

Chapter 21

Fridge on Wheels

I'd rather be sucking Mr Freeze ice pops with my feet in
turquoise water!

I ask *Mr Freeze*: what was your childhood dream?

The Viking of the Far North answers: a treehouse!

Me — And your teenage dream?

Him — A boat!

Me — And your grown-up dream?

He looks at me with eyes shining like a kid in front of a Christmas shop window.

Him — A refrigerated lorry! Not a toy fire engine. No, a 38-tonne XXL!

Me — The kind that carts dead fish from Rotterdam to Naples?

Him — Exactly! I'm going to convert it into a *rig*! It's already insulated, so I'll plumb in water and electricity and cut some windows so I can live in it.

Me — Given your relationship with the shower, you could last for weeks in there.

Him — Yeah! I'll park it deep in the forest of *Norborea*, with 400 km of trees in every direction for a view. I'll hook up the pipes and we'll live completely off-grid. (He dreams of stainless-steel screws sorted by mood. And me, of the sweet life. Just not one that smells of herring.)

Me — Oh yes! I can just see myself in your dream, in fleece-lined plastic Crocs caked in engine grease, a flimsy summer dress, wrapped in a foil space blanket, praying for one ray of sunshine to break through the treetops.

Him — I'll put in a solar shower for you!

Me — Thanks for the offer, but I'm not a two-for-one deal. I'm happy to join you at Lake *Luminör* now and then to discover your world of legends, but not to have your commando lifestyle forced on me. My needs get a vote.

Him — I'll save you the best spot, snuggled up in my arms!

Me — Except in winter it's dark 20 hours a day!

Him — Don't worry, my *rig* will be a palace. Super comfy. Super insulated. Super isolated. And there'll be room for everyone.

Me — I don't fancy living in your thingy. Unless you turn it into a yoga studio. It's called a couple, not a fan club. What if I invited you into my dream, just to see how you react?

Him — OK, go on then, what are you actually suggesting?

Me — My dream is always set in summer, even at the end of November. Between land and sea, sunshine and starry skies, on the *Presqu'île du Sel*, where pink flamingos are the kings of nature, wild and breathtakingly beautiful.

We do up an old single-storey house. All white, all simple, right by the sea. With a hammock and a yoga studio on stilts in the garden. My sister teaches classes there.

My parents nap in the deckchairs on the terrace, in the shade of the palm trees. We each have our own space. Me, a bright room for massages, and a glasshouse studio to create stories like this one.

And you, in your big converted ISO shipping container facing the salt marshes, you tinker, fix your vintage boats, build your wacky projects and sort out anything you can lay your hands on.

An open house where we live outdoors, have family and friends over, sing, laugh, and take the dinghy out to the Île du Croco for a picnic on the beach.

Or else a big plot of farmland where we each have our own house and see each other whenever we like. We share good times, in short, life! And when we go on holiday, it's somewhere hot, the Mediterranean or the tropics. And now and then, to your Far North.

Him, worried — Hang on, let me get my spy map out: there, too many mosquitoes. There, too many people. There, too dangerous, the regime's too shaky. That leaves only here: on my land, in my refrigerated lorry, slap bang in the middle of the forest of *Norborea*, near Lake *Luminör*, 400 km from another living soul!

Me — Fine! While I swing in my hammock with a view of the lagoon, you eat frozen herring in front of the log fire you got going with the pages of my novel, in your log cabin, in the middle of the forest.

Two dreams. Two opposite climates. Each as good as the other. And we meet up often: doable!

Sunday Is Showtime!

The journalist — Viking, have you always dreamed of adventure?

The Viking — Always! A treehouse, a boat, a refrigerated lorry. Being self-sufficient is the greatest adventure of all!

The author — Except all his dreams are hiding places.

The Viking — Not at all. I love being out in the wide open spaces.

The journalist — Perfect segue! As it happens, the tree huggers have a question for you: in the virtual age, why still print a book? That's not very green, is it!

The author — It also exists as an audiobook and an e-book! But I'm super tactile, I adore paper books. I love touching them, massaging them, stroking them, annotating them, highlighting them, dog-earing them. Lending them and swapping them, of course!

The Viking — Great! That way, I'll always have something to light my log fire with!

The author — Excellent idea! I'll submit it to IKEA right away:

"A fire-starter novel, organic, recycled, for your long winter nights.

Zero waste. Very eco-friendly."

The Viking — That could spread like wildfire and earn you more than your book!

The author — Better than playing with weapons and ending up moaning that people shoot at us with them! Always the same equation:

+ weapons = + deaths = – life

It multiplies when you share them out, QED: it's the most exponential function there is.

The Viking — Creating won't change a thing!

The author — Yes it will, quite the opposite! Creating is the art of living! The more we create, the more we share, and the more it grows! It's maths: the prize stallion of exponential functions. Life creates, that's the basics! It's like love and humour: you start from nothing and you end up with a book, a dish or a baby!

The Viking — You live with the unicorns!

The author — Oh, I may not have the ambition to kill everyone to get into power, or to change the system, which I don't find very serious. But in the meantime, I encourage anyone who wants to, to create. With the Kinder Surprise bonus: living in peace with yourself, and maybe with others, you never know!

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

The author — Make up your childhood, teenage and grown-up dreams. And if someone tries to force theirs on you, make up a funny comeback. And share it with us!

The journalist — One last question for the Viking: why a 38-tonne lorry, a palace of a *drak-car*, an XXL hangar?

The Viking — It's standard size for giants.

The author — Hmm... I have another theory...

The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

A novel by Karine Baridon



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