayed hard. But even so, she didn't feel any better as she walked down the slope. Opening the door with dread, she was almost relieved to see her father at home.

'Hello Rebecca,' he said. Her father was in a good mood. When he was sullen or absorbed he never said hello first.

'Hello Father,' she said with a smile. 'How was the catch?'

'Overflowing.' A brief smile split his beard, even his eyes seemed softer. 'The most fish we've caught at the start of the season since 1908.'

'Splendid news,' enthused Rebecca. She was genuinely happy. It boded well for a good year.

Her mother was handing out mugs of root beer.

'My,' said Rebecca. Her father must be feeling extremely indulgent and jubilant.

'I suppose everyone on Second Chance is celebrating,' noted Samuel.

Swallowing a fizzy mouthful Rebecca said, 'Everyone except the women at the saltworks. They celebrate when they put their feet up. Isn't that right, Mother?'

'They're still celebrating, Rebecca.'

She looked at her mother then quietly took another sip.

'Samuel, do you like fresh cod?' asked Rachel.

'Do I have a choice?' he joked and before Rachel could reply, said, 'Actually, I'm yet to find a fish I don't enjoy.'

'Just as well,' Rachel said with laugh. 'You're going to be living on cod for weeks.'

'You know, Rachel, somehow I think I will manage.'

Rebecca watched Samuel run his fingers through his blonde gold hair from his temple to his nape, his teasing eyes twinkling at her sister and hers glowing back.

That night they had succulent fresh fish dipped in milk and flour, pan-fried and served with a sprinkling of home-made vinegar. Simple, yet delicious. Everyone enjoyed it and the dinner seemed to hold a festive air even though Rebecca was the most withdrawn she had been in weeks. She would glance at the faces around the table and back to her plate, saying little. Everyone seemed to be bubbling along with Samuel's effervescence. He was the most talkative he had been since his arrival and her father too was uncharacteristically vocal. Rebecca wondered if aside from the favourable catch, he was buoyed by the presence of another man in the house.

'When you're more hale we'll get you out on the boat with us, Samuel. Though I have to say you're looking much better than that chap who washed up here a few weeks ago.'

'Count me in,' said Samuel. 'In a week or so, I hope to be rid of the crutches altogether and back to normal. And, if you don't mind, I'd like to stay on for a few weeks and make myself useful before I head off.'

There it was! Rebecca rested her relieved eyes on Samuel. He wasn't going to desert them straight away. Maybe by the time school finished, she would have calmed down and things would be back to normal and she could once again look forward to spending time with him, just like she had up until now.

'So I was wondering,' continued Samuel, 'now that I've started shaving again, is there a mirror around here I can use?'

'That we do not have,' said her father between mouthfuls.

'No problem,' said Samuel. 'I suspect I can manage or sort something out at Deception. Ladies, would you like a mirror to adorn your wall?'

Four heads immediately turned to look at him.

'Don't you know, Samuel, that mirrors bring bad luck,' said Silas. 'Did you have them on board your boat? Break a mirror and you get seven years of bad luck,' he warned. Silas sat there staring off into space shaking his head.

‘Worse though, Samuel,’ said Rachel, ‘if a mirror in your house falls and breaks by itself, someone in the house will die soon.’

For some unknown reason Rebecca felt compelled to add to the mounting pile of evidence. ‘And they can attract lightning during a thunderstorm, so you have to run round and make sure they are all covered up.’ Rebecca glanced at her mother who had not said a word and then she looked at Samuel who looked like he wanted to say a word, and did.

‘That’s just old superstition. Surely you don’t believe it?’

‘Call it what you want,’ said her father. ‘Ignore it at your own peril. But we don’t want any mirrors in this house.’

Samuel glanced around the table till his eyes found hers. She felt him silently communicating a message to her, one she couldn’t fully decipher, or was it one she didn’t want to acknowledge.

That night as they lay in bed, Rachel whispered to Rebecca, ‘I can’t believe how different Samuel looks, can you? It’s like he has been born again. When I was with him on Mica I imagined him on a great steed draped in caparisons, a knight in shining armour. He’s very assured on horseback. You should go for a ride with him one day, Rebecca. We had a grand time.’

‘Yes. Maybe.’ Silence. ‘Have you been riding with him much?’

‘Only today.’ Seconds of prolonged silence ticked by till Rachel wistfully added, ‘I hope he doesn’t leave for a while. I’ve decided I like having him around.’

Don’t we all, thought Rebecca, staring at the ceiling. She lay there for a while then turned towards her sister. ‘Rachel, do you ever wonder if we’ve learnt the right things growing up? Do you ever wonder that we should have learned different things?’

‘Like what?’

‘I don’t know. I just wonder if we’ve learnt how to live here and only live here and how it would be if we ever lived some place else. Would we know how to get by?’ She swallowed before continuing. ‘It seems Samuel knows a world quite different to ours.’

‘He does know a world quite different to ours. He’s from Toronto. He’s been all over the place!’

‘No, I don’t mean it like that. He thinks differently, as if he has knowledge that we haven’t. It makes me wonder if the people we know have not informed us properly.’

‘You’re talking nonsense. Our parents, our teachers, they have given us what we need to live in our world – here. But more than that, I’m sure they have done the best they could. And they have done right by us. What more do you want?’

‘I don’t know.’ Each word came out slowly, separately. ‘Whatever it is I feel I’m missing.’ She rolled back the other way.

My one and only brother,

“At night, in solitude, in tears. Not a star shining, all dark and desolate.”

Samuel Oh Samuel. I can't bear to think of what might have been. Of you living in the world below the brine. When I think of you, I think of us, inseparate. It will always be for me “we two boys together clinging.” Thank you for writing and easing my mind that you are well on the road to recovery and still the engaging, optimistic and brave brother I love and adore. I yearn to have you with me again so I can squeeze your very flesh and blood between my fingers and see the bright light in your eyes.

I know you need some time before you are ready to come home. Do what you must to feel alive and whole again, but do come back soon as our days are long without you. Don't feel bad about Uncle Michel's boat or the supplies. “They mean nothing to me Matthew,” he said. It is just you and the men he weeps for. He too won't let you go when next he sees you.

The folks have taken your news in their stride, thanks to Grandpa's ever calming influence. No doubt Lottie would have had palpitations had she read the letter you sent me. Leise, believe it or not, has had an epiphany. She told me, ‘Matthew, I nearly lost my baby brother and I realise I don't treat him like a brother. I have been given a second chance and I'm not going to squander it.’ Expect a letter any day.

And what an angel, this Rebecca Crowe. You write but little of her and her family, but in your next letter, I want to hear more about this remarkable girl and her beneficent family. My life of late has been adventureless to a fault. In a good week, Friday night El Latino, Saturday night the club, on Sunday a ride if I'm lucky. Other times it's

the hospital from dawn to dusk and beyond. Next summer we are going to Parry Sound together. Gliding through moonlight, pearly pink granite, shooting stars and twilight song.

Love Matthew

Samuel read Matthew's letter twice, picturing Parry Sound, recalling their canoeing trip nearly four years ago. He was right; a holiday together was overdue. Somehow, Saumuel didn't think it would be that year. Strangely he was in no rush to return home. Ought he to write and tell them so? And what would he tell his brother of the remarkable Rebecca and her sweet sister. His brother who from the age of sixteen, appeared as a man of the world, a man with stature and confidence, with dark features and a carefree urbane manner. Matthew was handsome in a dangerous sort of way, aloof and charismatic. For now Samuel wouldn't be indulging him with detailed descriptions of any Newfoundland nymphs. Nor would he be retelling what had transpired that afternoon. For when he and Rachel had come across Rebecca on the barrens he didn't know what to think. Of late, Rebecca craved his company. That afternoon, she was decidedly distant.

The next morning as Rebecca was getting breakfast in the kitchen Samuel came up to her and casually asked, ‘Are you feeling better today?’

She looked at him and once again couldn’t get over how different he looked. What alchemy occurred at Deception yesterday? With his face healed and his beard gone she saw his skin for what it really was: beautiful, like a three-month old baby’s, smooth and even and golden, the skin of a prince. Was her skin like that she wondered? Or was it because of his mother’s French blood? Next time she saw Miss Drysdale she was going to ask her if she had a mirror! But right now the absence of a mirror didn’t change the fact that in all her born days Rebecca had never encountered a man more handsome, and that disturbed her. First it was his eyes. His eyes! From the very beginning she had a bizarre weakness for them and now this. She felt the trembling start up inside her again. ‘Yes, why?’ She wanted to yell at herself, ‘Stop being ridiculous. It is only Samuel!’

‘You just didn’t seem yourself yesterday, that’s all.’

‘Oh,’ was the only reply she could manage. A feeble oh. She uttered it again, when she came home from school and found Rachel lying down on their living room floor with Samuel beside her, his hand on her leg. ‘What are you doing?’ she managed, once she found her powers of speech.

‘I’m making myself useful. I’m measuring Rachel’s legs. I’m going to make her a cleat for her shoes, so she doesn’t have to limp.’

‘You have to do that on the floor, lying down?’ she said, taken aback.

‘Yes, this way her hips are even, giving a true measure of the length of each leg,’ he said, tape measure in hand. ‘Then I can work out how high the attachment needs to be.’

‘Have you ever made a shoe cleat before?’ asked Rebecca, trying not to sound dubious.

‘Well, no.’

'Rebecca,' said Rachel, pushing herself up onto her hands, 'let Samuel be. As long as I don't break my leg in the process, there's no harm in him trying, is there?' She smiled at Samuel who smiled back.

'No, it's your leg.' Rebecca tried to be conciliatory. 'Good luck.' She turned and walked towards the kitchen, any place away from them where she could deal with her latest quandary, that since yesterday had been added to her equation of angst: herself.

Rebecca's world was in a spin. She'd oscillate between wanting to gaze upon Samuel's face, but not wanting to catch his eye, as then the hollow, sickening feeling would start again and she'd barely be able to breathe. To steady herself, she plotted a raft of questions to ask him as his replies would always entrance her. How long do you think icebergs last for? Where would you like to travel to next? And whenever her interest was piqued she was able once more to gaze into his animated face, to ask every question, to tap every last ounce of information and experience he had to offer.

But every so often in their conversations, Samuel would pause and stare at Rebecca, almost as if he was wanting to ask her a question, something entirely different to the topic at hand but then he would swallow before continuing on. At times like this she couldn't handle looking into his eyes. Instead, she would lower her gaze and stare into his mouth, at his teeth and his tongue and watch the words as they came out, listening to the rich deep timbre of his voice. And that was something else about him that stirred her; how someone who was only nineteen could possess the most masculine soothing voice she had ever heard.

On Saturday her mother gave her a rare afternoon off. What to do? Maybe she could walk out to the point and scan for icebergs. She hadn't done much of that lately, though today she would be lucky to see a thing. A large bank of fog hugged the shore. At least the wind had died down for a change. If it were a wet day, she would stay inside, read or do something with her sister. But it wasn't a wet day, grey though it was, and the last thing she wanted was to be with Rachel, hearing her whisper worship-like about Samuel.

Last night at dinner when Rachel said grace, she also said, 'Thank you Lord for sending Samuel to us.' And then when they opened their eyes she said, 'I'm sorry you had to go through what you did to get here Samuel but I'm so happy you made it.'

Rachel had good reason to be elated. Samuel's shoe cleat was a resounding success. Rachel now walked evenly, no bobbing up and down. So why didn't Rebecca feel thrilled for her sister? What was wrong with her!

If only she had a friend who lived close by, a friend she could confide in and laugh with and lose herself with. There was no one. But there was Mica, whom she loved, whom she rarely rode for pleasure, unlike Samuel and Rachel. She would ride her and when she was far away dismount her and lean into her neck and cry like she did sometimes, and be comforted by the horse's warm muzzling lips, her hot damp breath, her sympathetic eyes. That is what she would do.

When she was younger Rebecca had dreams of having her own horse, dreams of Rachel and her riding together enjoying a few hours of windblown exhilaration. And unlike her other dreams, these were well-founded. Late one spring she and Rachel watched in wonder as Mica's foal, Slate, a young colt entered the world. Rebecca instantly fell in love with the gangly creature and his huge brown eyes, spiky mane and crazy cavorting manner. As soon as Mica would let her, Rebecca started handling him. She couldn't wait to ride him, which her father said they would organise for her twelfth birthday.

The summer of 1910 however had not been a good summer for the Crowes and that year Rebecca learnt that bad summers meant bad winters and just how bad things could be. Come March all of the family's supplies were gone and they were reduced to living on cups of tea and bread smeared with the thinnest layer of butter and jam. Their diet soon took its toll. They had nasty cankers, the odd carbuncle. They were listless and constipated. Her father would rise early, sneak out in the pre-dawn light to see if he could bring down an erratic hare or a wintry fox, anything that moved. For days he returned empty handed, then one afternoon Rachel and Rebecca came home to the smell of meat roasting in the kitchen.

Rebecca remembered that. She remembered walking in and smelling the air and how the aroma had only served to intensify her hunger pains, accentuating the emptiness that within hours, perhaps minutes, would know once more what it felt to have food inside.

‘Did father get lucky?’ Rachel had asked.

‘Yes,’ said her mother, not raising her face to her daughters. ‘He prayed to God and God answered.’

But in mere minutes Rebecca knew the horrifying truth. She returned from the barn with a dread so deep it almost prevented her from walking. And worse, that night, despite her protestations, her father ordered her to the dinner table.

‘I’m not hungry,’ she had dared to replied. It was true. Her hollowness had been filled with betrayal, and a shocking, seething, loathing for her father which she was doing her best to mask, feeling justified over it, yet also feeling terribly ashamed of it.

