

Chapter 9 – 1815 London

Hardships lead to overseas travel via harsh means

The week had come and gone, and Abe had made that next trip to visit Mr Hutchinson while also running a gruelling advertising campaign for the business. Victor had gone up north and laid off additional seamstresses and was feeling extremely down in the dumps. They had put their plans into action and they had failed. Their last-ditch attempt at saving the firm had ended in bankruptcy. The business was now closing. And Mr Angus Hutchinson was of no help at all!

Closing the business was the only option available for Abe and Victor. However, Victor, while down in the dumps, had managed to secure himself another job. But Abe was not that lucky. Abe had never had a ‘normal job’ as he was a business man and owner through and through. When potential employers asked Abe what he did for a living he would say I own a business and then potential employers would feel threatened and not hire him. Earlier in the week when Abe knew his business was beyond repair, that is when he decided to try his luck at finding employment working for someone else but had no success. What was a man in his mid-30s supposed to do?

*

Back at home Abe’s wife’s Alice’s health had taken an even worse turn. She was dying, and the medical community could not help. She was bed ridden and had been for a while now. Her chesty cough had turned into massive fits of not being able to breathe. When she was not sleeping, she sat up in bed coughing and choking. Abe thought the world of his wife Alice and did not know what to do for her. He gave her drinks to sip on and the medicine that the doctors prescribed. Nothing worked. It was just doing nothing for Alice’s health and Abe watched his wife continue to fade before his very eyes. It was the most traumatic time of his life, watching his beloved Alice suffer and not being able to do anything for her.

Meanwhile, his children Harriet and Graham who were off at boarding school, were now back at home with him because he could not afford the fees anymore. He was so proud that he was putting his children through a magnificent education, and now they were back at home going to a school with children of all levels of society and which was said to be providing his children with a bad education setting them years backwards. It was a blow for him and his children. Abe could see it was affecting his children, particularly Harriet who had lost her friends. Harriet loved boarding school where she got to get an education more than many girls her age. Also, she was the popular girl with other pupils wanting to be her friend. She was in the first form for boarding and loved the day she got to go live out of home and at the school. What Abe thought might be too much for someone so young to cope with, that big move away, Harriet loved it and relished in it. Relishing every day with the new and exciting friends she made. Now she was back at home with her father who was driving her crazy as he tried to make their lives as normal as possible. But nothing about their lives was normal, not with their business failing and everything else going on. Also, at their boarding school Harriet was at a newly established girl's school and Graham a boy's school, so they didn't see each other much. Now they were at home tripping over each other and going to a school that had all types of pupils and it was a shock to their system. Harriet was the victim of bullying at the new school as everyone thought she was such a prim and proper snob and didn't know how to take her. Taking the kids out of boarding school and bringing them home was the last straw, the only choice, and hard on the whole family. Abe could of home schooled them, as many people of his class did, but he didn't have the time.

Abe thought of contacting his stern and strict father for help but could not face it. He was too proud to ask for any help from anyone. Let alone asking for help from the one man who would rub it in and pick holes in his life choices. It was always Abe's older brother who was the one doted on and the one everyone believed would make a name and career for himself. Abe never had much support from his father to begin with. So, asking for help was not the answer. Abe was on his own and had to figure out a plan all by himself.

Then one morning when Abe went upstairs to check on his wife, he had to face his worst fears imaginable. She had died overnight. He sat there by the side of the bed just sobbing and sobbing. He could not bear it. He had lost the love of his world and Alice was only in her 30s. She wasn't meant to leave the earth so soon. She had a life to live and children to love and cherish. Why had karma and fate handed him the worst cards imaginable? If it wasn't raining it was pouring with one bad turn in his life after another.

Abe went back downstairs to tell his children the horrible news that their mother had died and to contact the doctor on watch. While he had always had that glimmer of hope that his wife would make a full recovery, deep down he knew that she was ill, and her life was no more. On those nights over the last few days when he could hear her rasping breath and coughing, he felt helpless and knew she was dying. Abe knew in his heart over a week ago that his beloved wife Alice was already gone to him. He felt a flood of emotions flow over him. Emotions ranging from extreme sadness to anger that he had lost his wife so soon. He was feeling unsure of what to do next and how to cope with everything that was happening in his life. He had two children to look after, no pounds to live, and he was not sure what he needed to do about it all. He was always positive in front of Graham and Harriet. After all they had enough to deal with in their young lives already.

‘Harriet and Graham, can you come here please,’ said Abe with a sullen look ushering them over to the sitting room to tell them about their mother.

‘Yes father?’ they both asked.

‘Your mother died this morning,’ Abe had no idea how to convey the news to his children in any other way. The children sat there in shock until the tears eventually came flowing from their eyes as Harriet cuddled her father and wouldn’t let go.

That day was the most traumatic day of Abe’s life. The doctors came and confirmed his wife was dead. Then her corpse was taken to the morgue for storage and ready for burial. He sat there with his children all day and night comforting them with his kind and soothing words. Cuddling his children and confirming for them everything will be alright.

*

About a month later, Abe had sold his house to pay off his debt and moved up north to Lancashire with his two children. They had a funeral for Alice about a week after her death and thought a change of scenery was needed. Living in a town in Lancashire meant Abe had to see those very seamstresses he let go every day as they gave him an eyeful. Many of his employees had moved on and found new jobs that paid well. However, a few of the seamstresses were still a little mad at him for what happened.

His two children were now living in the care of Alice's sister Grace, their aunt, who had a small cottage not far away. While Abe lived in a shared boarding house with a few other men. The children attended a local school and were encouraged by Grace who aided in their learning. Abe was still not able to ask his father for help or afford to send his children to a public school, but they were happy. The fresh, crisp country air was what they needed.

