

The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

My pen is my “No.”

Karine Baridon

*Thank you, my beloved Viking,
I laughed so hard—and that's worth all the gold
in the world!
Did you know that "The Viking" never actually
existed?
Coraline.*

*Please don't interpret my novel. Live
your own life.*

Chapter 1

The Viking Lurks in the
Scrubland...

I'm angry! And too clear-headed to stay that way. I'd rather laugh it off and be free than be right and cry about it. Better to stay humble! No to pathos, yes to the dignity of the scapegoats. Tender humor and joyful healing.

No need to blow on the clouds. Just wait for the sunset, and they'll burst into flames... Magnificent!

What a funny coincidence... This week, I ran into him twice, from a distance. Him—The Viking, the real one. As charismatic as ever. Same angelic face, same radiant aura, same crocodile-skin boots. Same hands—pure marvels! Two Michelangelo sculptures... covered in grease. Same blood, probably slightly soaked in beer...

Back then, he used to say he was coming down to see me... clearly, he doesn't come back for that reason anymore. He spends his vacations here out of habit... it makes him feel secure. Nothing has changed...

Two days later, quite by accident, I discover I have a LinkedIn profile. That's news to me! No doubt a remnant of my life before "the great reset"... I take a look: two views! Ah yes, it's confirmed: this profile is completely obsolete. It clearly dates from before the update. I'd completely forgotten about it...

And right in the middle of that vast blank space, a little red dot catches my eye. Apparently, I have something new to check—surely an ad or a LinkedIn notification... On autopilot, I click:

— The Viking viewed your profile two days ago.

BOOM! What a shock! This has to be on purpose! I have this unsettling feeling that he's watching me from afar... slyly... and suddenly, without warning, I feel ANGER rising inside me!

— This time, it's a NO! I thought it was in the past, settled, put behind me. But it all came rushing back like a geyser. A silent volcanic eruption. An implosion.

When suddenly, Cling! I remember! It's true... I'd forgotten that, too... I pick up on other people's emotions without even realizing it, a bit like a long-range radar. But then, is this my anger or his? It doesn't matter—it has to come out, or the molten lava might explode! The magnitude of the tremor is so intense that it seems proportional to my past feelings. I have to admit, I was crazy about him! CRAZY!

BOOM! A revelation! I'm going to write! My journey as a heroine... or as Eros? Both, actually! Everything becomes something to laugh about: the XXL antenna, the mountain saga, random mode activated... I'm turning my chaos into a creative gold mine. Creating sets me free!

47 chapters later... Healed, not bitter. I've forgiven; I'm free. My motto: I've been through it, I laugh about it, I live it! So I'm buzzing with excitement at the idea of publishing my little book: "The Hammock and the Hummingbirds." That way, if by chance I run into him again during a chance encounter, I could always sign a copy for him:

Thank you, my beloved Viking, I had a good laugh, and that's worth all the gold in the world!

You know that "The Viking" never actually existed, right?

Coraline.

Three years later...

Sunday Is Showtime!

The reporter — Welcome to “Sunday Is Showtime!” We’re live from Palmeria for the concert celebrating the release of the novel “The Hammock and the Hummingbirds.” While we wait for 7 p.m., here’s an exclusive interview between the author and her fictional character. It’s a first, and we’re very proud of it! They’re here together on stage for you, in the flesh—or rather, in ink and on paper! I have the honor of welcoming Coraline Goldman and her famous VIKING! Give them a big round of applause!

The audience — (thunderous applause, joyful shouts full of love)

The reporter — Good evening to both of you!

The author — Good evening, thank you all for coming out in such large numbers!

The Viking — Good evening.

The audience — WE LOVE YOU, VIKING!!!

The Viking — Thank you! What a crowd!

The author — It’s surreal; I’d forgotten what an impact you have.

The reporter — So, let’s get right to the heart of the matter. What a surprising dedication! And without any double meaning... What was your reaction?

The Viking — My lawyers are looking into it.

The author — Don't worry, the real Viking is a myth. He didn't suffer.

The Viking — That's a shame! It seems I survived your book... but not your royalties.

The reporter — Since the two of you are here together, I assume your chance encounter actually took place. How did it go?

The Viking — Well, one day, I heard someone running behind me. I turned around, and that's when I saw her: bright red, panting, her hair all tousled, on the verge of collapse. She held out her book to me with a trembling hand, looking desperate, as if it were her last wish.

The reporter — And how did you react?

The Viking — I was caught off guard. I knew she really wanted to write it, which is what I feared, as did all of us, for that matter. I thought she wouldn't be able to, and above all, that she wouldn't dare. But in fact, she did it! And it surprised me, I was very worried about her mental health, because she's very dear to my heart!

The author — Just admit that you were terrified I'd tarnish your reputation.

The Viking — I don't see why you'd say that.

The reporter — I believe her book came with a rather disturbing note; can you read us what it said?

The Viking — If you insist... (he pulls out a piece of paper and puts on his glasses)

"My hero is a charming man in his fifties. Vain, controlling, and slightly singed-toasted. I thought you'd be perfect for the role".

She was very blunt. I had to take it in stride. But I'm a gentleman, so I let it slide. I decided to use the mafia's approach instead; I told her:

— *Pay up first!* while twisting her index finger. Then I made sure my henchman would keep her safe. "The Axe" is a big shot; she's safe with him. So, to make her happy and out of pure compassion, I came to help her promote her novel: *"The Viking and Me"*.