‘You’ll eat when hunger gets the better of you and then we’ll see how proud you are.’

‘She’s not proud, Silas, stop it,’ said Morna.

‘Why couldn’t you have killed a sheep!’ Rebecca couldn’t help herself, she practically yelled at her father. ‘We have a dozen sheep. Why did you have to kill Slate? He was little more than a baby. He’s not stock! He was my pet, more than my pet. He was my friend.’

Her father had slammed his hand down on the table. ‘Those sheep are worth more to us than that young colt ever would be! We need those sheep for wool and lanolin. That horse was expendable and God told me so. I put my trust in him and he provided.’ Her father pointed his knife accusingly at her. ‘You’ll understand one day, Rebecca, and you’ll thank me and God when you realise why you are still alive.’

She sat there stonily until her Mother told her to eat some bread and jam. Then she went upstairs and cried herself to sleep.

Rebecca’s childhood ended that day. From that day onwards something was not right about the world. She couldn’t fathom how her parents could do such a thing. But more than that she couldn’t understand how God could let

such a thing happen, particularly, after all of her prayers. Did he not care for her and Slate? And those thoughts too weighed her down. On one hand he gave her gifts and on the other he took them away. She wondered had she done something wrong to be punished in such a way. She never understood the reasons why and wondered if she ever would.

That was the year Ronnie Evans became her and Rachel's Guardian Angel. Without meaning to tell tales Rachel had told Ronnie about the woeful happenings over the hill. Within days a mysterious food hamper appeared outside their door with provisions to last them a good month. Silas could not refuse it for he did not know to whom to return it, nor was he about to ask around as to the identity of their benefactor.

For weeks afterwards every time Rebecca saw Mica's searching, sorrowful eyes she would just hang her own head and walk away, drowning in fresh misery. Had she known what her father was capable of Rebecca would have taken Slate away and saved him. How would Mica ever trust her again? It was Ronnie and Margaret Evans who helped Rebecca find a path through her troubled existence. Ronnie was the only adult who truly acknowledged her pain. He told her that the reason her heart was breaking was to make room for Slate to live on inside so she would always remember and love him. He said Mica and Slate would have forgiven her because she was so remorseful. They wouldn't want her to keep on suffering.

And once Ronnie had soothed her ailing spirit, once he had shared with her some of the sad and fathomless happenings of his own upbringing, he started telling her happier tales from his early life, from his adventures at sea, of his travels to strange lands and her injured soul found a way to breathe again as it found other things to hold onto.

Samuel came across her when she was leading Mica by the halter back to the barn.

'Can I walk with you?' he asked.

'Sure.' What could she say? They walked along slowly in an awkward silence until Rebecca could bear it no longer. She cleared her throat. 'How's your foot?'

‘It’s the least of my worries.’

That made her look directly at him. ‘Your worries?’

‘I’m starting to think about what I do when I leave. Do I go back and work in shipping with my uncle or do I return to Toronto and do something else. As lovely as here is, I can’t stay forever.’

‘When are you leaving?’

‘Not for a while, not till I’ve pulled my weight around here, but I don’t want to overstay my welcome.’

‘You’re not overstaying your welcome.’ She didn’t want to think of him leaving; she’d done enough thinking of his leaving already.

‘Rebecca, about Rachel...’

Oh, here it comes. ‘Yes?’

‘Well, about Rachel’s shoe, actually. You see, I made that for her as a thank you present. While you’ve been at school she has done a lot for me, made me lunch every day, done my washing, lots of things.’

‘It’s okay, Samuel, you don’t have to explain.’

‘But I want to. Coming up with something for Rachel was easy, obvious. And I’m wondering now if I have gone about this the wrong way. I know that when I first came to, dazed and groggy, I thanked you for rescuing me. I meant it then and I mean it now. You saved my life. And, of all the people in your family, I am indebted to you the most. I will be forever grateful to you. You must know that.’ She nodded, her eyes downcast. She could sense him waiting. She looked up into a smile that spread across his face. She breathed out. It was going to be alright.

Samuel continued, ‘It’s important to me to thank you in a way that is meaningful to you, but I’m struggling with what that is. I know you would like to get off this island for a while. I would love to take you on a trip somewhere but at fourteen I don’t think your parents would allow that.’

‘I’ll be fifteen soon.’

‘Even so, you know what I mean.’ They were outside the barn. Rebecca looped Mica’s halter over the hitching post.

‘Excuse me.’ She ducked inside to grab the horse’s curry comb and brush. When she returned, Samuel grabbed her wrist. She glanced down at his

hands and then slowly raised her eyes to his. They were incredibly earnest, that golden hazel, edged in ebony, framed in bronze lashes. They were unwavering. She felt herself unable to breathe again, unable to break away.

‘Please know that if there is anything I can ever do for you, anything I can help you with, you only have to ask, even after I’m gone. Just write to me. I am in your debt. Okay?’

‘Okay’ she said almost inaudibly.

He released his hand and she turned to her horse. She started brushing Mica’s mane and forelock, which were heavily tangled. In her exertions, her hair fell out of its loose braid and swayed gently as one of her hands brushed Mica’s mane and the other stroked it. Sensing Samuel watching her, she looked up. He was staring at her, with a perplexing, narrowing gaze, looking through her, into the past. ‘Samuel,’ she said, stirring him out of his trance-like state. ‘Samuel!’

‘I remember now,’ he exclaimed, coming up to her.

‘Remember what?’

‘I remember you and my boat and you peering into it and your hair,’ he said grabbing strands of it and watching it glide through his fingers.

‘You do?’ she asked with delight.

‘Yes, I thought I’d run aground on Sable Island, and you were this inquisitive equine creature come to explore a piece of driftwood.’

‘Are you saying I look like a horse?’ she asked half-indignant.

‘No, it was just your hair,’ he tugged it, ‘I don’t know, maybe your yelling sounded like neighing. My mind was quite crazed at the time. Perhaps I thought you were Pegasus come to bear me away to the heavens.’ He paused. ‘Am I in heaven?’ He twirled, his arms outstretched, his eyes skyward, ‘Are you an angel?’, he grinned. There was no escaping his smile. For the first time in days, weeks, she felt her heart glow.

‘Where is this Sable Island?’

‘Don’t you know about Sable?’ His eyes twinkled. ‘Well, let me tell you.’ He paused, collected his thoughts then he began. ‘Picture this. In the middle of the steel blue Atlantic, 200 miles due east of Halifax, Nova Scotia, not far from the main shipping route between the eastern seaboard of North America and

Europe, lies a golden arc. A shimmering crescent of shifting sand dunes battered by winds stronger than you could ever imagine. From the French it has been given the name Sable, meaning sand. For that is largely what you see: sandy dunes that rise from sandy plains that vanish in a sandy mirage.

‘If there’s bad weather to be had in the North Atlantic, you will find it around Sable. Winter storms wreak havoc on the shifting shore, cyclones reshape it and the currents are some of the trickiest to be had in ocean sailing. What’s more the island is one of the foggiest places on earth.’

‘Foggier than Newfoundland?’

‘As foggy,’ said Samuel, smiling at her. ‘With such foul weather and treacherous tides even the best captains steer off-course and run into trouble. Large barques, schooners, steamers, fishing trawlers working the Grand Banks have been shipwrecked there by the hundreds.’

‘How big is this island?’

‘Roughly a mile wide by twenty-five miles long, but curved like a new moon. More than a speck in the ocean but it’s largely flat, a totally treeless terrain, so it’s not that easy to identify even in daylight – not like the cliffs around here. Anyway, with numerous vessels getting stranded there, the British government in the 1700s established two lighthouses in the midst of that roaring remoteness, one at the western tip and one at the eastern tip, and to this day they have been manned by keepers, their families and lifesaving crews. Aren’t you glad you weren’t born there?’ Samuel said in an aside. ‘Two to three boats still go down every year. But now whole crews are saved, some, walking off their boats at low tide, crossing the sand bars and taking shelter with the local residents.’

‘And eating them out of supplies,’ laughed Rebecca.

‘Probably,’ laughed Samuel as well. ‘Anyway, around the time they put up the lighthouses, a Boston clergyman sent horses to graze on the island.’

‘He did what?’ asked Rebecca in disbelief.

‘Surprisingly, there are large parts of the island covered with grass and other low-growing, vegetation. And there are fresh watering holes, which is a good thing, for the lighthouse families as well. But sadly the first band of horses was stolen by privateers and fishermen. Then in the 1850s, a Boston

merchant landed about 60 horses on Sable, animals abandoned by deported Acadians leaving Nova Scotia. These horses did survive. And over time, they lost their domesticity and became the wild Sable Island horses with long flowing manes and tails.'

Rebecca noticed his eyes taking in her hair. 'So they still live there wild and free?'

'Yes, about two hundred or so. Though every so often, some of them are rounded up and shipped off to work in the Cape Breton Coal Mines.

'Oh,' she paused, 'I don't think I wanted to hear that.'

'Well Rebecca with the amount of questions you ask, you are not always going to like the answers you hear.'

She held his eyes for a moment, wondering if he was referring to something else, then breaking eye contact she asked, 'Have you been there?'

'No, as tempting as it sounds. But you see as I was drifting for days on end, lost in the North Atlantic, I did wonder about my chances of being washed up on Sable. I knew if it were to happen, I would be saved.' He stroked Mica's forelock lost in reflection, then his eyes found hers again. 'Do you want to go for a ride and pretend you're wild and free on Sable Island?'

'Yes' she whispered. 'Would...?' she trailed off, lowering her eyes.

'What? Do you want me to come riding with you, Rebecca?'

She raised her tentative eyes to his teasing ones. 'Yes,' she inhaled, 'I'd like that very much.'

'Me too,' he said softly.

When they approached the barrens Samuel asked Rebecca to pull up and to close her eyes. Her eyes immediately sprung wide open. 'Why?'

'Because I asked you to. Trust me! And don't open them.' She hesitated then obliged. 'Now, Rebecca,' he said, sweeping her hair around to one side of her neck and speaking softly into her ear. 'Imagine in front of you is not the sodden damp moor that half of Newfoundland is famous for, but rather a vast white beach full of gentle golden sand. It's a new landscape. A new seascape. Pure and pristine, unravelling like a glorious sash of silk. The sun is shining. The sky is dazzling. You can hear the hush of the tumbling surf, softly

surrendering itself to the shore. The air is laced with salt, but on the edge of the breeze is the soft scent of rushes and rare pink orchids. If you look closely you can see them hidden amongst the straggly beach grass, and, oh, what delight, a dainty white tussock moth is fluttering through the grass. Then a shadow floats by; a large black-backed gull, soaring skywards. All this is before us as we canter along. And when we start to tire at the end of a long sandy straight, what do we see, but the softest, greyest seal, a new born pup with moist dark eyes looking up at us, pleading to be left alone, which we do, because on Sable Island every living creature deserves to live life fully and freely.'

Rebecca was mesmerised. She was back in Samuel's world and his world was on Sable. There was no other place she wanted to be.

'We're going to start riding soon and I want you to keep your eyes closed and look for everything I've just told you. And when you see something, I want you to call it out and tell me where it is and what it looks like. Are you ready?' She solemnly nodded. 'Here we go. Don't worry, I've got you.'

Rebecca was floating, gliding on silver currents across a new crescent moon. It was so peaceful, so luxuriating. She had never had a ride like it. In her mind's eye she was on the beach, the water lapping softly at Mica's hooves, touching her lightly like feathers.

'Where are you?' whispered Samuel.

'We're on the beach. I don't want it to end. I want it to keep going forever. It's softer than snow, like what I think satin must feel like.'

'A-ha.'

And then a few moments later, 'I see the grass. It's swaying, gently lulling back and forth. And over there,' pointing to two o'clock, 'are white fluffy butterflies, perched on single blades of grass.'

'What about the gull? Do you see the gull?'

'Yes, out of the corner of my eye. He's resting on my shoulder.'

Samuel hugged her with his elbows.

'And the pink orchid?'

'He's picked one for me and brought it to me in his beak.'

'Do you see the seal?'

‘No, I see more horses. They want us to play with them.’

And then they teetered slowly to a stop.

‘You can open your eyes now.’

‘I don’t want to.’ She released Mica’s mane and looped her arms over Samuel’s and squeezed him tight. He responded in kind, hugging her from behind.

‘How was that?’

‘It was amazing!’ She opened her eyes and twisted herself part way round to look at him. ‘How do you know so much? How did you learn to take me to another world, just with your voice and your words.’

‘Did I do that?’ he teased.

‘Yes,’ she said, bumping back into him, ‘I will never forget that ride.’ Her face was flushed and ebullient. ‘Thank you.’ Shyly, she turned and pressed her face into his chest.

‘Do you want to do it again?’ he asked glancing down at her.

‘No. I just want to remember that one.’

They walked Mica home in comforting silence. When the house was in sight, Rebecca asked if he had taken Rachel riding to Sable Island.

‘No,’ he said. ‘I just took her racing across the moors. That was as much as she could handle.’ She could hear the smile in his voice. It warmed her heart.

Although it was Summer Samuel wondered if the mercury would ever hit 70 and the looming grey clouds, the swirling fog and the hanging damp would let up so they could shed some layers and once more enjoy the reprieve of sunshine and warmth and bright blue skies. They had marked the longest day a week back and now another milestone, for Rebecca at least – the first day of the rest of her life. School was out, for summer, for life.

The occasion coincided with Samuel's full return to health. He was ready to make the most of the warm, work season. Samuel was busy. Silas was busy. Everyone was busy. Silas would leave on Monday mornings and not return till later in the week when their catch was full, sometimes doing two trips in one week. In his absence the women turned into gardeners and harvesters and homemakers.