Every weekend Abe would go and visit his kids and help his sister in law, Grace, with the gardening and picking the fruit. Grace looked like Alice and was so beautiful with her blonde hair and blue eyes. Grace was not able to have any children of her own and was now in her mid-thirties and considered a spinster and old maid in the local community. Grace was living off money given to her by her father when he died, but also worked at the local town hall writing up correspondences for the local officials. That made her a little bit of additional income to live comfortably. Grace grew a lot of her own fruit, vegetables and knitted and sewed her own clothes. She loved having Graham and Harriet around as it gave her things to do and she was able to teach the children skills and give them a mother's love when they really needed it most.

Abe was living in a shared dwelling with two others as he tried to find work for himself. That gave those seamstresses a lot of reason to gloat as they were better off financially than he was. Even though Abe sold his house, the money went to pay off his debt. He was bankrupt and in a bad financial way. He did not want his kids to see him like that and so sending them to live with their aunt gave him a way to save face and keep his extreme poverty and predicament a secret as much as he could. Young children needed to have a good childhood not be burdened with their parents' problems he thought. He wanted his children to spend their afternoons out in the fields playing with friends, running, jumping and exploring as much as they could while breathing in that fresh country air. He was also afraid that they might get a chest infection like their mother. Abe felt guilty that it was his fault his wife died because he had taken her away from the country to live in a dusty, smoke filled city with the horrible smells and strong pungent pollution around every corner. He wanted the best for his children, and that was in the country living with their aunt for the time being.

One day Abe was walking down the street and he was absolutely starving hungry. Living with other men in shared boarding, meant they were always in need of food. He had lost a few pounds since moving up north. Every chance he got he would take some of the fresh fruit and vegetables from Grace's garden back to his share house for him and his fellow boarders to eat. They all found eating such fresh produce such a luxury. Usually, if they were lucky, they got

to eat some gruel, bread and thick gluggy porridge. He found such food hard to eat and stomach sometimes. He went from eating roast meals, toast, freshly made porridge, eggs, the finest meats in all the land to horrible gruel. The first time he ate such gruel he vomited it straight back up as it had no substance to it.

That day his starving appetite made him make a split decision that was to change his life in an instant. He was walking past the local baker's shop and thought he would take a sneak peak inside. Inside the shop was a counter full of crusty fresh bread rolls, and loaves of uncut white bread that smelt so good under his nose. He began salivating at the thought of eating such delicious freshly baked bread. The bread that him and his boarders ate was usually not fresh or crusty, By the time they got their hands on the bread it was a day or two old and really going stale. Abe stood there in front of the counter staring at the loaves of bread and knew he needed to eat. His mouth continued to water as he figured out how he was going to pay. He had no money that day and he was just so hungry.

The baker came out to serve him. 'What can I get for you sir,' said the baker with a northern English accent. 'these loaves are baked fresh today.'

'Um...' in an instant word came out of his mouth without any consideration of the consequences. 'Can I have those two fresh loaves please?'

'Certainly sir,' the baker passed Abe the bread over the counter and asked for the money. The problem was Abe did not has any money. Abe was wealthy prior to losing his business. Now he could not even afford a loaf of bread!

Abe did not know what else to do but run as he could not pay. He grabbed the two loaves of bread and ran out the bakery and down the road like his life depended on it. He grabbed hold of those two loaves of fresh bread and guarded them with his life. He ran and ran until he was out of breath.

Just as he ran around the corner, he could hear the baker shouting 'stop him, stop him. He stole my bread! Thief, Thief!' Abe kept running feeling the massive shame in the depths of his soul. He had reached the bottom of life by stealing bread. He tore a piece of bread away from the loaf and stuffed it deep in his mouth to savour the fresh crunch from the crust as he swallowed. He was out of breath and now trying to eat fresh bread at the same time.

As Abe got a few hundred metres away his luck turned against him. A constable was there near the corner intersection on his way to work. The constable heard the baker's cries for help and

that was the end for Abe. The constable chased after Abe and because Abe was out of breath and trying to eat he wasn't able to run fast enough. The constable caught up with him in no time and grabbed him by the arm. Abe was arrested right there and then. He was cuffed and taken down to the local police quarters. He was watched over and questioned and given 7 years in harsh prison confines for stealing bread. He wasn't even given the chance to tell Grace and the kids, but he was sure they would find out soon enough.

As the local prisons in Lancashire was full already, Abe was taken back to London to face his term. He was living in such cramped and uncomfortable conditions. He was cramped in with other prisoners who had committed a range of crimes, from minor theft, through to full blown murder. It was rather unfair that for such a minor crime of stealing only two loaves of bread, he had to be shackled and share a prison cell with highway robbers, murderers and leaders of rebellions. Abe was no rebel, and he wasn't really a criminal either! Not a criminal in his mind anyway. If given the chance, he would have paid the baker back as soon as he was able. He knew now that it would have been a much better decision to remain hungry than steal bread.

After around a month of living in prison he was informed that he was going to be sent to live out the remainder of his sentence in a far and distant land called Australia. That land was on the other side of the world and was hot and mysterious. He was to go on a long and arduous journey on a ship with hundreds of his fellow prisoners. It was hard for Abe to quantify or imagine what that all meant for him as all his thoughts were on the time when he was free to visit his children again.

Abe Davis embarked on a ship bound for Sydney towards the end of 1815 a broken and depressed man. Hardships lead to travel to distant lands by harsh means. The ship set sail and away he went to live out his future far away. Australia was now his future.