

Chapter 17

A Stopover on the Presqu'île du
Sel

We head down South,
but we must have got lost
between hell and paradise...

"We can finally leave!" He calls that good news?

I had a job, a life, holiday lets booked, plans, but that was before the mountains. I come back from them with nothing but the clothes on my back. The Viking tells me to hire a *Rune Reader* to raise my shield against my ex-boss. I just want to move on, but he insists and carries on: *"I gave up everything for you. I drove 2,000 km in my XXL drak-car so we could be together."*

We don't even have time to park before a neighbour comes at us: *"No, no, no! Parking here is prohibited, sir, madam!"*

You've got to be kidding! Here we go again, stuck between two hotheads... I try to calm things down, again! Round three.

Me — Who do you think you are? The car park attendant? You've got no credibility, seeing as you're the only one in the building who parks his camper van here "all year round"! So listen, I've had a long day and if you keep playing traffic warden, you'll end up with a knuckle sandwich. I need to let off steam!

Except rows bring me out in hives. So obviously, I said nothing, *not-at-all-at-all*, I stayed very polite. I handled him with kid gloves: *"Dear sir, thank you for your concern, but I've just driven 900 km, I'm a little tired. I'm an owner, just like you, and we're only here for a few days. Now I'd really like to get home and rest."*

Ever since I was born, I've done everything to avoid conflict, because I know like attracts like. But with the Viking, the same script keeps playing! I've run out of patience, I just want to be left in peace! Get back to my

cosy nest, curl up under my duvet and sleep for 24 hours! Dream in my hammock, and when I wake up, calmly think about what to do.

But no! The Viking panics! His blood boils in his veins, he revs up, steam comes out of his ears and he loses it! The neighbour legs it...

We go in through the cellar, *Boom!* I spin round with a start, that's all I needed! The giant has smashed his forehead on the ceiling pipes, his skull's still ringing! I rush over, in a panic... He explodes!

There you go! Talk about bad vibes, it's confirmed! Nobody's heard such a racket since the 60s, when the building went up. But the Viking's head is harder than cast iron. Too offended, he refuses to stay at mine and rest, and to come to the family lunch the next day. Oh no! He can't smile and pretend all is well! He's suffocating! He's got a better idea, get far away from here!

Destination extreme: the peninsula of the loonies, where kitesurfers come to face the frozen sea in the dead of winter, just *"for kicks"*. He parks his *drak-car* on the sand car park, ravaged by the storm and battered by the wind.

DRRRING the Viking: *"Come, it's magic, it's raw, it's Adventure with a capital A."*

Me: *"At -3 °C, with gusts of 30 knots? No thanks! I'd rather stay snug as a bug under my blanket!"*

Him — Exactly. You're too soft. You need toughening up! Translation: come and freeze your bum off, no shower, no heating, with my hackles up and dog hair everywhere!

He's cross, accuses me of not loving him, of preferring warmth to true love, instead of joining him in the thunderstorm!

I think: *"So, bye-bye my hammock and my hummingbirds?"* Soft touch that I am, I give in.

Out there, there's nothing! Apart from the icy cold, his *drak-car*, his wounded-angel eyes, Big Dog, and a refrigerated lorry parked right in front of him. His dream!

Barely arrived, the big kid goes straight to knock on the door for a tour. Takes the chance to down a few beers with the kitesurfing couple, and pushes me to do the same: drop everything and go back up North with him, into his Nordic exile.

He gets carried away — *Come on, let's build ourselves a log cabin, put up our 20-metre antenna, plug into the XXL world, live wild!*

I think — What I want is mutual respect, balance and peace, not a giant walkie-talkie stuck in the forest. Go on dreaming of the Far North in your *drak-car* from hell, if you like, with your frozen willy, your aching hips, your Big Dog and your antenna to Mars. Personally, I'd rather stay home, it's safer.

Him — But with me, you've nothing to fear. I can provide for you.

Me — *I know.* (That's exactly the problem.) *Hang on, I'm thinking...*

(Now who, willy-nilly, told me to give up my work? Who, willy-nilly, put me through hell? Who, willy-nilly, threw me out of HIS *drak-car* several times, at night, in the snow?

Who, willy-nilly, got me sacked from my job? And who, willy-nilly, ends up on the subs' bench without two pennies to rub together?)

— *Right, I've thought about it! Well, no, actually! (No way am I risking eviction again!) I'd rather rent out my flat, until I find work again, to avoid carnage, like the OTT¹.*

After many a row, both of us digging our heels in, he heads back up to *Lower Valhalla* all alone. I didn't follow him. I kept my dignity and my heating, well, at my parents', always ready to help me out, them! Far from my beloved Viking, but at peace at last, or so I thought! Because during his drive back, he's hatching a plan...

¹ OTT: the Toxic Tentacled Urchin.

Sunday Is Showtime!

The journalist — Why did you go and join him on the *Presqu'île du Sel*?

The author — See? It's pathetic! He'd panicked, so I went to reassure him and keep the bond alive... I couldn't give up on my ideal, he embodied my travel dreams and he was so handsome! Love is blind... and very patient! But...

The vase where this verbena's dying, was cracked by a fan's careless blow...²

The Viking — I just wanted us to go home together!

The author — I spent months in your *drak-car*, you slept just one night in my hammock! You didn't want to get in, just to get me out!

The Viking — ... I'll have another beer.

The journalist — While he goes to fetch it, what do you suggest to the reader?

The author — To write two replies to a hothead: the one they dream of saying, and the one they actually say*.

The journalist — Did you get your peace back?

The author — Or so I thought, but he wasn't going to let it go that easily, I was in for it!

2 ... The blow must barely have touched it: no sound would ever let it show. [...] Do not touch it, it is broken. Sully Prudhomme, *The Broken Vase* (*Le Vase brisé*), *Stances et poèmes*.

The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

A novel by Karine Baridon



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