With Rebecca's help they hauled the Nightingale onto the dry dock. He had wanted to wait for her father, but she insisted she could manage and that was when he started to get an inkling of the strength hidden beneath layers of light summer clothes. Over the course of one week he sanded it, resealed it with tar and painted it. Often he would get so engrossed that he would look up to see Rachel in front of him with his lunch wrapped in a napkin. He would always take a break, rinse off, put his shirt back on and they would eat lunch together.

He enjoyed those restful moments with Rachel. She did not have her sister's inquiring mind. She was less interested in Samuel's travels, instead harbouring an appetite for the smaller things: the school he went to, the house he grew up in, his sister Analeise and her recent wedding to Randall, an architect. Then one day quite unexpectedly she said, 'I was meant to be married this summer.'

And all Samuel could do was pause in his chewing, stunned by her admission as he struggled for a response. Swallowing he asked, 'What happened?'

‘Connor drowned. He was driving logs on Rattling Brook.’

‘When?’

‘Last April. Two men from the lumber company saw it happen but couldn’t get to him in time,’ she sighed. ‘They found his body by jiggling in water about 300 yards from where he fell. He could swim well enough, but he’d been crushed. They didn’t know if he drowned because he couldn’t force himself between the logs to get his head above water or whether he was crushed first,’ she volunteered.

‘I’m sorry to hear that.’ Samuel glanced at her but she showed very little emotion as if the accident had happened many years ago. ‘When did you become engaged?’

‘He asked me and my parents at Christmas a few months before my seventeenth birthday, before he went away and they said, when I turned seventeen I could get engaged and when I turned eighteen and Connor nineteen we could be married.’

‘That seems young.’

‘It’s not that young for women around here, Samuel. Maybe a little young for men, but Connor was a hard worker and would have been a good provider. Besides there was no one else on Deception I would have wanted to marry and probably no one else on Deception who would have married me. You may not realise but most men around here want strong and able women who can work the stage and work the house and work the plot. I can do all that but I don’t have the strength or stamina of someone like Rebecca.’

‘People should love you for you are, not what you can do,’ noted Samuel. ‘What was his rush in getting engaged?’

‘He was going away and didn’t want me being snapped up by someone else.’ She gave him a half-laugh, similar to her sisters. ‘As if that were likely.’

‘Did you love him?’

‘Yes.’ Rachel paused. ‘In a warm your heart way rather than a fluttering heart way. He was always the boy looking out for me – even from a young age.’

Samuel studied her pensive face. ‘Well that must have been difficult, tragic, losing your friend and your intended.’

Rachel made no reply.

‘You hide it well. How do you feel about it now?’

‘It all happened so fast; we were only engaged for a couple of weeks. We didn’t really have a courtship.’ She sighed. ‘Mother told me it wasn’t God’s plan for me, that my prince was still to come.’ She gave him a hopeful smile.

Samuel smiled in return. ‘One day. What about Rebecca, has she lost someone just as dear? She has dark days at times.’

‘Rebecca...what can I say? She dreams too much. She can’t help losing herself in her restless unrealistic heart.’

After the boats were completed, Samuel volunteered to check the roofs and clear the chimneys. ‘Do you like heights, son?’ Silas asked, handing him a stack of cedar shingles.

Samuel shrugged. ‘On the boats I’m forever climbing up and down the masts. I’m used to it.’

While he worked on the roof the ever-present cloud and fog finally rolled away. The air stilled. In no time he was warm. He lowered his braces, peeled off his shirt hoping that even a slight breeze would spring up to dry the beads of perspiration dotted down his spine, all the while hammering and nailing, gluing and painting. His able body became stronger, his torso tauter, his skin bronzer and his spirit even brighter as he stepped off the ladder – the ladder that you never walked under – and smiled warmly at his waiting entourage. Samuel didn’t give his shirtlessness a second thought. He and his brother had spent years running wild in the summer. That was what one did. But here, things were different or so they used to be.

After her week of delivering sandwiches to Samuel, Rachel was accustomed to the sight of seeing him without his shirt on. Samuel could tell it no longer embarrassed her. If anything, it enthralled her. That day her eyes swept slowly down his body from his exposed neck to the expanse of his shoulders, over his smooth chest with the brown button nipples all the way down to his narrowing waist where his braces hung from his trousers.

Rebecca on the other hand was studying Samuel’s body like she was trying to peel off his skin to understand how this male body was manufactured,

how the muscles flexed and wrapped around bones. How they gave him strength and power.

Meanwhile, Morna saw it all: a strapping specimen of masculinity, one daughter's shameless admiration and the other's intriguing innocence. 'Come, Rachel,' she grabbed her daughter by the forearm, 'I need your help inside.' Over her shoulder she called, 'Rebecca, maybe Samuel needs a clean shirt.'

'The one I had on this morning was clean,' yelled Samuel looking for where his shirt had landed. He wasn't unaware of what was going on. He didn't mean to offend, however he did find the situation rather amusing.

Just as he was about to pull his shirt over his head Rebecca touched his left shoulder. 'Samuel, how did you get those scars?' They were clearly visible: three rough slashes on his left outer shoulder raised in a keloid ridge. 'I remember now seeing them the day I found you.'

'I got them from not being careful,' he ventured. 'For being so engrossed in nature I ignored it.' Her puzzling eyes drilled his face. 'I got swiped by a black bear,' he explained, 'and if it weren't for my brother Matthew I probably wouldn't be here today.'

'When was this?' she asked, looking at him with a mixture of alarm and awe.

'Eleven years ago. We were holidaying on Lake Nipissing. I was eight at the time, Matthew was twelve. We were lying down on a beaver wall, facing each other on opposite sides of what we thought was their entrance, waiting for a little dark snout to appear when something made Matthew look up. About six feet behind me was this black bear sniffing suspiciously. We immediately jumped up and started flapping our arms and hollering to scare it away. But then Matthew glanced behind him and what did he see but two bear cubs on the other side of the bank.'

'No!' Rebecca's eyes widened. 'What did you do?'

'Well, first we pried a branch loose and tossed it in the water upstream, hoping the bear might think it was a fish, but that didn't work. Then Matthew pulled a large stick loose and stood tall, hands and arms and stick above me and growled at the bear. She swung her front paw to knock the stick out of his hand but instead she caught me on the shoulder and knocked me into the

river. I surfaced to see Matthew nearly jousting her with the stick, hissing and growling. He yelled, "The canoe, Samuel, the gun." So I dashed and grabbed the rifle but when I got back there seemed nowhere I could stand to take a clear shot at the bear without risking his life. And I'd only shot the rifle a few times before. So I scrambled along the beaver wall and said in my shaking voice, "I've got the gun."

'Matthew passed the stick he was holding to his left hand and reached behind. Then he said, "Okay, Samuel, let's go, to the canoe. Back-up."

I started to move but he didn't. I said, "Are you coming?" I was practically crying by this stage.

'And he said, "I'll be there when it's safe. Go now." And his voice sounded calm and assured – like our father's – so I backed up. And he yelled at me to get the canoe in the water. All the while holding his ground. When the canoe was ready he fired a single shot. I thought the bear would collapse in a big heap, but she just reared up, veered to the right, and bounded up stream after her two young ones. And in a flash he was with me and we were out of there.'

Rebecca was gazing at him with a look halfway between stunned wonder and relief. 'You're like the cat with nine lives, aren't you? How many more near-death experiences have you had? What happened to the bear?'

'She didn't die by our hand.' Samuel looked deep into her eyes. 'Matthew sent the shot flying over her left shoulder to frighten her. He said he couldn't kill her and leave those two cubs without a mother. So I walked away with three gashes on my shoulder, one for each of the lives Matthew spared that day. And he risked his own life to save mine as well.' He paused for a moment. 'There you go. That is where my weakness for nature got me.'

'You must be close to your brother?'

'I am. He's the best.'

'So how can you bear to live your life so far from him?'

Samuel tried not to smile, "I'll ignore that pun, shall I?" Without pausing he said, 'We just do. He's very involved with medicine but we make the most of the times we are together. And we will spend time together in the future.'

Probably like you and Rachel. You two are close, but one day you will live apart.'

'You know, Samuel, all the time I've thought of getting away from here, dreamt of myself in some other place, I've never consciously thought about leaving my family. But maybe you're right, maybe there will come a day when we are apart for awhile.'

'I hope for you, there is because that is when you really can be the master of your own destiny. And nothing will be the same again.' He brushed his hair back off his forehead. 'I'm hot enough for a swim. Do you want to join me?'

'The water will be cold.'

'I'm counting on it!' He grinned at her doing his all to encourage her.

'Maybe another day.'

'Come on, it's summer. When are you going to swim, if not in summer?' And then a thought dawned on him. 'Do you know how to swim?'

'Yes, I can swim a little. My mother made sure Rachel and I learnt to swim when we were young. She didn't...' Her voice trailed off. 'Maybe I'll just come down with you and see what the water's like and swim another day.'

'What, are you telling me the water is too cold for you? You being a local and all,' Samuel teased.

'No it's not that.' She was avoiding his eyes. 'We'll see. I'll go in and get changed and grab some towels.'

Rebecca returned dressed in the same clothes, holding a single towel in her hand. 'Mother needs me. I'll come another day.'

'She can't even wait twenty minutes?'

Shaking her head, she stepped back from him and his look of pity, at a loss as to what to say to him for she wasn't that disappointed that her mother had asked her to make up some starch. As keen as she was to spend time with Samuel, she had been torn when he asked, knowing it would mean contravening her own personal breaking the ice ritual, which she didn't want to explain. She knew he thought her family had enough odd beliefs. And this one she had concocted all by herself. For the year she had learnt to swim, the first

time she had donned her bathers, had been in a pond on the occasion of her fourth birthday. And she had taken to the water like a fish and everyone marveled at her natural ability to float, to hold her breath underwater, to glide through the water with calm and steady strokes. It was if she were a natural born selkie. And aside from knowing that her parents were pleased with her, Rebecca also felt that God had been pleased with her by giving her this special swimming gift for her birthday – for she had prayed the night before, ‘Dear God, let me not drown, let me be a good swimmer, let me learn quickly so I can be a strong swimmer and look after Rachel so Mother and Father don’t have to worry.’ And God had answered. And every year since she would honour him on her birthday by remembering his kindness in taking care of her on her very first swim and she would swim anew as a mark of respect and as a kind of safeguard against the year to come.

Even though her birthday was just days away she would wait. When the blueberries were ready for picking, when the sightings of icebergs were few and far between, when the calendar marked the fourteenth of July she would brave the waters, come rain, shine or fog, and have her first swim of the year.

On the morning of Rebecca's fifteenth birthday Samuel rose early to prepare a treat for her and her family. His mother had sent him many things in her care package that had arrived a week ago, but it was a simple delicacy, the birthright of every Canadian – a bottle of maple syrup – that he prized the most. Yesterday they had gone to pick blueberries on the barrens. Today he was making French toast with fresh berries, cream and maple syrup as a birthday surprise.

Midway through his preparations he was startled by Rebecca coming into the kitchen from the back door with a towel draped around her shoulders and wet hair. 'You're up early,' he said. 'Most people I know indulge themselves on their birthday by having a lie-in. What have you been doing, washing your hair?'

'No. Taking a swim.'

He hadn't expected her to say that. 'You're an odd one, Rebecca Crowe. The other day when we were melting with the midday heat you wouldn't go swimming but today, at the crack of dawn when there's still a chill in the air, you take a dip.' Lowering his voice he said, 'You should have woken me and taken me too.'

'Maybe next time I will. What are you cooking?' she asked coming towards him.

'A surprise. Hey,' he turned towards her, 'I almost forgot.' He bent to her, whispering, 'Happy birthday,' and in that moment he wanted to kiss her on her tender young mouth. He checked himself and kissed her on the cheek instead. 'I'm sorry I don't have a birthday present for you. Breakfast is as good as it gets.'

'That will be perfect, I'm sure,' she said, unable to look at his eyes, unable to look at his mouth even, noted Samuel. She settled on the shallow dip at the base of his throat and then turned away as she heard footsteps on the stairs.

‘Samuel, this...is...delicious,’ enthused Rachel.

‘It’s heavenly,’ said Rebecca, now composed and helping herself to another spoon of maple syrup. ‘I’ll take it over molasses any day. I think you’re going to have to send me maple syrup every year for my birthday,’ she laughed.

To celebrate her birthday Silas suggested Rebecca take Samuel hunting on the barrens. She looked at Samuel, her expression unreadable, before glancing at her mother and saying, ‘Mother do you need me to help make jam?’

‘No she doesn’t,’ said Silas. ‘She needs you to bring her home something mouth watering for dinner.’

They set off, Rebecca wearing men’s trousers for a change and carrying her father’s shotgun while Samuel carried spare shells, a burlap bag, and a knapsack with water and food for their lunch. As they walked Rebecca described the birds they might come across – specifically grouse and rock ptarmigan – and how to distinguish the male and female.

‘You seem to know a fair bit about them,’ noted Samuel.

‘Well they are my favourite bird,’ she admitted with a grin, ‘taste-wise that is, so that does help to hone one’s skill at identifying them. Wait till you try them.’

Sometime later, a few hundred yards ahead in the sky, they saw a peregrine falcon, seemingly suspended. Rebecca nodded in its direction. ‘It’s onto something.’