The reporter — You mean *"The Hammock and the Hummingbirds"*?

The author — Bingo! There's nothing better than being together to reveal our inner conflicts...

The reporter — And why did you look at her profile?

The Viking — Because I care about her! I was really worried. She was very sick! She had cold sores all over her face—it was unbearable to look at, a horror! She was contagious, so I kept an eye on her from a distance to check her temperature...

The author — What a sweet gesture! Truth be told, "controlling" is the right word for you! It's just who you are, you can't help it!

The reporter — So, in the end, it all started with a simple click on LinkedIn?

The author — Exactly, I took back the humorous control of my life, without his approval!

The Viking — I don't like that tone! Watch what you say, or I'll sue you.

The author — Yeah, I know, what you don't want, is for people to make fun of you; we've heard that song before! But let me reassure you right away: All the characters in this novel are fictional. You can rest easy... and forget about your damages and interest.

The Viking — This woman is despicable, she's using me to make a fortune!

The author — Just a precaution. I'm protecting my copyright. I learned that from the king of business, aka Vik the King, who got me fired from my job and cut off my income... Oh, sorry, I'm getting sidetracked... What was the question?

The reporter — What inspired you to write?

The author — The irresistible urge to turn my anger into creative compost. It's very eco-friendly.

The Viking — You should've had a nice cold beer to cool off! (The Axe approaches.)

The author — Is that a threat? Sorry to disappoint you, but I chose to create, not to take a shot! Besides, I'm not really good at drama. When I take myself too seriously, I get bored out of my mind.

The Viking — I disagree. You have this innate gift for being both funny and very attractive, especially to disasters! But you overthink things; it's actually quite

touching, because you get lost in your own ramblings. The other day, The Axe spent a whole day looking for her, he turned her house upside down. She was in her garden, peaceful, daydreaming in her hammock. Apparently, that's how she writes. She wakes up with an idea, as sleep-inducing as can be. Good thing I'm here to breathe some life into her lullaby!

The reporter — Coraline, why do you love your hammock so much?

The author — It's my safe space, not an open space. It's where I recharge, where I turn my fears into laughter. That's where my novel was born: *Hammock, Hummingbirds, and Freedom!* The rest can wait!

The Viking — That's right, you've always dreamed of being "*the star*", admit it.

The author — Impossible, you'd already taken that role.

The Viking — Of course, I'm a demigod...

The author — Maybe that's why I chose you? It's true, I've always had this slightly absurd dream of turning my life into a novel. That way, I might finally drop this rather harebrained idea of opening a dance school, because dancing is second nature to me: no questions asked, I go with the flow, I clear my head by stamping my feet. Apparently, I'd make quite a sexy dancer, or so they say.

The Viking — I can vouch for that. But I'm your emotional catalyst. You should thank me, by the way! After all, you don't really have a choice: it's thanks to me that your book is a success!

The author — True, I don't really have a choice... especially since The Axe is protecting me!

The Viking — I make sure to take care of you, and this is how you thank me!

The author — Thank you for keeping an eye on me? I'm not a witness for the prosecution on probation!

The Viking — But do you realize that you'll have to forgive me someday, especially since I've done nothing wrong?

The author — Oh, I already have! I know you're not a bad person, just hurt.

The Viking — I don't know what makes you say that?

The author — So British! You have so many layers of defense that you're almost impossible to get through. But correct me if I'm wrong, you were the one who chose your last line, weren't you?

— *I close the book for good!*

The Viking — I had to put a period at the end of my sentence someday!

The author — And you chose an exclamation point! Why am I not surprised?... Well, I just replied, with a slight time lag...

— *Fine. I'm opening the book you've just closed... To tell my truth.*

The Viking — It's too late, we don't reopen old cases.

The author — Better late than never! And don't worry, I've stopped loving you, but I haven't stopped loving life! Cupid has more than one trick up his sleeve; my little heart keeps beating, it's in its nature.

The reporter — I read that you throw scenes in at random, is that true?

The author — I tend to write down my emotions as memories come back to me, which, I must admit, is a bit random, especially since the great reset. Then I investigate, trying to untangle the invisible threads to see what's going on behind the scenes... and try to make sense of it all. But sometimes my inner voice is complete chaos. So I fall asleep feeling a little discouraged, and after a good night's sleep, things often become clearer to me.

The Viking — You mean you're moving forward blindly!

The author — A little, yes, I admit. I follow whatever draws me in the moment. I don't need to understand the logic right away. I trust my instincts.

The Viking — That explains it all!

The reporter — Indeed, it's still a bit confusing... By the way, I hear you also invite readers to take part?

The author — Yes, in the *Soul and Smile Award**. All you have to do is choose your favourite fictional character, both funny and profound. It might be a chance to dig up a few gems!

The reporter — So, if you don't mind, I suggest you introduce yourself to announce what's next...

The author — With pleasure! Well, I'm afraid I'm the author of the novel *"The Hammock and the Hummingbirds"*... And now, I regret to inform you that we're going to go over a few excerpts from my book—ones I'm not very proud of.

The Viking — And for good reason!





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A novel by Karine Baridon



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