

Chapter 7 – Norway 1815

A fresh start comes from the most unlikely places

Birna, Halvor and Jens Knudson were let to grieve the loss of Lars in private. Days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months as they mourned and got used to not having him around anymore. The neighbours helped with the cleaning, cooking and fishing duties. However, the township was experiencing its own economic downturn, so everyone was struggling. People were finding it hard to make ends meet and yet they all pitched in to help the Knudson family in their greatest time of need. Worst of all, the boys were struggling and not coping to well. Jens had become a living zombie while losing himself in his imaginative story telling. Halvor refused to go anywhere near the water and just sat in front of the fire at home all day long wishing his father would return.

A few months had passed when Birna received a letter from her sister who was living in Sweden with her husband. Birna had an older sister named Agatha who had married a Swede named Gilbert. Gilbert was a sailor and served in the navy. He was always at sea and hardly around. One day Gilbert was passing through their village in Norway and met Agatha and the rest was history. She followed him back to Stockholm and they were married within the month and she was pregnant. Now, Agatha and Gilbert have been married for around 20 years and have two children together. The eldest of the two is also a sailor. Agatha was around 19 or 20 when she fell in love and moved to get married and have a family. Not long after Birna did the same thing, meeting Lars and having her two sons. But unlike her older sister, Birna stayed put in her local village.

Agatha had come to visit Birna not long after Lars death to offer comfort and support. She stayed for a week helping where she could and now wrote to her sister periodically. The letter from Agatha read:

To my dearest sister,

I have been thinking of you and your boys lately. Are you ok? How are Jens and Halvor? I hope to come visit you soon.

I have something I wish to speak to you about on my next visit. It is an opportunity to move to another country. Gilbert has been travelling a lot internationally lately. He was commissioned by the British navy for a time and is currently working on other vessels in trading. He has been offered a job where he will be settling in Australia. It is apparently hot there and reachable via a long sea voyage. I am moving with him in around 5 months' time. Would you and the boys be interested in coming with us? They will set us up with a small cottage to live and give us all the provisions we need.

My children are old enough to look after themselves now. My son Anders is a keen sailor and off on his adventures. Livia is 17 now and engaged to be married already! How time flies. They both wish to stay in Sweden, so it is me and Gilbert travelling alone. We would very much enjoy your company.

Talk about our plans soon.

As always

Love your sister Agatha

Birna read through the letter as she flipped the pages through her fingers absorbing every word. A place called Australia? Neighbours had spoken of such a place and its wild stories of convicts, native peoples and the hot harsh conditions. It was something so foreign to Birna as her small village was all she had ever known. Agatha had always visited her not the other way around. The many times Birna was invited to visit Stockholm and kindly refused such an invitation had made her even more of a homebody.

Moving a hundred million miles away was never something to be considered lightly. What happened if she hated it over in Australia? Would she had the ability to return home to Norway? What of her boys? There were many questions and considerations flowing through her mind as she sat in front of the open fireplace with the crackling and hissing noises spitting from the fire.

After Lars died her focus had been on comforting her sons and her knitting. She had knitted everything from a sweater, a jacket, blankets, pillows, toys and more besides. You name it and Birna had knitted it. Knitting freed her mind from making important decisions and actions. She would focus her mind on threading the knitting needles with the yarn and weaving amazing creations, instead of worrying herself with what lay ahead of her without Lars.

If Birna decided to take up her sister's offer would her life change for the better or worse? As she had a few months to decide doing other activities was her way of deflecting the decisions she really needed to make.

That day Jens had come to Birna to tell her of a story he had conjured up with his vast and vivid imagination. The story was about a boy who was left alone in an open field full of tall grass surrounded by cows and nothing else. The boy befriended the cows and could talk to them. Then one day a bird flew over and was also talking to the boy and his cows. The bird convinced the boy that he needed to go on a quest to find something that the bird needed. The bird needed a piece of silver that another bird had stolen off him. The quest came with a reward. If the silver was returned to the bird, the boy would have the gift of seeing into the future. All the cows told the boy that he should not go on the quest, but the boy ignored the cows and went anyway. The boy then found the piece of silver for the bird. So, the boy was rewarded with the gift of seeing into the future. However, because he could see into the future, he would try to change it for the better. If he saw someone was going to die, he would try and stop the death. But changing the future resulted in even worse consequences for the boy and the person he was helping. As an example, the person who was going to die would die anyway, but the death would be even more painful, and the boy would have to watch it all happen. The moral of Jens story was that the future is also determined and trying to change it only ends in disaster.

Birna was so glad that Jens told her his story. Even though it was only her son's imagination it made her think about whether she should accept her sisters offer. It made Birna think that if the future was also determined, at least in part, then why was she worrying about making the right or wrong decision? After all, Birna had no way of seeing into the future and knowing what decision was the right one to make. No one had that power and it was best they didn't.

So Birna decided to take up her sister's offer. She decided that because Lars was not around, she had nothing left for her in the village. The village itself was suffering economic loss and she was not sure if she could start up the fishing business again. New and more experienced fishermen had recently moved into the village to fill a small void. Lars was not the only victim of the foul weather. Another 3 experienced fishermen had died in the preceding weeks after he did. Was it fate that Birna move to Australia?

Fate or not Birna wrote back to her sister Agatha accepting the invitation to move to Australia with her. She would discuss it more when Agatha visited in two months' time and organise the move and other things. Birna was excited and had to tell her boys the exciting news.

'Jens and Halvor?'

'Yes mother,' they both replied in unison as they sat in the small cottage by the fire.

'I have something to tell you and ask you,' replied Birna as moved closer towards the two of them in front of the fire.

'What is it mother?' asked Halvor as he was the more outgoing of the two.

'How do you feel if we were to move son?' asked Birna worried the boys would get upset at that prospect.

'Move where?' asked Jens who had started paying attention now.

'To Australia. It is a land far away. Your aunt Agatha is coming with us,' said Birna with an enthusiasm to inspire the two boys.

'Australia? I have not heard of such a place mother,' said Jens and he loved to learn about far and distant places.

'Yes, its south and really warm in summers. It will be a great change for us. You can both go fishing again!' Birna was going to sell all the fantastic points that a move will do for the three of them.

'Yes, ok.' Halvor was reluctant, but like Birna he had nothing left to stay in the village for anymore. Lars meant the world to him and with him gone a change was what he needed.

‘Why don’t you two think about it and we can discuss it more with your aunt Agatha Ok?’ replied Birna giving them time to absorb and think about what the monumental decision of moving would bring for them all.

‘Ok mother,’ the boys both replied as they went off to mull around the house some more while Birna did her knitting. Now they all knew what was happening and they had time to think.

The move was going to be their fresh start. A fresh start comes from the most unlikely places, in this instance Birna’s sister in Sweden. That fresh start was scary, exciting and well needed. Only fate knew what lay ahead for the three of them. But they would soon find out if moving was the best choice or not, when they let go of all they knew to move overseas. Until then they looked forward to that fresh start.