She loaded the gun and clutching it in both hands at chest level started walking quietly but steadily forwards. The bird circled and circled and then, as it dived, Rebecca took off. It stooped low and captured its unsuspecting prey. As it did the small flock of ptarmigan startled in surprise and flew about twenty frightened feet before setting back down. In those few, perilous seconds, Rebecca whipped the gun to her shoulder, aimed and fired bringing down three of the larger birds.

Samuel was already by her side. ‘You made that look easy, too easy.’

‘Not always,’ she replied, unable to suppress a small satisfied smile.

Finding them though was a completely different matter.

‘How come you don’t have hunting dogs?’ asked Samuel after five frustrating minutes. ‘You live in Newfoundland for crying out loud. Aren’t you meant to have a Newfoundlander? A retriever or a Labrador even?’

‘No chance of that,’ said Rebecca. ‘When we were little Rachel and I wanted a dog but father wouldn’t have a bar of it. Said he’d been bitten by a dog when he was a boy and his leg got so badly infected he nearly died. For years he was convinced dogs had venomous fangs like snakes. Even today I think he thinks they’re onside with the Devil.’

‘Your father,’ said Samuel shaking his head. ‘He’s one of a kind.’

Eventually they found the three birds and walked on. Rebecca offered to carry the bag suggesting Samuel carry the shotgun but he told her to keep it for now.

They decided to spread out and do a sweep and see what might take flight when surprised. They walked about eighty yards apart keeping each other in clear view. Every so often they would run for a short burst and when Samuel flushed a bird it took off, travelling fast. Simultaneously Rebecca’s gun went to her shoulder and she followed its flight waiting till it was a good distance from Samuel, clear against the stark sky before squeezing the trigger. She took three on the wing, not missing a single one.

‘When did you shoot your first bird?’ asked Samuel, coming up to her, delighting in her prowess.

‘When I was eight.’

‘Eight!’ He couldn’t hide his astonishment. ‘I didn’t start till I was twelve.’

‘That’s seven years too,’ she said, fast with her maths, ‘so we’re even.’

He smiled at her, shaking his head. He didn’t think he was her equal.

‘I wanted to be a crack shooter after hearing all about Annie Oakley,’ Rebecca confided.

‘Did you? Stories open up the world and make you dream of bigger things, don’t they?’ He paused. ‘When I was eight my grandfather showed me this painting of a bison hunt, Caitlin was the artist, and I remember thinking when I grew up I wanted to be able to ride a horse and hunt like a native, even though they hunted with spears, not rifles. Looking back I’d say it was the

motivation for me wanting to learn how to ride a horse and be reasonably accomplished at it.’

‘That you are,’ said Rebecca, beaming at him.

He smiled in return. ‘I have an idea!’ he exclaimed, suddenly excited. ‘When I go back home I’ll send you a book on the French masters. It’s full of the Impressionists and all their beautiful watercolours and it’s got Matisse and Gauguin and his vibrant paintings of his time in Tahiti. It’s even got Rodin in it. He’s an amazing French sculptor. I am in awe of his work. One day I hope to see his statues in real life.’

‘Do you? What are his statues of?’

‘People mostly, sometimes the odd animal. He is so talented that when he produced ‘The Age of Bronze’ all the critics couldn’t believe he had created it by hand. It was so lifelike they were convinced he made it out of a cast mould. But he hadn’t.’

‘What’s this Age of Bronze statue of?’

‘A Belgian soldier, a naked one.’

‘Naked!’ She stared at Samuel, her expression dubious.

‘Yes. Naked and life size.’

‘Are most sculptures naked?’

‘Yes, a number are. He’s—’

‘Does he make these up from his imagination or do people...’

‘Yes,’ said Samuel, unable to stifle his laugh. ‘People do take their clothes off and pose.’

‘No!’

‘Yes!’ Their eyes met and held while he shook his head in wry amusement. ‘Tell me Rebecca, what do we learn from the human body when we keep it hidden? It is something to marvel at, to explore, to study and admire. It is not something to be ashamed of. Like everything else in this world, it is something to appreciate and understand.’

‘Maybe,’ she conceded.

‘Maybe? Come on! We are born naked, not wrapped in a blanket.’

‘Well, yes. But mostly we need to keep covered up.’

‘Granted there’s a time and a place for everything and shelter, clothing and protection are basic human needs. But I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about function and form and humanity. I’m talking about skin and senses and spirit. Artists understand this and so do doctors. My father has had to study human bodies in all their forms, alive and dead. And even dead, he says they’re fascinating. Inside and out.’

She gazed at him and in her eyes he saw her trying to grasp something new.

‘And another thing,’ Samuel continued, ‘Sometimes when you’re clothed you don’t really feel things. You don’t feel the tickle of your dog’s hair across your chest as he pounces on you and licks you under your chin. You don’t feel the rain splashing on your back in a thunderstorm, you can’t experience the floating sensation of total immersion in water, you can’t feel the sensuality of another person’s skin.’ He paused thinking perhaps he better stop there, but then temptation got the better of him. ‘Have you ever swam naked?’

‘No! Of course not!’ Her eyes were downcast.

They walked on in silence. After several steps Samuel felt perhaps he should apologise for making her feel uncomfortable. He was about to touch her arm when Rebecca turned to him and said, ‘I guess having a bath doesn’t count?’

He laughed loudly at that and she with him. ‘So I gather you would you happily pose nude for a sculptor?’

‘You bet!’ He flashed her a grin. ‘If I were lucky to model for Rodin I would gladly pose nude, be carved in marble or cast and dipped in bronze for posterity. He has this way of making anyone look beautiful, strong and self possessed – clothed or not.’ He paused. ‘You’d make a great model, Rebecca.’

‘What, beautiful strong and self-possessed?’

‘Yes. He’d capture you in your hunting garb, gun raised to your shoulder, the whole world in your sights. It would make a magnificent subject. Newfoundland’s version of Annie Oakley immortalised in France. And people would look at it and go, “Who is this woman? What is her story?”’

‘She doesn’t have a story. You’re the one with the stories, Samuel.’

‘She does have a story. We all have stories. That’s what I love about art. It’s a glimpse of another world through someone else’s eyes, someone else’s interpretation of a story. I think you would find it fascinating.’

Rebecca agreed but then said, ‘There’s just one problem with that book as you describe it.’

‘What’s that?’

‘If my parents got hold of it they would burn it.’

That night after they had dined on delicately roasted ptarmigan with sage and wild parsley stuffing followed by rhubarb and blueberry pie, Silas said their little band of hunters and collectors had done rather well.

Samuel looked sideways in admiration at Rebecca. ‘Your daughter’s a fine marksman.’ Although he had ended up shooting two more birds than Rebecca, it was only because she had set it up that way.

‘She doesn’t do too bad,’ acknowledged Silas, ‘and she can land a fish or two. As can Rachel.’ His eyes darted from one girl to the next.

Two days later, the three of them, again at Silas’s urging, went salmon fishing at Anchor Brook, a reportedly high return spot at the base of a waterfall in a cove, four bays to the west of the Crowes. There, Samuel discovered that Rebecca did fish as well as she shot, though to his astonishment she wanted to throw the first one she caught back.

‘Please tell me you are throwing this fish back because it’s undersize which somehow I doubt, or loaded with eggs!’ Samuel implored. ‘Please tell me you are not throwing this fish back because your father once told you not to keep the first fish of the day or else you will be unlucky for the rest of the day, for time immemorial.’ He couldn’t get over how two intelligent girls were so unquestioning in some matters, so falsely indoctrinated.

Rebecca and Rachel exchanged a quick glance. ‘What do you say, Rache?’

‘I tell you what I say,’ said Samuel wresting the fish from her. ‘I’m keeping this fish whether you like it or not. Whether your father likes it or not.’ They stared at Samuel. He stared back. ‘Really you two, that notion is just ludicrous. And Rebecca, if you believe that, then you know what? The other day when you shot down your first bird, you should have cast it skywards, to

ensure you had good luck for the rest of the day. Because otherwise it's a complete double standard. Talk about superstitious nonsense.'

'Maybe,' said Rachel, springing to Rebecca's defence, 'it's more about giving thanks and honouring the fact that God has provided.'

'You do that when you say grace,' said Samuel, his voice softening, 'and you do that by not being greedy, by not taking more than you need. But here I'd say you could do with all the provisions you can get.'

They fished for another hour and were rewarded with three more fish and then not a bite for quite some time. All the while Samuel's eyes would go from staring at the water in front of him, to tracing Rachel's line up towards her hands and then up further to her placid, smiling face, then back to the water in front of him, then to his left, to Rebecca and the pendulum of emotions on her unguarded face: one moment melancholy, the next, when she caught his eye, a smile of shy joy. Something about her blazing tumescence dissolved him. Something about her quiet capabilities humbled him. Sometime later she stood up and stretched. 'Samuel,' she turned to him, 'would you like to swim now?'

'Yes!' He shot up winding in his line. It was a sensational summer's day by any standard. Only the odd wisp of cloud stretched across the royal blue summer sky. He was ready for a swim at nine o'clock after he had rowed the ninety-minutes over. But they told him he'd frighten all the fish away if they went swimming first.

'I'll show you the cave as well.'

'What cave?'

'There is a cave behind the waterfall.'

Samuel went on ahead while Rebecca changed into a charcoal-coloured outfit with three quarter length pants and sleeves. Rachel decided against swimming, volunteering to prepare lunch instead. When they waded into the water even Rebecca gasped a little. The water temperature stole their breath away.

'You have to keep moving don't you, or else you feel like you will seize up,' said Samuel.

‘Yes, even when it’s sunny like today. At least here with the fresh water flowing it’s not as cold as in our cove. Let’s go.’ She took off towards the waterfall. He followed. When it was just two metres in front of them, crashing down in a sheet of white water they halted. ‘We go round here to the side,’ yelled Rebecca, ‘it’s easier. You still have to kick hard and strong but you’ll get through and when you feel the pressure on your knees, swim to the surface like this,’ she held her hand at a 45 degree angle, ‘and then you can ride the bubbles to the top.’

‘Let’s go together.’ He grabbed her hand, ‘on the count of three.’ She took a deep breath and dived down and he was right beside her. Breaking the surface on the other side, they gulped in air and smiled at each other. Rebecca went to pull away, but Samuel held on, marvelling at her. ‘You’re a mermaid that’s what you are, a naiad. I have read about creatures like you,’ he teased, ‘but I thought they were only myths.’ Rebecca smiled at him in delight. ‘Is there anything you can’t do?’

Her grin wavered. ‘Yes, I can’t stop you from leaving.’

Their eyes met and held. After interminable moments he reached out and touched her face. ‘I know.’

She led him to the right, where they scrambled up the rocks and crawled to the small cave carved out by the forces of nature, barely three feet deep, nearly four feet high and across. ‘Here,’ she patted the rock as she moved to sit on the ledge and dangle her feet over the edge. She took a deep breath, turned to him and gave him a smile full of sheer delight. ‘It’s magic isn’t it?’ They gazed out at the waterfall at the sparkling curtain of light, droplets glowing in the strange soft backlight. He reached for her hand again and she let him take it, clasping his strongly in her own. They sat in the crashing silence looking from the curtain of water to each other’s smiling face and as they did, a grateful look passed from one to the other as if they had just shared a special childhood celebration, like a rite of passage and both were aware of its significance.

They had been rowing for about twenty minutes when Samuel spotted a boat coming towards them. Both girls turned around. 'It's coming from Petrie's Bay,' Rachel said. 'Slow down, Samuel.'

'Who's rowing it?' asked Rebecca, squinting. 'It must be...William?' She exchanged looks with her sister. 'Back, Samuel, towards the boat.' As they came closer, Rebecca called out. 'Hello William, we see you, we're coming.'

The lad stopped and looked over his shoulder. When they came alongside, Samuel was surprised to discover that William could be no older than ten.

'What's up?' asked Rebecca.

'It's mother, she's had a fall. Hurt herself real bad,' the boy panted.

'Oh no,' said Rebecca.

'Come here,' said Rachel reaching out to help William across. 'We'll tie your boat to ours and go see what we can do for your mother.'

Rebecca moved across and took an oar from Samuel and the two of them rowed like they were in a rowing race. When they reached the Petrie's stage, Samuel told them to go ahead. Coming to the house barely a minute after, he found Rebecca and Rachel leaning over the silent figure of Annie Petrie at the foot of the outside stairs, a bloodied towel wrapped around her head. But Samuel didn't need to remove it to see the state of her. Her puffed face was grotesque. He was relieved to feel a pulse in her neck. 'She's alive, but she needs a doctor. Here, help me roll her onto her side.' The girls obliged while three anxious tiny faces stared at them: William, together with his younger sister, Mary holding on her hip her whimpering baby brother, Franklin. At the base of Mrs Petrie's skull, about an inch above where the spinal chord ends, where most people have a slightly raised bump was a bloodied mess of splintered bone. A pool of blood lay on the flat stone underneath.

'How did this happen?' Samuel asked.

‘I didn’t see it happen,’ said William. ‘She was carrying a basket of wood and I guess she slipped and landed on her head.’

‘She landed on her head alright,’ said Samuel, shaking his own with dread.

‘Oh, it’s all my fault,’ wailed William. ‘I should have been carrying the basket for her. I told her I would do it before it got dark. I just got busy with my snares.’

‘Hush,’ said Rachel, ‘it’s nobody’s fault. It’s just an unfortunate accident.’ She put her arm around the trembling lad. ‘When’s your father’s due back from the Grand Banks?’

‘Not till the end of the September.’

Rachel, Rebecca and Samuel all exchanged looks. ‘We’ll have to move her to Ronnie’s, maybe even to Twillingate,’ said Samuel. ‘There’s a doctor there, right? She’s got pressure building up inside her head that needs to be released somehow. I’ve heard about this from my father. The brain swells up and because of the rigidity of the skull it’s under enormous pressure – see how puffed her face is because of this?’

