Chapter 5

Hold on!

The Viking — Yes! This is life!
Me — Yes! No brakes?!

If I'm going to go, I might as well end up among the stars...
The seagull — *Kaii* = Absurd!

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

Palmeria, the wind, the sea, the Viking and me.

Right, so how long has it been... one, two weeks we've been together? And the Viking, ultra-enthusiastic, tells me — I go get my catamaran!

Me, amused — Your catamaran? Naturally!

And he does! He comes back with a racing *hobbit-cat*. A flat-pack *mini-kat*, made by trolls. A sporty longship, for training for the Route du Rhum.

A day later, we assemble it in front of the slipway. Him, hyper-focused. Me, hypo-novice. His instructions are few and far between, so my mind wanders. I watch the boats, the seagulls, the clouds, I listen to the wind, I daydream...

The Viking calls me back to order!

— Ready to launch?

Me — Ready!

Him — One, two, three, push!

Spot on! He climbs aboard with the ease of a Viking born on the water... But the wind pushes the *hobbit-cat* back towards the quay. If its floats scrape the concrete, the boat's going to get hurt.

The Viking looks at me and shouts — HOLD ON!

Me (never heard that word in my life) — Pardon????

Him — HOLD ON! HOLD THE BOAT!

Me — What is “hold on”?

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

Luckily, he mimes...
Unluckily, I'm not bilingual in mime.

So, obediently, I *hold*. Except I'm not *holding* anything at all, really. I grab the float at the front. Ouch! Oh, bum! The back of the boat swings round and threatens to scrape the quay.

Him — NO, GO BACK!

I run to the back, I grab the float and, of course... the front swings round. How daft!

Him — NO, HOLD ON, HOLD! GO FRONT!

I dash back to the front. I *hold*. The boat pivots, I zigzag, we dance. A perfect tango!

Luckily, dancing is something I can do! I'm not quite sure where all this is going to lead us, but I haven't lost my footwork, or my sense of tempo. Chassé right-right, chassé left-left... Phew, what a relief!

Captain Wuthering Heights — NO! NOT HERE! THERE!

A seagull hovers into the mistral, right above us. She confirms — *Kaiii*! = correct! And shows me the way — *Kaii kaii*! = over there!

Instantly, I see the scene through her eyes. From above, the *hobbit-cat* looks like a compass needle searching for north. Light as a feather, bobbing about like a little cork, it's getting knocked about by the waves. Its two nutshells are drifting dangerously towards the quay. To avoid a

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

smash, Captain All-Red, hair *vol-au-vent*, barks orders at the cabin girl, who zigzags like a competition crab.

Down below, I dash back and forth, half panic, half giggles. This metronome movement takes me straight back to the very same feeling I had as a little girl... Instant flashback!

My little sister and I used to build two enormous sandcastles 25 metres apart.

— The first one to flatten one of them wins!

On “go”, each of us set off from one mound, and we ran like mad things to leap very high and land with both feet on the castle opposite. Then we turned round and started again the other way, without stopping. It was as much cardio as it was euphoric! We laughed so hard when we crossed paths that we could never finish our game. We always ended up rolling in the sand, laughing till we couldn't breathe, hearts pounding.

The body has a memory. The more absurd it is, the more I laugh. My frantic back-and-forth has woken up my Proustian madeleine. I've got the giggles, I can't stop.

Meanwhile, Captain Haddock has trained his daughter in boat racing since she was a child. She has become his seasoned crewmate. Touched by my beginner's reflexes, he's as patient with me as he was with her! He can see that for me, it's just a game. And he loves playing! My giggles remind him of his darling daughter's and touch him right in the heart! Irresistible! An angelic smile lights up his face, his watchful eyes sparkle. He starts laughing along with me!

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

In the end, nothing beats experience! The old sea dog manages to steady the beast and get clear of the quay. Hop, I climb aboard and off we go!

Well, almost... because, to my great surprise, the mistral sets us drifting, rather slowly but very surely, straight towards a luxury yacht 50 metres long and 4 metres high. Probably the Beckhams' or Beyoncé's? No paddle, no rope, no life jackets, we look like two plastic bags on a pedalo. Short of a miracle, we're going to smash into its hull before we've even left the harbour!

And during this suspended moment... I'm completely fascinated by its shimmering hull, midnight blue and pearly white. I've only got one idea in my head: to stroke its 3D glitter paint. The closer we get, the more I admire those mica pigments catching the light like a jewel on the water! How marvellous! If I'm going to go, I might as well end up among the stars!

Luckily, the master of the helm roars firmly to hold our course — HOLD ON!

Me — Here we go, he's at it again!

So, on reflex, I close my eyes, stretch out my arms, *Wonder Woman* style, and absorb the impact instead of the floats, which spin round and dodge the immaculate hull by a whisker.

I open wonder-struck eyes, nose pressed to the hull, which, close up, looks like the starry universe! Beginner's luck! We are protected by the Immaculate Conception!

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

— Thank you, Mary, full of grace and glitter, protector of sailors!

The harbour bloke arrives in a Zodiac and calls out to us:

— Right, you clowns, we'll tow you.

The Viking catches the mooring line in mid-air and, as soon as he catches the wind, lets go of the rope and starts manoeuvring at lightning speed, then drops me off on the quay in a flash.

Him — WAIT HERE!

Me — Is it over already? Or... did I not get the concept?

And off he goes straight away to test his boat in the harbour, before heading out to sea. I watch him pull off his *insane* manoeuvres with unsuspected grace! 180-degree turns, perfect wind catches, feline glides balanced on a single float... The boat creaks, but holds. It's at that precise moment that I realise he was born on a longship! Child of the sea, a sailor at heart, he talks to the wind and tames the waves. He's-a-pro!

