

Chapter 4 – Norway 1815

The sea gives life and the sea takes away

Lars Knudson was an avid fisherman and lived his life by the sea. He was tall, had blonde hair, blue eyes and a strong build. Living in a small coastal village in Norway made him innovative finding ways to survive in a harsh, cold and weather-beaten climate. The winters were cold and summers only a little warmer.

Lars was in his 30s and was married to a lady named Birna also in her early 30s. Birna had brown shoulder length wavy hair, was of average height, and had brown eyes. She was also from a fishing family and between the two of them they made a living out of catching fish and selling it at market. If they had surplus seafood, they would export it and sell it at another township. They had two sons named Jens and Halvor. Jens looked like his mother and Halvor like his father. Jens was the older of the two and was 12 years old. He was an imaginative type spending a lot of his time at their small cottage telling stories. While his brother Halvor was 10 years old and was more interested in fishing and never stopped talking. Halvor had a business focussed mind thinking about how he could make money from fishing, while his older brother was more interested in reading, writing and being imaginative. They were the complete opposite and yet they both helped their father with the fishing.

One bitter cold morning Lars, Jens and Halvor left Birna at home with her knitting and cooking by the fire to go fishing for the day. It was a relatively cloudy morning and freezing cold, but the weather was ok. The three of them embarked on their daily fishing run as they had many mornings before. They climbed into their small wooden rowboat to head miles off the coast to fish. Lars started rowing with all his might with nets and fishing lines in the boat ready for them to drop a line.

‘Father are you excited about today?’ asked Halvor as if he knew something that Jens didn’t.

‘Excited?’ asked father Lars.

‘Yes, today is our 100th trip together fishing,’ replied Halvor as if the other two even knew that answer or had even counted the number of fishing trips. Jens went fishing to help but was never as keen as his brother. And Lars had been fishing his whole life and was not one to count how many fishing trips he had been on because the number was insurmountable.

‘Really son? How exciting. I am glad you are keeping a tally,’ replied Lars. He was excited and surprised his son was keeping score on their number of trips and time spent together. Lars was very close with his two sons.

‘We can celebrate when we get back with our catch ok?’

‘Ok father,’ replied Halvor. ‘Father?’

‘Yes,’ said Lars again.

‘Do you think the weather is turning?’ there were some dark thick looking grey clouds slowly moving across the skyline and looming ever closer as they were rowing to their final point to fish.

‘It is hard to say. Yes, it could be turning as the clouds are becoming darker. I am sure we will be ok son,’ replied Lars with his comforting words even when he was feeling a little uneasy at how quickly the weather was changing. Lars continued to row further away from the coast line.

The sea was not as rough today as it had been on other trips and that gave the three of them a sense of hope and confidence that the weather would be ok until they returned. Lars was great at predicting and seeing upcoming weather patterns and today he had not seen anything in the clouds, wind or rain that would predict any foul weather. Although, there had been many occurrences when the weather changed very quickly on them before, so nothing was out of the question.

They continued to row until they reached their point to start the fishing. The first net brought up around 30 fish and Jens and Halvor were putting the fish into the wooden storage box at the end of the small boat. Meanwhile, the weather was turning foul on them.

The lads pulled up a second net and two fishing lines and the boys worked away putting the fish into the box. At the end of their rowboat they had a big wooden box that they kept all their fish in until they reached the shore. They could feel their small boat rocking with the waves. What was of interest to them was that the boat was moving and swaying more than usual. The waves were getting higher and higher and the boat becoming too unsteady to fish anymore.

‘Father?’

‘Yes Jens?’

‘Can we go back now? The weather isn’t too good,’ asked Jens with a concerned look on his face. The waves were not only becoming higher, but the sky was becoming so dark it was getting harder to see.

‘Yes, I think that is a good idea,’ replied father Lars. ‘Let’s go’. Lars picked up the oars and began rowing. Just as he did the small boat was engulfed by an even larger wave and some water came crashing into the boat knocking off the lid of the wooden box where the fish were stored and throwing it overboard.