‘You two take her,’ said Rachel. ‘I’ll look after the children. Call in and tell mother on the way so she doesn’t worry.’

‘William, say goodbye to your mother,’ said Rebecca. ‘You too, Mary and Frank. She’s got to go away for a little while.’

‘You take her to doctor?’ asked Mary.

‘Yes, to Doctor Ron to start with,’ said Rebecca.

‘Will she be alright?’ asked William, his voice shaking.

‘We’ll pray for her,’ said Rachel, patting his shoulder once more.

‘Here, Samuel, you take—’, but before Rebecca could say, ‘her feet,’ Samuel had bent down and hoisted Mrs Petrie up in both his arms.

‘Rachel, grab some blankets. We need to keep her warm. She’ll be in shock.’

The sisters raced ahead and climbed into their dory ready to take Mrs Petrie as Samuel lowered her across.

‘Here,’ said Rebecca, handing Rachel two trout. ‘We’ll be back tomorrow.’

They made Mrs Petrie as comfortable as possible. 'Let's take it in turns to row,' said Samuel. 'I'll row first and then you can row when I get tired.'

Samuel didn't think Mrs Petrie's prospects were all that promising, but he didn't want to voice his doubts. One thing he had learnt from his father, never talk in doomed tones in front of patients even if they were unconscious. But he was amazed at how rough life was here for these people on the edge of the earth. How a simple mishap, doing something as common and everyday as bringing in firewood could result in this precarious life and death situation Mrs Petrie now faced. That these people somehow managed to carve out a life here in asperity, in largely tenuous, subsistence circumstances was commendable. And part of him could understand its appeal. But what about its downside? Limited educational possibilities, scarce work prospects, minimal social engagements, and now highlighted by the plight of this woman, even more so than his ordeal, the desperate lack of medical services. Rebecca definitely would be better off this island, he thought.

'Samuel, where are you? You seemed lost in your thoughts.'

'Am I?' Between exertions he said, 'You know, it's hard to believe that in a place as quiet and as remote and as peaceful as here you can still have major accidents.'

'Is this major?'

'This is major. Head wounds can be serious.'

'Do you think Ronnie will be able to fix her?'

'I think Ronnie will need help.'

After a while, Rebecca said in a hushed voice, 'You know Samuel, sometimes I think that the only way I am ever going to get off this island and see another place is if I were to have a major accident.'

He paused mid-row, alarmed by her admission. 'Don't be silly.'

She shrugged. 'I don't know...tragedy, death, touches every family around here. And occasionally I wonder that in my wanting to escape, to see beyond this island, that my dreams, my prayers will be answered in a shackled kind of way. That somehow I'll inadvertently have a major accident or perhaps I'll be granted my wish but it will be something like this, "Here you go, you can

get off the island and see the world, but oh, I'm sorry, you have a mystery disease and you are going to go blind very soon".'

'That's a tortuous form of rationale Rebecca. You are feeling guilty about having dreams and desires and you are letting that guilt get the better of you. You need to banish those thoughts. You will leave this island one day and in perfect health.'

'You think so?'

'I'm certain of it.'

'How can you be so certain?'

Smiling, Samuel said, 'Because you want it so badly. You will make it happen. Even if you have to swim off this island to make it happen you will. I have seen what you do when you put your mind to it and I believe you could do anything you wanted to.'

'Really?' she asked, her voice hopeful.

'Yes. You just have to decide what it is you really want and go after it.' He paused. She was looking at him in total rapture, her eyes on fire catching the light from the slowly descending sun. 'What?' he asked. He wanted to stop rowing that instant, reach out and stroke her face like he'd done just a few hours ago. To remember this moment, not just with his eyes but with his fingers also.

'No one has ever said anything like that to me before. No one.' She shook her head. 'You are the first person who has ever said they believe in me.'

'I'm sure your parents and Rachel believe in you. Your teachers probably did as well. Your parents probably don't want to encourage you that's all.' Leaning into her, in his huskiest voice to date, with a small smile teasing his lips, Samuel said, 'What is it that you really want Rebecca?'

She averted her eyes turning her head to the side so he saw her only in profile. 'I already told you,' she whispered. She sat staring at the water, not meeting his gaze.

'What can we do about that?' he murmured as he started rowing once more.

An hour later, they pulled into their cove. 'I'll stay here,' said Samuel, reaching for the buckets of fish to transfer to the stage. 'Sort out this lot.'

'I'll do that,' said Rebecca. 'You go. If she were to wake I think it would be better for her to be with someone she knows.' Samuel was off, taking two steps at a time. When he returned five minutes later he was panting. 'Your mother's coming with me. She wants you to ride Mica to Deception. You'll get there before us and you can help Ronnie prepare. Telegraph Twillingate.'

Rebecca rode hard and fast to Deception. Samuel rowed hard and fast to Deception, only stopping to take a drink from a canteen when Morna offered. They talked little. At one point she said, 'Thank you for doing this, Samuel.'

'Mrs Crowe,' he said pausing to wipe his forehead with the back of his hand, 'after everything you have done for me, there is absolutely no need to thank me. I am only too happy to assist.'

'I know, but thank you all the same.' A little while later, she spoke again. 'This could have been me, Samuel.' She shook her head. 'Some years ago I took a nasty fall, one January on some black ice. I had a wooden pail in my hand with some dried fish I'd got out of the store and some eggs from the barn. I knew I was going down but for some stupid reason I didn't want to drop the bucket because I knew I would break the eggs. How ridiculous was that. How foolish. So what did I do? I hit the ground completely, landed on my lower back here.' She reached around behind herself. 'A dreadful blow, must have hit my kidneys or something. Of course I was still holding onto the wooden pail but my elbows were in agony. Excruciating pain. They too had somehow managed to take the full force of the blow, which was probably a good thing as my head didn't hit the ground. My neck jerked back though. I remember that. I had a terrible strain, it took weeks to get better, but that wasn't the worst of it. The worst of it was I broke my waters and less than a day later Paul was born.' She sighed, her eyes glazing over.

'He was just too young, too tiny. His little lungs weren't properly formed and he couldn't breathe. What a nightmare. It's such a terrible torture to see one so tiny, so helpless, struggle for every breath. You can't help but imagine the pain the wee one must feel. You can see it with every stolen breath they take, almost as if they are slowly drowning right in front of you. And you stand by all the time just helpless. What can you do? His tiny face was so blue, like he was being strangled, dark blue beneath the translucent skin. I put my mouth

over his nose and mouth and blew air into his lungs. Hour after hour I did that. I'd do it for five minutes and then I'd give it a break for five minutes as my head was totally in a spin. I was so giddy and then I'd do it again for another five minutes,' she said, shaking her head at the memory and looking away from Samuel across the sea at the sun slowly sinking to the horizon. 'Silas stopped me in the end. Said I would run out of air myself and then what good would I be to him, to Esther? Poor little Paul. He didn't even last a full day.'

Samuel thought she had finished, but after a spell she said, 'What a painful time all round,' her voice tight. 'I wouldn't wish that experience on anyone. I hope to heaven Annie is not with child.'

He heard Morna take a ragged breath and then she was quiet. 'I'm sorry,' he said into the stillness.

She waved him off. 'It was a long time ago now.'

'How long?'

'Well, Esther is twenty-six,' she sighed. 'That would make Luke twenty-four and Paul twenty-three. So twenty-three years ago.'

'And Luke?' asked Samuel, surprised at the mention of another sibling he knew nothing about. 'Where is he?'

'He was stillborn.'

Samuel softly gasped. 'I am sorry. That must have been hard...losing two sons.'

Morna looked at him and nodded, her eyes grave. Then in a barely-there voice she said, 'We lost four boys.'

Samuel halted in his rowing. 'You lost four boys,' he repeated, almost dumbstruck. 'What happened?' And then as an afterthought he said, 'I'm sorry, do you mind talking about them?'

Morna gave him a faint smile. 'It's fine to talk about them once in a while. After Paul I had two more boys in quick succession. Simon and Isaac. Had they lived they would be twenty-two and twenty-one.'

'And were they born healthy?' ventured Samuel.

'They were brimming with life and boyish curiosity,' Morna smiled faintly at the memory. 'You couldn't hold them back. They were little rascals the pair of them. Then one year when I was working on our stage and Silas

was away, I left them for about twenty minutes while I went up to prepare lunch thinking they would be right by themselves. They weren't babies; they were nearly five and four. Esther was up above doing the ironing that day. She was nine going on ten. When I came back I discovered they had tried to row off in the spare tender, trying to be big strong fishermen like their father, who knows. We allowed them to play in the boat but only when it was tied to the stage and one of us was present. 'The boat capsized and they drowned.' Her sigh was unmistakable. 'I was pregnant with Rachel, my big belly bobbing out in front of me. I couldn't swim out to them in time, though I tried, how I tried.'

Samuel shook his head in sympathy; it was all he could do. 'How wretched for you,' his voice solemn. 'I'm surprised you didn't up and leave.'

'My word, Samuel, some days we did want to but we'd only end up somewhere else by the sea. Silas was born a fisherman and he'll die a fisherman.' Morna became silent, seeming to go inside herself. Then in an unfamiliar voice she murmured, 'They, were hard times.'

Samuel looked into her eyes. In their depths he had a glimpse of her sorrow and how it must have weighed her down like an anchor dragging the seabed of her soul.

Trying to be optimistic, he said, 'Then you had Rachel...'

'Yes,' Morna quietly agreed. 'It wasn't a time of great joy though...she seemed part of a different world for a while, not our world. Rachel was a small baby and for the first time ever I hardly had any milk, she grew slowly and she was gone two before we noticed the problem with her leg. I worry that I caused that somehow. And I can't tell you how much I lived on tenterhooks when I was pregnant with Rebecca.'

'I'd say it was high time your luck changed.' His words lingered.

'So did your mother only have the three?'

'Yes, as far as I know.'

'Well lucky for her that she only had to go through three births to get three. My odds weren't so good.' She looked away from Samuel. Softly she said, 'Then again, I should be grateful that they're all in Heaven now.'

Annie Petrie died that night at thirty-seven minutes past eleven. The telegraph from the doctor at Twillingate advised that they were to keep the patient elevated and place ice on her head to reduce the swelling. That much they could have figured out themselves, thought Samuel. He and Ronnie merely sat with the dying. After she had passed away, Samuel said, ‘You know moments like these make me wonder how islands like yours are still inhabited. The odds seem so stacked against folk here.’

‘Oh, I don’t know, Samuel, wasn’t it Daniel Boone who said: “A population of ten to the square mile was inconveniently crowded”?’

Samuel gave him a look.

Ronnie sighed in agreement. ‘It’s not an easy life for sure. But for most, it’s the only life they know. They’re not working in polluted factories; their children are not in some dingy place losing their eyesight or their lungs. They’re not living in crowded hovels, which most likely would be their lot if they were to move to the city.’ After a pause, he looked directly at Samuel. ‘You seemed to handle this episode well. Very calm and clear-headed in the face of an emergency.’

‘I must be my father’s son,’ Samuel said, matter-of-factly.

‘Maybe you’re meant to be a doctor after all.’

‘Maybe,’ he breathed out, keenly aware that had he been his father or brother, Mrs Petrie’s outcome perhaps would have been dramatically different.

Samuel was out at the end of the peninsula when he first saw it. Resting his bone-weary shoulder after spending a good hour chopping a fallen spruce, he had wandered through the small forest to the end of the point where he stopped to stare at the enormous blue ocean glistening in the summer sun. And there it was. Huge, even from that distance, floating along like a gigantic nautilus shell. Near one end a cavern had been washed out by the swirling ocean currents. He was standing on the very spot where Rebecca had chanced upon him and now the iceberg was following the same trajectory he had. It was surreal and breathtaking to see such a large object simply flowing along, totally silent yet powered by invisible forces. He understood immediately how Rebecca was drawn to them. And no sooner had he thought that then the idea was upon him.

He dashed back to the house. Where was she? God she could be anywhere. He found her inside with her mother and sister and the Petrie children, helping them with the never-ending fruit bottling. It was like the tropics in there. He was mildly panting.

‘There you are,’ he said, smiling lightly, running his hands through his hair. ‘Mrs Crowe, I need to borrow Rebecca for a while if that’s alright.’

‘Why, Samuel, of course. Is everything alright? Do you need two extra pairs of hands?’

‘No, thanks, I’m good. Everything’s fine. I just need her help for a few hours.’

No sooner, were they out the door, when Rebecca asked, ‘What is it, Samuel?’

‘I can’t say just now but quickly, we need to put to in the Nightingale.’ That was all the explanation he gave as he tore down the hill to the Crowe’s stage, Rebecca in eager pursuit.

After they launched, she tried again.

‘No, Miss Curious, I can’t tell you, but I will tell you this much: I can take it from here. You just sit over there and close your eyes like you did that day we went riding on Mica to Sable Island.’

She smiled warmly as she moved away from him, but after a few seconds she said, ‘Come on, Samuel, give it up,’ her eyes practically begging.

‘Haven’t you ever heard, curiosity killed the cat? When have I ever denied you and not answered your questions?’ She stared at him silently. ‘That’s right, never, so have a little trust,’ he admonished her but in a playful way. ‘And just to be sure you keep your eyes closed I’m going to bind them.’ He cast around for something to use. There was nothing in the boat.

‘With what?’ said Rebecca, a smug smile on her face.

