Chapter 10

The Viking in Game of Thrones

The Viking — This isn't Care Bear Land!

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And me, I think I've met the sunshine of my life! Naïve, I land in *Game of Thrones*[1]. The Viking has declared war on his whole family. Each one gets a glorious nickname.

His father, the Viking king, *Narcissus the First, the Flawless*, a megalomaniac who decides everything. The others have no choice: either they follow him, or they clear off. If they succeed, it's thanks to him. If they fail, it's their own fault.

His mother, the Viking queen, alias *the Lady of the Fjords*. One morning, all of 6 years old, he notices a bruise on his mother's face. So he decides to help her run away. But his giant of a father catches up with them. The king and the queen have a little chat and go back to the castle like good children. The father held it against his son for *high treason!* The son held it against his mother, for the same reason. Like father... like son! Viking logic: among flawless gods, you'd rather shoot your shot than be dethroned by your own offspring.

His ex-wife, *a loser*, incapable of making a decision. So says *Vik the King*, who makes every decision for his wife. *Mrs Yes-Yes* surely preferred to keep the peace at home, so she could do as she pleased. No point wasting your time arguing with a man who never lets you get a word in edgeways. She followed him until he left her.

His darling daughter, *the Amazon of the Waves*, did everything with him: boat races, boozing. When he left her mother, she blew all her university money on parties and drink. She hasn't spoken to him since he refused to pay for her racing longship.

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1 David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, Game of Thrones (YouTube).

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Viking conclusion — Her mother brainwashed her.

Apparently, nothing to do with making up for a lack of love with heavy drinking. Nor with drowning her rebellion in compulsive racing-longship shopping. He went off to France to go camping. She went off to Australia, to sail. A chip off the old block, he can't disown her.

His 18-year-old son, *the Great Translucent Hermit of the Screen*. After cutting the power to his PC to force him to the table, he had a bare-knuckle fight with him. Too offended that his son preferred his games to a meal with him. Since then, radio silence, not a word, the void. His mother smothers him, his father ignores him, it's like a wildlife documentary.

Viking logic: there's always someone to blame, but it's never him. Him, he's the last just man in a world of incompetents. He fought the sea monsters in the War of the Scorched Lands. His men died, swallowed by nuclear octopuses, in the desert of fire. A real nightmare! His scorched dragon heart is one of the last survivors... so he drinks to forget... the weepy cries of depressed seagulls. A tragedy! A Viking hero... of happy hour.

I sympathise. I'd never have survived in his shoes. I admire his courage, but I feel for him. OK, I admit, his angel face, his irresistible charm and his off-the-scale charisma more than make up for his little family hiccups. I wish him luck sorting it all out, for everyone's sake. But as long as these little red flags don't dent his mood too much, I'd like to enjoy my trip because I'm lucky enough to be living my dream and it's wonderful!

Touching is the only language we speak without a translator. Like two magnets brushing past each other.

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Twenty times a day, he smiles at me, welcomes me, all warm and snug, into his two metres of open arms. And I throw myself in as if it were the first time. He never says no, to my greatest delight.

Him — I love it when she strokes the back of my neck. It's her vice. Running her hand through my curls.

Me — The demigod's hand-kiss makes me melt, even two centuries late. His mating dance knocks me for six.

Anyway, it would take a whole book to describe the charm of this adventure. We discover stunning places, the locals smile at me and look me in the eye. I can still see the pirate ships. The giant fans in the middle of fields. The roads out at sea. The moving walls. And the hilarious accents. Every day he switches between vintage cars, vintage sailing boats and retro musical instruments. We make the most of each one.

Him — I show her our treasures. We wander from flower-filled medieval town to beach as long as the country, made of dunes as soft as flour. I take her to a chalet hidden in the forest, packed with local giants. We very nearly made it to a live music festival.

Me — We come home inseparable. Heads full of memories, phones full of photos, hearts full of love. We've finally found each other, it's as if we'd always known each other, we're over the moon!

Back home, a midnight swim under the moon. We float in harmony. Nature, the sea, the night, he kisses me. Love in unison is worth all the gold in the world. Quick as a flash, he answers: *“You're the gold, my world.”*

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The next day, I ask his opinion on my website, 6 months' work. He gets more involved than I ask him to, in 3 days it's done. Impressed, I trust him and catch myself following his advice. Might he be right?

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Sunday Is Showtime!

The journalist — What a family legacy! An explosive cocktail!

The Viking — I didn't come here to cry.

The journalist — A collection of glorious nicknames!

The author — Yes, and in fact, I invite the reader to make up their own for the people around them*!

The journalist — Did your father never talk about love?

The Viking — Yes, he did. For him, talking about love means talking about himself: *Bjornulf the Flawless*. Apart from him, as he says: *"sort your own mess out, not my problem"*. He forgives nothing. Either you're strong, or you're disowned. Weakness is taboo. Showing your feelings means losing your power. He gives no quarter: if you've got a heart, you're the weakest link to be eliminated. He humiliates you, he casts you out. Full stop.

The journalist — What did you learn from that *Bushtucker Trial*[2]?

The Viking — I never ask for help, never show weakness. It's the winner's mind game, my father's legacy.

The author — You do the same with the people who love you. You give them an umbrella when the sun shines, and take it back from them when it rains.

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2 I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here! (Wikipedia).

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The Viking — It's training. If you count on me, you go soft. That's how you forge a real Viking: self-reliant, tough, indestructible.

The author — And if people don't count on you, you take it as betrayal. We're going round in circles! So you put up a wall, you take down a tyre, or you monologue for three hours while emptying a bottle. Great training for your liver!

The journalist — It's a tragicomedy...

The Viking — Go on, laugh. But that's what saved my life when I was a *berserker*, in the War of the Scorched Lands. I saw men crushed with their longships by the sea monsters. With your soppiness, you'd have gone mad. You haven't lived through the horror, so don't judge!

The author — You're right. You survived all that with great courage. Luckily, the war's over now.

The Viking — You're in denial! The war is never over! Watch the news, it's on every day! Everything's going wrong, it's all going to blow up! I've lived through it, I wouldn't wish it on anyone.

The author — You're stuck in your War of the Scorched Lands! You keep going round in circles with your sea monsters. Alert, danger, boom!

The Viking — I'd rather know what's going on. So I can react fast.

The author — But you watch war like a football match! Two sides, a setting, suspense. Kick-off at 8 pm. Anxiety compulsory.

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The Viking — This isn't Care Bear Land!

The author — Between your end-of-the-world match and my hammock, I've chosen humour. A non-violent weapon against single-track thinking. My peace is sacred.

The Viking — Of course. You're all nuance and you don't give a fig for the news.

The author — I just want you to switch off *TeleKata* and come and lie down with me in my hammock. I've got a gentler programme.

The journalist — You were saying you recognised each other?

The author — Indeed, from the very first evening. We were mirror images, each behind our own wall. Me: “it'll be fine”. Him: “I don't need anyone”.

The Viking — We recognised each other through the concrete.

The journalist — And what drew you to her?

The Viking — Her humour, her gentleness, her strength, even if she can't see it. She was different, she made me believe I could be a normal man.

The author — Our cracks, our needs were very much alike, with one difference. He needs emotion to feel alive. Calm kills him. And me, I need calm to go the distance. Keep pulling on the elastic, and who's going to get it smack in the face?

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The Viking — Wow! You've just killed the mood with your trailer. Work on your punchline or nobody will read your novel. And stop sticking labels on me!

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