He comes back for me and smiles with the nonchalance of an old ocean hand, delighted to have been able to play with his new two-hulled longship, while the mistral blows a hooley. I look at him open-mouthed, ready for him to sign me an autograph. Completely reassured, I put myself blindly in the hands of my Nordic Tabarly, who's really starting to look like my nomadic dream. My romantic heart starts beating again...

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

We leave the harbour... And then, all of a sudden: mistral at full blast! The boat flies, literally! No harness, clinging to a trapeze rope, we're hanging by our destiny! We glide. We laugh. We scream... Eu-pho-ric!

The Viking — YES! THIS IS LIFE!

Me — Yes! No brakes?

Time suspended. 100% adrenaline. Total buzz!
The waves, the wind, life!
It whips, it soaks, it's exhilarating!
I a-dore it! This is adventure!
My heart races, joy floods over me,
I FEEL... FREE!!!

My skipper from the Far North is in his element. The sea air suits him so well. He smiles at me and kisses me passionately. Mamma mia, how I love that taste of iodine!

I'm living my dream! I fall in love on the spot. No romantic film comes close to my happiness! Nobody at sea is more of a wobbly jelly than me. The corsair looks smitten, unbelievable! So proud!

Luckily, at this speed, nobody notices a thing. From a distance, the *hobbit-cat* looks like a white flash, passing back and forth, tilted on a single float, with two counterweights in a precarious balance, taking off at every wave. We're having an ab-so-lute blast!

After an hour of speed, storm warning. The weather turns, the rain stings us. Soaked and supercharged, we're starting to get cold.

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

Him — Ok. We go back.

No room in the harbour. No rope. No plan. The pilgrims of the high seas, who have braved the oceans, come back ashore soaking wet!

We end up three of us on the beach, with a local bloke, pushing this blasted cat up the sand. Light as a 250 kg seagull, it wants to head back out to sea. It's made for speed, for *races*, for regattas. At a standstill, it's nothing but an empty shell, tossed about by the wind. If the waves push it too hard, it'll smash to pieces!

The sheet has snapped, the sail flaps and whips the air with a sharp, repetitive crack, like a flag snapping. The Nordic colossus struggles not to get slapped forehand and backhand and lose control of the vessel. Swept by 30-knot gusts, the sail rebels and slips through his hands. But Odin's heir is more stubborn than it is and clamps it in his pincers to replace the sheet before cata-strophe strikes.

Meanwhile, the local bloke and I hold the boat steady as the waves shake it. He looks like he knows what he's doing. So I do the same.

In the end, nothing resists the strength of the Viking. He jumps into the water and, all three of us, we push with all our might, fighting the current, to get the boat back up the beach.

Exhausted, soaked, out of breath, but the *hobbit-cat* is saved without a scratch!

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

The skipper of the *Intrepid Breakwaters* looks at me, calm as you like, and comes out with:

— Well... maybe we can't use it that much?

A seagull flies past — *Kaii* = Absurd!

I smile — Maybe, Baby... Indeed, Unforgettable.

Back to the campsite. Drunk on the sea, drunk on love, drunk on life!

A little debrief, sipping a beer, on our first love adventure at 100 km an hour. We laugh tenderly at the absurd situations we've shared, against a backdrop of mistral and linguistic mix-ups.

Me — What is “hold on”?

He mimes — Flat hand = *hold on*.

Not to be confused with:

— hooked hand = *catch*.

Me — Oh, I see! *Hold on* = *maintenir*, keep it steady!

A seagull flies past — *Kaiii* = at last!
— *Kaiii Kaiii* = better late than never!

I've never forgotten.
My body held on.
My heart beats stronger!

When evening comes... Right in the middle of passion.

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

DRIIIIING!!!!

Me — Hello, Dad?
— Why am I whispering? I'm not alone! ...
— No, I can't speak up.
— No, I'm not pregnant either!
— Do you want to say good night to him?...
— Maybe we'll wait a bit... just to be sure...

I look at the Viking...
he's fallen asleep...
like an angel!

I've never needed the pill, in case that crossed my mind. My parents are the best contraception there is. Zero sex life, guaranteed!

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

Sunday Is Showtime!

The journalist — You'd known each other for two weeks, and you went for it?

The author — I fell in love with him. It's the most human thing in the world. Beautiful, devastating. I knew I wanted to have a beautiful relationship with him. When I love, I go for it. In fact, that's what he liked about me. We both went for it. Two bets on the same table.

The journalist — And what do you suggest to the reader?

The author — To make up a word in Viking and mime it: the others guess what it means in their own language. On video, in a photo or in a drawing*.

The journalist — Question for the Viking: as a multilingual man, what was her English accent like?

The Viking — Oh, nice, surreal, but nice. Let's say it went through some interesting metamorphoses. Mostly we got the *stupid French woman* from *'Allo 'Allo!*

— Listen very carefully, I shall say this only once!

More Frenchy than anything I'd ever heard in my life! She sounded like Michelle of the Resistance, the colonel's blonde. She put her foot in it from morning till night!

— Good moaning!

She was really brilliant, she mixed up filling and emptying, holding and catching... And by the end of the evening, from concentrating so hard, she looked a bit odd, with half her face drooping, a bit as if she'd had a stroke.

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

The journalist — So, in the end, did she get the accent?

The Viking — Never! She really tried everything, during our conversations and even outside them. That's why, later on, at the rock festival, when she started talking to me in Provençal with a pied-noir accent, I found her frankly unconvincing!

The journalist — A pied-noir accent... that's handy, your family is waiting in the wings.

The Viking — Your father too? Then I'll keep my seat near the exit.

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved

The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

A novel by Karine Baridon

lehamacetlescolibris.com

© 2026 Karine Baridon — The Hammock and the Hummingbirds — all rights reserved