‘With my shirt.’ He undid the top two buttons, pulled it over his head, rolled it into a bandage and knelt down in front of her to tie it around her head. ‘Like that,’ he said.

Rebecca could feel the slightest breeze on her body, or was that their movement through the water creating that breeze. And she could smell Samuel on his shirt, his sweat and his Samuel smell, mixed with the sharp tang of freshly cut, evergreen pine. After a while, he told her she could sing if she wanted to. ‘It might make the time go faster.’

‘I’m not singing, I’m listening,’ she replied.

‘What do you hear then?’

‘Birds, the water lapping the boat, you dipping the oars, you grunting every so often, but that’s enough, I’m not falling for your questions because then I won’t be able to listen and work out where we are going.’

But as Samuel pulled the oars through the water she sensed the chill in the air and gasped in realisation at what they were about to uncover.

‘What’s the matter?’ he asked, concerned.

‘Nothing,’ her voice catching. Any moment she was going to cry. She took a shallow breath and smiled her biggest smile for him. She wasn’t about to deny him this. She breathed hard. She almost wanted to lean over and press her face to his chest like she had done on Mica that day.

A few minutes later she asked, ‘Do you see anything?’

‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘your face. It looks most expectant.’

Rebecca laughed and the laughter eased her emotion.

She heard him say, ‘Getting close.’ Not long after, he slowed his rowing considerably. A few minutes later they bumped up against something.

‘What was that?’ asked Rebecca, steadying herself on the seat, then moving her hands to her head.

‘Rebecca! Leave it on! Just a little bit longer.’

‘Okay, but what was that?’

‘It was nothing,’ he said.

‘It was something!’

‘Yes a nothing something.’ He stopped rowing. ‘Give me your hands.’ She gave him her hands. ‘Now slide off the seat and sit on the bottom of the boat and slide down like you are lying in bed.’ With his help she squirmed into place. ‘Right, I’m going to come over and join you.’ Steadily, he moved across. ‘Now I’m going to take off your blindfold but keep your eyes closed till I say you can open them.’ He pulled his shirt away from her head. ‘Okay, open.’

And she did, almost cautiously, slowly adjusting her eyes to the blue light all around: a brilliant blue filtered light, sparkling in patches like sapphires and diamonds and aquamarines. She glanced at Samuel and found him bathed in a blue aura, a holy light, like the second coming, such an ethereal moment.

‘Where are we?’ she whispered.

‘In an ice cave, floating along with an iceberg.’

In a million years she never would have expected this. Astonished, she sat up. To her right she could see the brighter, whiter light beyond Samuel where the opening was. ‘You rowed us out to an iceberg? Not just any iceberg but one that has a cave like Aladdin’s?’ Now she did cry. But through her tears her face radiated absolute joy. She was mesmerised, and not just with the iceberg. ‘I don’t believe it.’ Slowly she lowered herself back down. ‘I must be dreaming.’ Rebecca folded her hands across her chest and stared in awe at the crystal dome overhead. Her eyes glinted, like the shimmering blue light above, taking in the entrancing expanse of the blue cavern.

‘Samuel, this, is, amazing. Thank you!’ She glanced at him and could see the abundant pleasure on his face. She touched his bare chest shyly, gently, in

gratitude. She felt the exhilaration of discovery, of something new, of being fully alive. Her heart was in her throat, such a transcendental moment. She reached for his hand and squeezed it. 'Is such a thing really possible?' she whispered. She held onto his hand while they both stared in wonder and awe at nature's creation. 'Look,' she said as she released his hand and pointed to a shape within the ice like a new crescent moon, a darker blue imprint in the blue surround.

But Samuel was past looking at the crystal cove above, past looking at this stunning work of nature, for he was looking at another. He just loved watching her face come alive. It became a shining light of pure innocence, a vessel full of wonder, as the melancholy slipped away and sheer joy burst to the surface. And right now there was no melancholy; there was only discovery and delight. He could not get enough of her face, her eyes, her smile.

She was as enticing as the iceberg all around her, such a magical, mystical form. He wanted to touch her. Feel her. Breathe her. He wanted to melt through her skin and be inside her, to feel her body all around him. He wanted to warm his hands around her heart. He wanted to know the place where her laughter came from and dive into her bountiful soul. He ached to understand how such an exquisite creature could just be. God, she was beautiful. And she didn't even know it.

'I have seen a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused,' he whispered as his eyes drank in her face.

'Oh, it is something, isn't it?' She sighed and turned to find him looking at her, intensely. At that point he was done for. Completely. And so was she. Their eyes locked as awareness filtered through.

Smiling softly, Samuel touched her cheek. 'You're something'. Then he kissed her. He couldn't help himself. He knew she was only fifteen, but he could not let the moment pass him by. In the icy cavern they were in, her lips were surprisingly warm, summer warm and soft. She kissed him back, tentatively, tenderly. He kissed her slowly, lovingly, exploring her lips with his. He opened his mouth. She opened hers. He moved his arm around her waist,

all the while kissing her. She put her hands on his head and continued kissing him. ‘Oh Rebecca,’ he sighed into her mouth. And she murmured and kissed him some more, an amazing kiss for one so young, so innocent. He never wanted this kissing to stop. He wanted all of her right there and then. But she was so young. He had to stop.

He pulled himself away. Rebecca opened her eyes. She was willing him to kiss her again; he could tell. It was palpable. He smiled, touched her cheek with his right hand and gazed longingly into her eyes. ‘I will remember you, I will remember this,’ and then he couldn’t help himself, he kissed her once again, a shorter, yet still exquisite kiss, then withdrew, not trusting himself to leave his lips on hers for any longer.

Her eyes were closed and a dreamy smile floated across her lips, her face. She did not trust herself to utter one single word or to open her eyes. The iceberg and the kiss. She must be dreaming and if she spoke, she would wake and it would vanish forever when all she wanted was for it to keep going.

‘Rebecca,’ he said shaking her lightly.

‘What?’

‘Open your eyes. Say something.’

‘I can’t. I’m so happy’

‘Are you?’ She heard the happiness in his voice too. ‘Why?’

‘I think you just kissed me or was that a dream? Is this whole iceberg a dream perhaps?’ He squeezed her and kissed her on the brow. ‘Why did you kiss me?’ she asked opening her eyes.

‘I think that’s obvious.’

‘Have you kissed my sister?’

‘You know the answer to that.’ He placed his hand on her chest, below her throat, ‘in here.’

Her breath caught in her throat. Moment later she ventured, ‘Would you kiss my sister like that?’

‘No,’ said Samuel, shaking his head, his smile genuine. ‘I kissed you because I wanted to kiss you. I’ve wanted to kiss you for a while. I like your

sister but not in the same way.' His eyes roamed all over her face. 'I don't want to kiss her. I don't desire her.'

Ah, desire. That was the word. That was the feeling. It pulsed through her body. 'Kiss me again,' she pleaded.

'I can't,' he sighed.

'Why not?'

'Because if I start again, I might not be able to stop.'

He was looking at her lips. She was looking at his. She wanted his lips on hers again. 'Please,' she said.

'You know, it's probably a good thing I'm leaving soon.'

'Don't say that!'

'I'm sorry, but more kisses like that could lead us into trouble and I'm not ready for trouble.' He gave her a grave look. 'I have a question for you for a change.'

'What?'

'Where did you learn to kiss like that? Have you kissed a few boys before?'

'No, I've never kissed a boy before.'

He eyed her closely.

'But I have kissed a man.'

'Have you? Who was that?'

'You,' she whispered as she raised herself to plant a kiss shyly on his lips.

'Well, all I can say is you've got great intuition.' He kissed her quickly, 'But you better stop now, we'd better stop now,' he said between more kisses then he pulled back, but still held her head in his hands. 'Look, this has been a beautiful moment, but that's all it can be for now.' Rebecca thought she saw a flash of sadness in his eyes. 'Think of it as something to look forward to...when you're older.'

'Will that be with you?' she asked, placing her hand on his chest, hoping to extract a promise.

He sat up and looked away. 'Come, we best head back soon and I'd like to look around some before we do.'

That night Silas arrived home with a letter from Matthew.

Samuel, Samuel,

We long to see you but more than us there are others who need to see you.

I have been to see Seb and Luc and Louis' family. You would not know that Luc's wife Marissa is pregnant with their first child – she never got to tell him. A tragedy yet a silver lining on the dark clouds hanging over her.

I know you've written and said you feel indebted to these good people, the Crowes, but there are others to whom you also owe a great deal. As a doctor I have seen death first hand and I can only share with you my experiences but what I can tell you is the family always wants to know everything they can about their dearly departed. They want to know everything they did since they last saw them, everything they said, everything they thought, everything that happened to them, when they laughed, what they ate, when they slept, and importantly, when they talked about their loved ones and what they said. And the reason they want to know this so desperately is that in the telling they feel they are walking by the side of their loved ones, this side of death. It's moments and hours they can claw back for themselves to sustain them through their uncertain future. Samuel, you are the only person with all this information. It's inside you, waiting to come out and they are waiting and wanting to hear it.

If you need me, I can be there to support you when you tell your story and their stories. Telegram your arrival date in Québec. I beseech you not to delay this any longer.

Remember, keep your face always toward the sunshine - and shadows will fall behind you.

All my love,

Matthew

Samuel felt bad for his brother had spoken the truth. He had been dragging his heels and it had nothing to do with not wanting to face Luc's wife or see Louis' or Seb's families. It had nothing to do with being frightened of the voyage home being on open-water again out of sight of any land mass, it had nothing to do with an imminent reckoning with his Uncle.

It did have something to do with his summer on Second Chance feeling like a mythical Scheria, something to do with his knowing that such a long idyl without responsibilities would never come again this lifetime, something to do with not being ready to face his future and answer the question, 'What now, Samuel?'

But in unguarded moments like the one behind a teeming, twinkling waterfall was the undeniable truth of what it most had to do with: Rebecca. He wanted her, wanted her in a way he had never wanted another, for she warmed his soul, more than that, she filled his soul. And he knew it. Deep down inside he knew it. Like the moon and the tide she pulled him to her and over the past few weeks he had started to realise he could not get enough of her. Nothing was ever enough. Her face was the one he sought out when he walked into a room. Her company was the one he relished the most. Her eyes on his face as they darted from his eyes to his mouth would put his head in a spin. Could she see that? Could others see that? Why would anyone be in a hurry to leave? And all that was before today.

So now if he was to do what his brother asked, leave immediately, which part of him knew was the right thing to do, than he'd be doing the ultimate kiss and run. Is that how he wanted to leave? On one hand he felt he should broach the subject of his departure over dinner and yet on the other, why spoil what been the most magical day?

Samuel wasn't sure if Silas had a sixth sense about what had happened or whether it was just pure coincidence, but oddly that night, as they were enjoying a meal of fish and brewis, he said, 'We've got two empty position on the schooner going out the day after tomorrow. Phil Gresham and Robbie Coombes have to go across to Twillingate for some unexpected business. Young Toby Henderson is going to join us but we're still one man down. What do you say about lending us a hand, Samuel?'

For some time he had been expecting such a request. How could he refuse now? How could he say, "Sorry, I can't, I'm heading home next week"?

He did not look at Rebecca. He put on his happy-to-help face, his please forgive-me-Matthew face and said, 'Count me in,' looking at Silas with all the genuine interest he could muster.

The morning they set out Silas asked him, 'Do you think you'll be fine being out on the open water in the middle of the ocean, in the middle of the night?'

'Honestly, I haven't given it much thought.'

'I figured it would be good to get you out there again. You've been rowing that dory around getting the feel of water again. But some people, I'm not saying you, Samuel, when they have a fright at sea, develop a fear of it, and they have a devil's own time getting over it. Best not to leave it too late before you get out there.'

There were six other men on board the schooner that set sail just after eight a.m. on the twenty-seventh of July. They sailed northeast for five hours on the first day of their planned six-day voyage making the most of the prevailing northeasterly.

Samuel found it quite exhilarating being amongst the waves again. Most of the men on board felt the same. Coming up to him, Toby said, 'Don't you just love the ocean? So grand, so mysterious. It hooks you in it does. Has this strange way of binding you to it.'

'Yes,' agreed Samuel. 'I've had some unforgettable experiences on the water. Things I would never have thought possible if I had stayed on land.'

The next day during a lull between hauling in nets Samuel found himself alongside Silas. 'It's a hard life you have here on the edge of the Atlantic,'

noted Samuel, 'I suspect it takes a special type of person to live here and work these waters year in and year out.'

'I don't know if we really do endure more hardships than other folk. Whatever the case, there is no other place for me. Besides, we're small fry.' Silas's hands were busy untangling part of a net. 'We play it safe. Most of us are older and have families and responsibilities. We're not big risk takers. If we were big risk takers and after the big dollars we'd be working the Grand Banks. I did that for three seasons. One of the boats I worked on even took loads of salt fish to the markets in the West Indies, like your little trip last year. I could have sailed down there, but I decided not to. I'd just met Morna and it was not the life I wanted for us. We mightn't make as much money this way, but unlike Annie Petrie, God rest her soul, Morna knows that even in our busiest times, she will see me once a week, when we come in for the Sabbath.'

'Sounds very civilised, Mr Crowe, even though life on-shore is almost as strenuous.'

He narrowed his eyes at Samuel. 'Have those women been weaving you stories? Their lives could be a lot tougher, a lot tougher. I've chosen a much easier life for my family. Morna knows Tamar had it much harder.'

'Tamar?'

In a hushed tone, Silas muttered, 'She was my first wife, died in childbirth when we were floaters on Labrador. In those days you lived on board the boat over the entire summer, sometimes you would build rough summer huts and flakes to cure your fish. The women worked alongside their men, for some people their whole family lived on board. But I should have known it wasn't a good idea. Never a good idea to have a woman on board a boat, at least not a working one.'

