

Chapter 4

The Rear-View Mirror of Fate

Stuck between two hotheads,
one not convincing, the other not convinced.
It rings false, it's badly dubbed.

Idiots will dare anything — that's precisely how you spot them.

Michel Audiard — *Crooks in Clover*

Bright sunshine. Jazz music. The XXL *drak-car* rolls slowly into a street that is far too narrow. We glide along on velvet, in second gear. The Viking at the wheel, proud as a peacock. Two days as a couple. First romantic trip. First ride in the *drak-car*...

A car shoots past. Bish, bash! Clips our mirror and blocks the road. A bloke gets out bawling as if he had just lost an arm.

The bloke — You've smashed my mirror! Look at that! My BMW!

The Viking is livid, he leaps out of his seat

— NO! It's fake! You see, fake mirror, FAKE!

I watch him circle the *drak-car* from the passenger seat. I have a hunch that everything is being decided at this precise moment: he is waiting for me to take his side and translate on the spot. Without a second's hesitation, he opens my door, visibly impatient.

The Viking — Come out! Quick! Translate! Now!

I comply with a calm befitting the occasion. For the space of one breath, I turn the outside volume off, for a little sound break. From inside my cotton-wool silence, I watch them gesticulate without really hearing them.

Then the pressure of his hand on my arm turns the volume back up full blast: I smile... through gritted teeth. Stuck between two hotheads, one not convincing, the other not convinced. I find myself translating in my Franglais. It rings false, like a badly dubbed film.

Me — Hey, guys, stop, deep breaths! No need to unleash Ragnarök over a bit of plastic. If the mirror's broken, we call the insurance, not Odin! But shall we check first?

I look: the mirror has just popped out of its socket, but the bloke is making a huge song and dance about it.

Me — Look, the mirror's fine. *Click*. There you go, all done! Goodbye and safe travels!

The Viking, grand tirade — This man... IS A LOSER! BIG FRAUD! He wants my money! I give him FISTS! Tell him!

I calm things down — He says that... erm... you're... a crook and that he's going to offer you (*fists???*)... a fistful of... croissants? Or maybe... it depends how you translate it, really... a knuckle sandwich?

The Viking, visibly furious, all 2 metres of him, waves his arms about like a windmill. The bloke backs off, brandishes a till receipt, a photo of his cat, gets into his car and flees.

A few minutes later... silence in the *drak-car*. The Viking is wound tighter than a G-string.

Me — Right. All sorted. Let's relax and have a laugh.

The Viking, steely gaze

— You do NOT support me! You SABOTAGE! You with HIM! ... I'll NEVER forget that!

I try a joke to take the wind out of his sails and avoid blowing our brand-new romance, as fragile as a little chick barely out of its egg.

Me — You're kidding! All this because I didn't act out your melodrama? I already hate conflict, and you dump me in the middle of the hostilities for nothing! And I'm the one who gets it in the neck? Oi! Are you off your head? Wake up, General von Klinkerhoffen!

... And that is how the rear-view mirror became the murder weapon... of our entire relationship.

Sunday Is Showtime!

The journalist — You're setting the scene! Is this an attempt at mediation in a hostile environment?

The author — Let's say I don't really have a choice. Above all, I'm trying to stop those two clowns from turning "my" romantic comedy into "their" war film. Stuck between 0 % listening and 100 % threats, I'm trying not to get thumped. So I play Switzerland: I neutralise the hostilities. Mind you, I'm used to it with my parents, finding myself stuck between two drama queens, playing the buffer! Rather than take sides, my sister and I very quickly opted for *romcoms*... (fewer decibels, *mucha emoción*).

The journalist — Why do you love romantic comedies so much?

The author — Let's say they pay well, the punchlines are genuinely funny, and I always get to kiss the handsome bloke at the end. I've always been a hopeless romantic! (Thank you, Hugh, the great!)

The journalist — Still, there's a slight gap between your romantic ideal and your real life, isn't there?

The author — You noticed?... It's tragic! But I don't replay scenes from the past, except to laugh about them.

The Viking — You're wrong! People adore passionate conflicts! Listen to me carefully, *Stupid French woman*! I am directly descended from the Gods of trade! We Vikings are the kings of commerce. Since the golden age, the whole world has been our market: we've sold

everything, spices, boats, ideas, even hot air! We are the Guardians of the *Treasure of the Mist*. It's in our genes, it's in our blood! If we don't sell anything, we wither away! We never let anything slip through our fingers. So you can trust me! A good row can pay off big time! Me, I never tire of it! Take my advice: *Take the money!* You're a good girl!

The author — Do you think I'm a hopeless case?

The Viking — No, but you're useless at negotiating! You can't say NO! Even if you try to change your nature, which is rather a good thing, a leopard never changes its spots.

The journalist — How did things go with the Viking at the beginning?

The author — Oh, I thought I was rather brilliant, to say the least, for landing the role of the sun's girlfriend; my ego was flattered. So I asked him:

— What do you think of me?

And he replied:

— Well, you're really... Clumsy! Stupid French woman!

My ego went phut, or *tchoufa*, as we say back home! It collapsed like a soufflé.

The journalist — How close are you to your characters in real life?

The author — Very close, I'm an everyday anti-gloom bombshell.

The Viking — Not close at all.

The author — No, you, of course, have nothing in common with the rich, radiant, charming, party-loving, handy, skipper hunk...

The Viking — Nothing indeed. As you know, I'm a yoga teacher in *Nederwick*, I spend most of my time reading the *Vedas* and meditating in silence. But since you love my supple, muscular body, you gave me the lead role.

The author — It's true you're rather sexy on a mat... minus the self-awareness problem.

The journalist — After the mirror episode, you could have got out of the *drak-car*...

The author — No way was I giving up my adventure-packed romance over a bit of plastic that had popped out of place! You have to be fearless and forge ahead with panache, as my mother says, so I jumped into his boat with both feet.

The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

A novel by Karine Baridon



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