Their small boat was rocking back and forward in time with the waves. Lars stopped rowing and stood up to see ahead of him because the sky had become so dark. He put his hands above his eyes as if that would help him see further ahead of him. Lars knew at that very moment he had made the wrong decision about the weather. They were now stuck in the middle of a severe storm. The waves were continuing to get higher and the clouds so dark with rain pelting down onto their open rowboat. The rain was so heavy and the wind becoming so strong. As the boys sat there in the wooden rowboat the fish were being tossed around due to the wind and waves.

‘Halvor please get ready for a battle against the weather,’ said Lars in his Norwegian accent as he tried to sit back down.

‘Yes father,’ replied Halvor as he and Jens gripped onto the sides of their boat. As they did their father got thrown overboard by a wave. As Lars was trying to sit back down, he became unsteady on his feet and was tossed into the open ocean by the fierce waves and gale force winds that had developed from nowhere. He should never have stood up, but obviously felt that he could handle the elements having gone fishing in bad weather so many times before. He was not expecting that at the very moment he would try to sit himself back in the boat that the bad weather would toss him overboard.

Lars began swimming trying to grab onto the sides of the boat to no avail. As he nearly grabbed back onto the side of the small wooden boat, he was tossed far away from the boat by another wave. What seemed like ok weather, had turned very bad in such a short time. The three of them were about a mile off the coast and the two boys were calling for their father panicked that he was adrift with no form of rescue. Why did he stand up in the boat they thought? They were so worried about him and were calling for him. ‘Father? Father where are you?’ The boys yelled into the sea. They could see their father not too far from the boat flailing and fighting with the strong waves while the rain pelted down on them and they were just trying to stay inside the small boat themselves. Every time a wave came up and over the top of them, they

would grab hold of the boat and pray they would remain inside it and the boat would not capsize.

Lars was swimming and struggling and he could hear the faint cries of his sons calling out his name. Replying to them was not an option as he could barely breath as the salt water was flooding in his mouth and deep into his lungs. He was choking on the salty water, while trying to swim back to the boat. He felt that every time he got a tiny bit closer another wave would come and push him backwards and even further away. The boat looked like it was drifting too, which added to the distance between Lars and the boat. The boat was drifting and the waves tossing Lars in the opposite direction.

Lars was struggling and finding it hard to breath now. His lungs were now full of salt water. Meanwhile the boys were still inside the boat, the fish were flying everywhere, and they were. Halvor took the oars in his hands and tried to row without much success. Jens was too busy worrying about his father to even think let alone do anything. He was stunned, just sitting their staring out to sea.

Lars was beginning to give up as the waves were too strong for him. He tried floating and as he was floating waves were coming over the top of him throwing him like a ragdoll and filling his lungs with more salt water. He was giving up and just floating as the waves threw him and tossed him here and there. He was so tired. He couldn't breath either as his lungs were full of water. This went on for about an hour as his sons tried to row to his rescue. Then after trying to swim he body went limp and he just floated. Lars took one last effort to breath and then gave in to the elements as life was taken from him. He was gone.

The boys could see their father's lifeless body in the far distance just floating and being tossed by the waves. At such a tender young age they knew he was gone to them. They knew there was nothing more they could do. In their minds they knew that ages ago.

They sat there in the boat and waited for the storm to finish as they could not do anything else. As the storm slowly abated, Jens and Halvor began rowing back towards the coast. They too had drifted out to sea a little further than they would dare had hoped. Their father's lifeless body had been taken by the sea. Their only real option was to row back to shore and tell their mother the dreaded news. The two boys were in shock and did not have time to process what had happened just yet.

*

Back at their house they found their mother in front of the warm fire knitting. They told her the news as they sat in front of the fire to dry off. A search crew was formed to go and investigate their father's death. Truth be told there was nothing much more the search crew could do either. Jens and Halvor were now able to grieve. Even the community could not comprehend that an experienced fisherman would succumb to the elements. How would that happen? It did happen, and the boys were now in a phase of mourning. Lars was their world and how they were going to cope with his death was something no one in the community really understood. Just as quickly as the sea provides food it takes life away.

Birna, Jens and Halvor were now on their own. Alone. Sad. In grief. What they had to come next only god knew. What started out as a good day had ended in tragedy.