'You have had your share of misfortune,' said Samuel, stirred by Silas's admission. 'Is that why you won't take Rebecca on a trip?'

'Partly. Rebecca is the closest we've got to a son. That's why I've taught her to shoot and fish. If something were to happen to me,' Silas knocked on the boat three times as he spoke, 'I know Rebecca could look after Morna and Rachel. She's not coming on board. She's where she needs to be.'

'But is she where she wants to be?' asked Samuel.

‘That really has nothing to do with it,’ said Silas. ‘Her duty is here, to her family. She can read books and you can fill her head with stories till its full, but this is where her home is. This is where she belongs. Where can she go by herself? What can she do?’

‘Well,’ said Samuel, ‘My father has written and he wants to repay you for all that you have done for me. He has offered— ’

‘Samuel, I’ve said before— ’

‘Yes, you have and just like you have your way, my father has his. I think he would feel gratified to be able to do something for your children like you have done for me. And he has sent money for this very cause. It’s not an insubstantial amount. If you wanted to, if your daughters wanted to, he would be happy to fund their further education in Gander or St John’s. They could continue their schooling at a boarding school. Rachel seems to have a way with children. Maybe she could train as a schoolteacher. Maybe through more education, Rebecca could discover her true calling.’

‘Like you have done?’ scoffed Silas.

‘I’m getting closer.’ That was all Samuel could say about the process he was working through.

‘This is our affair. I know you mean well.’

‘I respect that it’s your affair. All I’m saying is that they will always have this life here. You’ve taught them admirably well in that regard. But this could be something they could fall back on. They could have another skill, another occupation somewhere; it may even end up being here. But they could have another type of life, which could still be of help to your family, possibly more so and put them in a better position to help their own families one day.’

‘We couldn’t afford to have both girls away from home. Morna needs their help. She’s had many hard years, coping on shore with young ones while I’ve been out here trying to provide for them. It’s only in the last few years things have gotten a little easier. You might think our life is hard now, Samuel, but in reality it has never been better.’ With this last comment, Silas once more knocked three times on the side of the boat, ‘Touch wood.’

‘It’s true you don’t seem to want for much,’ admitted Samuel. ‘But this is a wonderful opportunity nonetheless. Perhaps for Rachel initially and then Rebecca later.’

Silas smiled begrudgingly. ‘I’ll say one thing about you Samuel, you don’t give up easily do you?’

‘No. If I did I wouldn’t be here to chew your ear.’

They were meant to be away for six days but on the Saturday they became becalmed, stranded in the midst of an ocean that was as flat as a millpond. Silas took to whistling for a breeze. Occasionally some of the other men would join him. But there was nothing to it. They were adrift, at the mercy of the tides. It wasn’t till mid-morning on Monday that the wind picked up and they were able to set a course back to Deception.

They weren’t the only ketch that came crawling into port overdue from lack of wind. One of them carried the diminished and desolate Thomas Petrie, for if ever there was a man, who looked like the bottom had fallen out of his world it was him. Thomas wanted to hear from Samuel all about his wife’s last hours. Matthew’s words echoed inside his head. Samuel glanced at the ocean, an oily grey in the late afternoon light to match the taupe grey skies overhead, the air heavy and damp. Samuel did his best to lengthen the hours Annie Petrie lay dying.

Silas insisted Thomas and the children stay the night. Over breakfast, when Morna and Rachel were talking about what supplies were in the Petrie’s house and what they could send across, Silas dropped his knife on the floor. As he picked it up, he muttered, ‘I wonder who this will be,’ and then more loudly to Thomas, ‘We’ll wait a while before we head across.’

Samuel, never ceasing to be amused by Silas and his superstitious convictions, said, ‘Do you really believe that, Mr Crowe? That if you drop a piece of cutlery, you are going to get a visitor. I drop cutlery all the time and I’m quite sure I don’t get a visitor whenever I do. Call me a sceptic but how can you put so much faith in it?’

‘Ah Samuel, perhaps that is the difference between you and me. Maybe if you believe in it, it will happen and if you don’t believe in it then it won’t. Either way, no harm done, except my way, I’m better prepared.’

An hour later when Silas and Samuel were outside packing up the bags they had cleaned yesterday on their return, a rider came over the hill. ‘Look Samuel, we have a visitor.’ Samuel looked towards the rise then to Silas who was smugly nodding. He yelled, ‘Ronnie Evans and on a horse no less.’ As Ronnie ambled up to them, he said, ‘Is that Bill Sweeney’s nag?’

‘It is indeed. Morning Silas, Morning Samuel.’

‘Hello Ronnie,’ said Samuel. ‘How are you?’

‘Not bad, not bad. How’s everyone here?’

‘So so,’ said Silas, ‘as you would expect.’

‘I’ve come to pay my respects to Thomas. Is he about?’

‘He’s in the living room with the young ones.’

‘Apparently he called in to see me yesterday when I was out. And as I was about to head off a telegraph came through for him from a Beth Dundas.’

‘That would be Annie’s sister, from down Trepassey way. Anything else happening?’

‘Yes,’ said Ronnie. He looked from one man to the other. ‘Apparently, Britain is at war.’

‘At war! Who with?’ asked Silas.

‘Germany. You probably haven’t caught up. Last week Germany invaded Belgium. England gave them an ultimatum to pull out which they ignored.’

‘What about France?’ asked Samuel.

‘Germany declared war on France on Monday. So they’re in bed with the Brits for a change.’ Samuel and Silas looked at each other, almost ominously.

‘And Canada?’ asked Samuel.

‘Haven’t heard anything yet, but it’s probably just a matter of time. But here my lad, we are in Newfoundland, where we are a British dominion. We, therefore, are at war with Germany by default.’

Was there another word in the English language, so short, so simple to pronounce yet so potent with dread? War.

‘What will it mean,’ asked Rebecca, as soon as she had digested the news. ‘Do you have to go off to war, Father? Samuel?’ her voice strained.

‘Usually, it’s the young single men who go off to war,’ said Samuel. ‘So I suspect your father’s safe for now.’

That was no relief for Rebecca whatsoever. ‘Please tell me you won’t have to go off to war?’

‘I’m not going off to war, if I can help it. Canada’s not at war. Though I wouldn’t mind a trip to Paris,’ he quipped. Rebecca turned to see a look of dismay on Rachel’s face. She was sure hers mirrored it. She heard Samuel say, ‘Before I was born my grandfather served in the Boer War as a medical officer and do you want to know what his verdict on war is?’ Anxious faces looked in his general direction. ‘Avoid at all costs.’

‘Sometimes people don’t have much say in the matter,’ said her father.

‘True, but I belong to a long line of men who believe in saving peoples lives, not destroying them. If I have to go, it will be to that end and in that much I expect I do have a choice.’ Everyone was looking at Samuel. He dropped his eyes then raised them again. ‘Although the timing is the same, it is for completely unrelated reasons that I need to make plans to leave you all.’

For Rebecca, it was almost a relief to hear him say that, so long had she been dreading the words. Her mother must have heard the silent screams of her heart.

‘Rachel, Rebecca, go with Samuel, enjoy these last few days. I can manage. Just be back to help with dinner.’

It would take Samuel over a week to travel home given what he had to do on his homeward journey. When to leave? After much deliberation he settled on Friday.

‘No, you can’t leave on Friday,’ Rachel told him.

‘Why not?’

‘Because you never start a sailing voyage on Friday! You just don’t, Samuel. Very, very bad luck.’ She was adamant.

‘Well then it’ll have to be tomorrow, Thursday.’

‘Please don’t leave tomorrow,’ said Rebecca.

‘Saturday then.’

‘Stay for the week-end,’ stumbled Rachel.

‘Monday.’

‘Tuesday,’ said Rebecca.

‘Tuesday,’ echoed Rachel.

‘Tuesday it is then.’ He would leave on the 11th August.

The three of them walked down the hillside, two sisters and one young man, strangers less than three months ago, but each knew in their hearts, they had shared moments and experiences that they would treasure all their lives. Moments filled with joy and laughter, gaiety and hope. Rebecca tried to put on her bravest face. ‘Well if you’re off, Samuel, you’re off. There’s nothing to it. We’ll just have to plan for your return.’

‘Yes, when do you think that might be?’ Rachel laughed.

‘Who knows,’ said Samuel. ‘Maybe you two can come holiday with my family in Toronto, or on one of the lakes even.’

The girls looked at each other, both not wanting to voice what they felt with certainty. That although their parents might let them visit their sister in Bonavista – though it was yet to happen – the likelihood of their ever going further afield was nigh on impossible.

‘That would be lovely,’ said Rachel.

‘Yes,’ said Rebecca, ‘How much will it cost for you to get back home Samuel?’

‘I honestly don’t know. Maybe twenty dollars.’

Rebecca glanced at Rachel, her eyebrows raised just a fraction. Another impediment to any possible voyage.

Two nights later Rebecca and Samuel came racing home shortly before dusk with a brace of hares. Rushing into the house, Samuel said, ‘I’m sorry

we're late. They only showed their heads about an hour ago. Do we have time to skin them before dinner?'

'Of course,' said Morna. 'Let me get you a pail for the scraps and show you where to hang everything.' Morna followed Samuel outside. Rebecca went in search of her sister.

When her mother returned Rebecca was sprawled out at the kitchen table, her palms faced down, her arms outstretched, her face buried in a mass of tousled hair.

'What's, up Rebecca?' asked her mother, 'Are you tired?'

'A little,' her voice muffled.

'Are you sad?' she asked, leaning into her.

'A little.'

'Is it something else then?'

Rebecca raised her flushed face. 'Do you know what Rachel's been up to all afternoon? No wonder she didn't want to come hunting. Actually, she's been up to this for days! Weeks!'

'Stop speaking in tongues.'

'She's knitted Samuel a jumper. It will be finished by tomorrow or the next day. Definitely before he leaves.'

'Has she?' Morna met Rebecca's eyes, both fully aware of the old wives' tale about knitting a hair into a garment to bind the recipient to them.

'Yes,' said Rebecca after a prolonged pause. 'Meanwhile, I have absolutely nothing to give Samuel as a farewell present.'

'I'm sure you can come up with something. I thought we could send some jams and bottled fruit home to his family.'

'That's a good idea,' she said, standing up. 'What shall we pack it in?'

'Maybe one of those canvas packs your father takes with him on his fishing trips.'

Rebecca went to clean one. Her sister had trumped her, yet it wasn't even a competition. If anything she knew she should be grateful for stumbling across Rachel sitting upstairs on the landing, knitting away, catching the last rays of light coming through the window. Until that moment, the idea of a

farewell gift for Samuel hadn't even entered her mind, yet it kept her awake half the night.

The next morning she declined Samuel's invitation to go across to Deception with him – much to his surprise. He was off to invite Ronnie and his wife Margaret over for dinner. 'I won't be gone that long,' he said.

'Then I won't miss you too much,' she replied. 'Are you going to take Mica?'

'I hadn't thought.'

'Leave her behind and I'll come looking for you when I'm done.'

Without Mica Samuel would be away longer. As soon as he was gone, Rebecca got out the drawing paper and pencils they had dragged out for the Petrie children. She wanted to draw the iceberg they had rowed out to that unforgettable day. After two hours, she was finished. How to wrap it? Racing upstairs, she grabbed her hairbrush and proceeded to brush and brush her hair then she plaited a thin section at her nape, which she tied off tightly with cotton thread. Raching downstairs she rifled through her mother's sewing box till she found her dressmaking scissors. She snipped the plait almost to the base of her skull. And then she tied more cotton around the top, rolled the drawing up and secured it with her braided hair.

Then she had another idea. She raced outside, found Mica, led her to the barn and brushed and plaited a long section of her tail before shearing it off like she had done with her own. This she brought back inside and stitched onto the strap of the canvas bag she had selected the night before.

That afternoon, she and Rachel helped Samuel cook rabbit bourguignon, his farewell treat for them. They had just finished mixing the marinade when Morna walked in from outside. 'Toby Henderson has come to visit.' Toby followed her inside, doing his best to tame his dark curly hair. 'Put the kettle on please, Rebecca,' said her mother.

Hellos were exchanged all round. After they had poured tea, softly-spoken Toby said, 'I wanted to let you know I have signed up for the Newfoundland regiment. I'm off to war.'

A piece of coal pinged in the wood oven. And another.

‘Goodness,’ said Rebecca, breaking the silence. ‘That’s very...brave of you.’ Her first thought was “reckless” but she couldn’t say that.

‘That is big news,’ said Morna. ‘What do your parent’s think?’

‘Mum’s not over the moon. Dad said, “It’s your life, son.”’

‘What about Jonah and Michael? Are they going too?’ asked Rachel.

‘Nah, they think I’m mad. But,’ he paused, ‘it will be an adventure.’ That resonated with Rebecca. Part of her would have jumped at the opportunity too.

‘You could get killed!’ exclaimed Rachel, the alarm evident in her voice. ‘Like we need more ways for our young men to get killed.’

Everyone felt the aftershock of Rachel’s comment.

In restrained voice Toby said, ‘That’s not my intention.’

‘But it could be your reality, Toby.’

‘Well if we all sat back and left it to someone else, countries and people would be walked all over by these German aggressors. Today Belgium, next month England, next year Newfoundland.’

‘Like that’s likely to happen,’ she mumbled.

Before Toby could reply Samuel asked if he had strong feelings about what was happening in Europe.

