

Chapter 11

The Unlabelled Viking

The Viking — If there's an apocalypse,
we know where to pitch base camp.

His XXL *drak-car* has no stickers, no name, just sparkle. A mobile *Apple Store*. I've nicknamed it *the Blizzard*. White on white, it goes incognito, camouflage mode. It could cross the Arctic without disturbing a polar bear. The Immaculate Conception on wheels shows off its driver.

The Viking wears no brands. Just the Holy Grail of textiles, the crème de la crème of *non-iron*, the last word in crease-free, double-plus made-to-measure. His technical underwear with cellular memory has more degrees than I do.

Him — I invest in art, I'd rather have a signature than a logo. My creed, will it gain value? I don't shop, I invest.

Like his crocodile boots, hand-stitched, indestructible, or his sailing shorts: crease-proof, waterproof, breathable, mosquito-proof and silent, built-in chip with satellite connection... Even his rustle is premium.

Him — Handy, I can cross the Atlantic in a force 10 gale, you'll always know where I am. I like to own very little. Just the very best.

I look around: *little* is a slightly different concept among giants. His 300-square-metre XXL hangar is a retail park all by itself. You'll find everything there: boats, cars, DIY, computers, clothes, enough musical instruments to kit out an orchestra. And two one-metre dogs to guard the stock. He's got squirrel syndrome. He buys in bulk, in XXL, all of it WITHOUT LABELS. He doesn't tidy, he archives. Here, objects retire, but never die.

I asked for a corner for my massage table. He offered me the pontoon. Massage in a yellow oilskin mid-storm, I passed.

Him — With my supplies, I can sit out a war on my own and hold out under siege for a year! If there's an apocalypse, we know where to pitch base camp.

Me — Just as I thought... Bit creepy, though!

Sunday Is Showtime!

The journalist — Why this no-logo fashion diktat?

The Viking — No labels, no brands! I like simplicity, visual purity. I control my image. (The audience rises, sports logo-free T-shirts in his honour and applauds him for 1 minute.)

The audience — Vi-king! Vi-king!

The journalist projects a coat of arms — You're forgetting your own brand!

The Viking — That's our royal coat of arms. I am *Iron Lance*, direct heir to the kingdom of *Haldorholm* in *Soumerland*.

The author — Okay, *Proud Lance*. Well, if it's all the same to you, I'd rather wear the T-shirt from the little yoga studio. It reminds me of my sister, whose silhouette I drew. True, it's a bit weathered by time, but it's my comfort blanket. The bond matters more than perfection.

The Viking — Suit yourself. I'd rather invest in myself, in luxury, in signed pieces, XXL, that gain value with time.

The author — I'll grant you your taste for quality, no doubt about that.

The Viking — It's my upbringing. My father was an art dealer, he sailed the seven seas hunting for treasure. To him, ordinary meant mediocre. So for me, it comes naturally. I collect fine works.

The author — Sure, but getting your non-iron knickers in a twist over a logo...

The Viking — Oh really? Yet if I remember rightly, you were the one who got cross over that outrageously expensive luxury perfume I gave you?

The author — Maybe because it wasn't my scent. And because I'd have preferred an apology, which, for its part, costs nothing.

The Viking — My father didn't raise me in weak mode. A Viking never apologises. He gives a valuable gift.

The author — Thank you, Bjornulf *the Flawless*! That's why the collector by inheritance looks after his treasures, but not the health of his liver.

The Viking — Rubbish, I have an iron constitution! I categorically deny these erroneous and unfounded interpretations!

The journalist — And why did you choose Jeff Bridges to give the Viking a face?

The author — It's a nod. He loves *The Big Lebowski*. Except he's bigger and more over-the-top than Jason Momoa, with Hugh Grant's fair play and that Viking “*I don't care*” humour that makes him one of a kind!

The journalist — How did you write the Viking's part?

The author — I watched his habits and the weight of seemingly trivial details, to understand him better.

The journalist — Such as?

The author — Oh, he always sits in a corner, to keep an eye on everything. And near an exit, ready to bolt if he has to save his skin.

The Viking — Correct. In case of danger, I'm into my crease-free clothes in three seconds. And I always look shipshape! I grab my earpieces, wallet and keys, always within reach, and I'm off like a shot, nobody the wiser.

The author — There you go, his rock'n'roll look is a cover. Laid-back outside, on red alert inside. His angel curls defy the short-back-and-sides system he walked out on.

The Viking — Wrong! I keep them because you love running your hands through them, *naughty Fräulein!*

The author — It's irresistible, I'm addicted.

The journalist — He's still a lucky gambler and a daredevil!

The author — Yes, between you and me, I find that reassuring. His contradictions make the demigod human. Deep down, he's like me, half human, half... absurd.

The Viking — You're like all creative types, you mistake wishful thinking for reality. I came here to defend your book, not to stand trial before the *Thing*.

The author — Don't worry, you're unforgettable! By the way, I invite readers to describe a character through their objects*.

The journalist — And why this obsession with self-sufficiency?

The Viking — If the world burns, I want to die in the sun.
I'm a Viking, not a smoked salmon!

The author — I remember once you rang me in a flap, to
warn me in your epic, fairy-tale language:

*Thunder growls on the horizon, the din is rising on the far
side of the world.*

The rumble behind the mountain is deafening!

Have you seen the storm in the east, the fire over the hill?

*Already the flames are racing in the distance, the sea is
rising offshore,*

I can see lightning on the map, but fear not,

*if it all kicks off, I'll come down and fetch you, and we'll
flee to Portugal. All is ready:*

*I've wedged the suitcase next to the jerrycans
of petrol, of tinned beans and herrings.*

If a bomb goes off, we'll be safe!

The author — A bomb that stops at the Portuguese
border? Makes sense!

I hung up amused, but a little worried: I couldn't tell if he
was pulling my leg or dead serious. I would soon find out
for sure.









The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

A novel by Karine Baridon



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