‘Some,’ he said, ‘Certainly not to the degree I would feel if it were happening here in Newfoundland. It may start over there, but where does it stop?’ He shrugged. ‘It will make a man out of me.’

Morna hushed him. ‘You’re already a man.’

‘When do you head off?’ asked Rebecca.

‘I leave on Tuesday.’

‘Same as me,’ said Samuel.

Toby had rested his cap on his knees, but now he was rolling it nervously in his hands, his eyes downcast. ‘Umm, Rachel,’ he glanced up at her, ‘can I write to you?’

Rebecca felt as if everyone’s head just snapped to attention while Toby’s words hung in the air. After what seemed like a minute, but was probably only a few seconds, Rachel replied. ‘Sure.’

‘Will you write to me?’

Her sister's head was bowed, her cheeks flushed. Rachel nodded, slowly raised her head to look at Toby, and nodded some more.

'Thank you.' She gave him a faint smile. 'Will you sit by me in church on Sunday?'

Rebecca saw Rachel pale. 'Toby,' she said, 'please will you sit with us at church on Sunday? And I'll write to you occasionally too. We won't forget you over there.'

Everyone was sombre after he left. No one said a word. Rachel, Rebecca and Samuel returned to their dinner preparations.

That night around the big table in the parlour, Ronnie said to Samuel, 'Well lad, back home to Toronto to see your family and then what?'

Rebecca's eyes were on Samuel, her ears alert. They had not talked about the future. They avoided it, but now she was keenly interested in what Samuel had to say.

After a few pregnant moments Samuel sighed, deferring his head slightly towards Ronnie. 'The way I look at it, I have three options: back to sea working for my uncle. That still has appeal, though I have done that for a while and I now know it's something I can turn to at any point in my life.' Samuel glanced towards her father. 'I will visit my uncle on my way home. He is very enterprising and probably can already see plenty of business opportunities between here and France with the war. I'm not sure I want to be involved in all of that. The second option is war, and I don't really have any desire to go off and dodge bullets let alone fire bullets, so I figure the third and only viable option is to get involved in something that will keep me out of the war for as long as possible, yet still serves my country.'

'And do you know yet what that is?' inquired Margaret.

'Yes, what, Samuel?' Rebecca said under her breath.

Samuel's eyes flicked briefly to Margaret before settling on Ronnie. With a small smile he said, 'Would you believe medicine?'

'I knew it!' exclaimed Ronnie. 'You have the makings of a fine doctor, son.'

Rebecca's heart gave a little jump. Samuel was going to be a doctor! Her eyes had never left Samuel's face all evening. At that moment they glowed in admiration. Everyone around the table was excited for Samuel.

'That would be a fine thing if you were to become a doctor, Samuel. You could come and live here and all our worries would be over,' said Ronnie.

'You never know.' Samuel's eyes shone at Ronnie, then he glanced at Rachel before bringing his gaze to rest on Rebecca.

There was no denying what was upon them. Each day brought more news from the outside world, of events happening outside their control, like a tornado heading their way, so that before long the inevitable had happened.

‘August 8: Britain accepts Canada’s offer of 25,000 troops. Canada is at war’, screamed the headlines of the Twillingate Sun which landed on the dock at Deception the day before Samuel departed, along with a telegram for him from Toronto.

SAMUEL. COME HOME POST-HASTE. MATTHEW IS OFF TO FRANCE TO SERVE IN A HOSPITAL. WE WANT ALL OUR FAMILY TOGETHER BEFORE HE LEAVES. TRAVEL SAFE UNTIL WE SEE YOU AGAIN. LOVE M&D.

If it hadn’t been before, their fate was certainly sealed now. ‘I’ll telegram them tomorrow from Twillingate,’ said Samuel, ‘let them know I’m on my way.’

His last day with the Crowes, his last opportunity to pull Silas aside and hand over the money his father had sent through weeks earlier. As expected, Silas was as stubborn as ever. In exasperation Samuel said, ‘What am I meant to do with this money? My father will consider my powers of persuasion sorely lacking if I return home with it.’

‘Well that will be your problem,’ said Silas, clearly enjoying Samuel’s predicament. ‘Samuel, it has been our pleasure to help you – really it has, despite some of my initial misgivings. And you have helped us in return. You have more than proven your gratitude. And that is all the thanks we need.’

‘If you don’t want to take it for yourself or Mrs Crowe what about for Rachel and Rebecca?’

‘I don’t want to take it for any of us.’

In his situation Samuel would probably feel the same. Silas was virtuous and certainly not materialistic in any sense of the word. But Samuel was frustrated that he wouldn't see this as a windfall to do something for his family, to consider and to provide for them in a way that he might not ordinarily be able to do so. He would broach it another way. That afternoon Rachel, Rebecca and he went for one final walk out to the headland where Rebecca had first spotted his drifting boat. When they were gazing at the iceberg-less sea, being buffeted by the wind, he brought it up.

'How do you repay someone for saving your life? How do you repay a family for welcoming you into their home and treating you like family?'

'Samuel, what are you talking about?' said Rachel. 'You have more than done that.'

'Yes,' nodded Rebecca, 'one hundred times over.'

'Maybe I have, but my father and mother haven't. And they want to and they seem to be thwarted in their efforts. I don't mean to speak ill of your father, but he's steadfast and won't accept what my parents have extended.'

'And what is that?' asked Rachel.

'Payment for having me these past three months.'

'Money?' said Rebecca.

'Yes, money, which could go to any number of uses, to your further education even.'

'How much money?' asked Rachel.

'Two hundred dollars.'

'Two hundred dollars!' the girls exclaimed in unison. 'That's a colossal amount. No wonder he wouldn't take it,' said Rachel.

'He didn't even know the amount. Trust me.' He paused. 'I'm wondering if you can take it on his behalf.'

'We couldn't possibly do that,' said Rachel. 'Besides, what need do we have for money like that?'

'You might not have need for it now. But you never know what you might need in the future. Prices always go up in wartime. Goods become scarce. It is something for the two of you to have for a rainy day. I would have

liked to see you take it and put it towards further study somewhere, but your father wasn't open to that.'

Rebecca and Rachel looked at each other considering Samuel's words.

After a few moments Rachel said, 'Samuel, your offer is very tempting. Study aside, it could pay for a holiday for us to come visit you. But Father's right, we can't take it.'

'Why don't we take the money and keep it here for safekeeping. We won't spend it and then you can come back in a little while and collect it,' said Rebecca.

'Brilliant idea!' said Samuel.

'Rebecca, how can we take his money? How can we explain it to Mother and Father if they ever were to find it?'

'How are they going to find it? We will hide it. Samuel's right. We have no idea what is in store for us.'

The girls looked at each other. Rachel's mouth was drawn in tight. Rebecca's brow was creased. 'What about if we only take half the money,' suggested Rachel. 'That way your father knows that it was accepted in the spirit it was given, but we are also able to say, it is not necessary. We do not need this money, but we will accept it because we understand it's important for you to give it.'

'Yes!' said Samuel.

'Yes,' said Rebecca, nodding her head.

'Yes,' said Rachel. 'But we will only hold onto it till you come back and claim it.'

It was their last night together, their last supper.

'Your first visit to Newfoundland is over,' said her father. 'You had the best of it my lad, the warmest summer we've had in years and the wind has behaved itself as well.'

'Maybe you brought the weather with you,' said Rebecca, thinking, you brought a lot of good things with you, Samuel.

'You couldn't have picked a better time to get shipwrecked,' continued her father. 'During winter you can start to feel cooped up. Too much cabin fever at times, ain't that right Morna?'

'Yes, and it's all ahead of us,' said Rebecca, dryly.

'What do you do in winter in Toronto?' asked Rachel.

'Go ice-skating. Play ice hockey with my friends. Some people, like my sister for example, like to hug the hearth. I like to be outdoors doing something if I can, crunching the snow, but then I get incredibly hungry. I could eat a horse some days.'

'You wouldn't really eat a horse, would you?' exclaimed Rebecca.

Samuel looked at her for a long moment then shook his head. 'No,' he murmured. 'Not if there were other choices.' She had told him about Slate.

'Speaking of winter,' said Rachel, 'I have something for you.' She went to the wool basket, moved aside some of the dyed balls on top to pull out a naturally coloured bundle. 'Here.' She handed the item to Samuel.

'Newfoundland wool to keep you warm this winter.'

He took the bundle from Rachel and unfolded a jumper of homespun wool with a faint herringbone pattern across the chest. He stood and held the crew neck under his chin and each sleeve end by his hands. 'It's beautiful,' he said, smiling at Rachel.

'Try it on,' urged Morna.

Pulling it over his head, Samuel had to also pull his hair out from the neck of the jumper, it was that overdue for a cut. But the warm natural hue of the wool made his summer skin look even more bronze. Rebecca thought he looked impossibly handsome. She imagined Rachel thought the same.

'Perfect.' Her mother admired the fitted form. 'Well done, Rachel.'

'This must have taken you days,' said Samuel. Rachel didn't elaborate; she just smiled at him. 'When did you manage to do this?'

'Obviously, when you weren't looking.' Her eyes shone.

'Thank you. I will treasure it always.' He rubbed his hands up and down the sleeves.

Rebecca felt her mother nudge her. She rose, went to the pantry and returned handing the canvas bag to Samuel. 'Here this took mother hours too.'

Samuel looked inside the bag and exhaled with pleasure. ‘Oh my, this is wonderful. Thank you.’ He looked sincerely at Morna. ‘I think I am going to return home twenty pounds heavier than when I left.’

‘You certainly need to be heavier than when you arrived,’ said Silas.

Everyone laughed. Morna said, ‘The bag is one of a kind,’ drawing attention to the effort Rebecca had gone to. Samuel ran his finger along the horsehair strap. ‘Where did this come from?’

‘From Mica,’ said Rebecca, smiling with her eyes. ‘It is her little farewell gift. She wants you to come back and take her riding again one day.’

‘Does she?’ His eyes twinkled at her.

Rebecca continued to smile warmly at Samuel remembering their Sable Island ride. And then feeling everyone looking at her, she cleared her throat. ‘I’m afraid I can’t claim to have spent hours on your farewell gift. But it comes from the heart as well.’ She handed over her present.

Samuel looked down at the scroll in his hand and touched the finely plaited braid. He looked up at her, then he untied the bind and rolled out the picture. A smile appeared on his lips and his eyes softened, melting her heart. Across the bottom rolling like waves she had written the words: I will remember you. I will remember this. Rebecca Crowe. 1914. She heard his inhale. He raised his head and his eyes glowed. ‘Thank you,’ he said, ever so softly.

‘Please show us,’ said Rachel, unable to contain her curiosity. Samuel turned the drawing around for all to see.

‘Oh, Rebecca,’ said her mother, ‘how delightful,’ her eyes shining at her Rebecca.

‘It’s great,’ said Rachel. ‘You should do more drawings.’

‘She should, shouldn’t she,’ said Samuel.

‘Very fitting,’ said Silas. ‘You know if it weren’t for her fascination with icebergs, she would not have found you.’

‘I know,’ said Samuel. ‘I am a lucky man.’

‘You are. I’m amazed you didn’t die out there of exposure or frostbite or something. The Lord must have decided we’d had enough sorrow for one year.’

‘Yes,’ drawled Samuel. ‘The will to live was strong and providence was on my side.’

Everyone rose early to have breakfast with Samuel, yet no one was hungry. He needed to leave just after seven to be at Deception for the nine a.m. sailing. They were all keen to come and see him off, except Samuel. ‘Please, I’d much rather say goodbye to you here. I’m not one for public farewells.’ Rebecca and Rachel were petulant.

But Silas was onside. ‘I think that’s the right idea, Samuel. That way you can have some time to yourself before you get on board.’ Samuel nodded his thanks. He was counting on that. Silas came towards him, his arm outstretched. Samuel shook his hand and patted him on his right shoulder with his left arm, ‘Thank you again sir, for everything.’

To Morna he said, ‘Thank you too, Mrs Crowe. I will never forget your many kindnesses.’ He took both her hands and kissed her the French way; left cheek, right cheek then hugged her. Turning to Rachel he said, ‘Rachel, what can I say, there are so many things I will remember you for. You’ve been truly wonderful. Thank you.’ As with Morna, he took both her hands and kissed both her cheeks, but as he started to release their embrace, Rachel leant up and kissed him on the lips. He never thought Rachel would be so forward. He smiled warmly and did his best to put on a charmed look, at the same time hoping not to encourage her.

Lastly he turned to Rebecca, sweet, sorrowful Rebecca. He couldn’t put it off any longer. She wasn’t smiling. She was biting her lips, doing her utmost not to cry and failing miserably. His whole heart was giving out. All of a sudden he hated this farewell. It was way too public even. He wished he could have said his goodbyes separately and then just disappeared before they arose. Never again. ‘Come on Rebecca,’ he said. ‘The first thing I saw when I came to on this island, was your beautiful smiling face and it’s the last thing I want to see when I leave.’ He opened his arms to her. She leant into his shoulder and released her tears. He gently rubbed her back. ‘Without you there would be no farewell. And my heart would not feel as it does today. Be well, my little ice mermaid, my Newfoundland naiad.’ He looked fondly down at her then he

pulled back a little to kiss her on each cheek and then a gentle soft kiss on her lips, before pulling away and rubbing his thumbs across her cheeks to brush away her tears. 'Smile for me, please! Be happy for the past. Be happy for the future. I'll come again one day.'

And that is when she lifted her eyes, lifted them to cling to the promise in his. And she held on to that. Releasing him in the flesh only, stepping back with a slight nod and the tiniest tremble of a smile as if to say, 'Well, I'll see you again too. I'll be waiting.'

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