

Chapter 6 Show-bis

The Locomotive and the Anchor —
The Interview

Dad — Genius? My daughter? Not that I know of — unless she's been rubbing a lamp?

Mum — A swollen head is bad for the circulation.

My sister — Loving means taking the hits.

Sunday Is Showtime!

The journalist — Back on set, please give a warm welcome to the Solemare family, a big round of applause. Thank you all for coming.

Mum — Of course we came, she's our daughter.

Dad — For life, till death!

My sister — And then some!

The journalist — So, first question: how do you keep in touch by phone?

Dad — We call her every day, that's how it is, full stop!

Mum — Tradition is the habit that stays when you've forgotten everything else. Jean and I, so we don't lose our memory, we train for the quotation marathon...

Dad — And on top of that, I play bridge! I've already memorised 2 binders of rules! I've got a memory like a steel trap!

The journalist — What's the family philosophy?

Dad — Nothing's serious, you've got to play it down,

Mum — and keep your balance: self-mockery and good old down-to-earth common sense,

My sister — that's the wisdom we inherited!

Dad — We each have our favourite subject. Mine is more politics!

Mum — Oh no, don't you start again! Stop grumbling. *Pessimism is a matter of mood; optimism is a matter of will*, as Alain says.

Dad — *We choose to be happy, if only to set an example.* Jacques Prévert.

Mum — We survive by laughing at ourselves, and at others — it's always better than shooting each other.

The journalist — And what do you think of her relationship with the Viking?

Dad — The first time we met him...

Mum, cutting him off — He won everyone over! We were smitten!

Dad — Her mother and I looked at each other. We'd never seen her so happy.

The Viking — It's true! Our feet never touched the ground, we were floating 3 metres up.

Mum — He couldn't take his eyes off her, and he talked about her to everyone, even the baker. They looked beautiful together — strangers stopped them in the street to tell them so.

My sister — I can confirm. They were glowing! And very much in love, it was all you could see!

Dad — But later, once I got to know him better, I told Renata straight away: something's not right with that one, he's fallen out with his whole family! And he drinks like a whale! There's something not normal there!

The Viking — You can tell you've never met my father! Not everyone is like you, a real father to your daughters. You stop at the surface, but I'm like an onion, I have layers!

Dad — Yes, we'd noticed — and every one of them is thick! Me, I say what I think, that's all!

The Viking — You don't understand! I love my family, it's them who don't love me! So, you know where you can stick your family optimism?

Dad — Far away, very far away, much further than you!

My sister — Right, well, that's done! Now, let's all calm down... Especially since it's really very simple! It's the triumph of projection over common sense! They got together out of love, then hoped to change each other, so of course... each of them was inevitably disappointed. No need to draw you a picture — even if my sister wrote a whole novel about it!

The Viking — I may act the tough guy, but sometimes I wonder if I'm not just a kid who's simply scared of being alone...

My sister — I can confirm: back then, she was all you had. Even if everyone turned to look at you in the street, at home nobody answered any more. She was your only lifebuoy.

Mum — Never mind, that's all in the past. It's over, there's no point brooding, you can't turn back the clock. And anyway, *what doesn't kill you makes you stronger*, as Nietzsche would say.

Dad — Your mother's right, I agree with her. You face up to things and you move on. That's everyday courage!

Mum — Come on, chin up! Nothing is impossible to a valiant heart! It always feels better once it's done! Better to fail aiming high than to succeed by staying mediocre — so there! Keep going, my darling, even limping and singing, *the path is narrow and hard to tread*, as Somerset Maugham says, *so when you come to a fork in the road, take it — the supplies will follow...* I can't remember who said that? I learn one quotation a day, I'll have to reread my list!

Dad — I agree with your mother, that's why I married her, actually. When I saw her, I said to myself: she's the most beautiful woman in the world, and the best weapon against inertia. As she always says:

— Right, Jean, it's time, shall we go? — Come on, Jean, shall we go?

— Jean, this time are we going, or am I leaving on my own! And since she's already gone on ahead, I always have to run after her to catch up!

Mum — At least it keeps you fit! Me, I like to plan everything and check that it all goes to plan, so I can sleep easy!

Dad — That's for sure — you should have gone into insurance, the way you always expect the worst! That's what serenity is: panic kept well in hand!

The journalist — It's lively between you two!

Dad — That's how it is with us, we make noise because we're alive! We sing out of tune, but in chorus! We're a cacophonous duo, but a harmonious one — unlike some!

Mum — Which is why I'm half deaf, by the way!

Dad — Put your hearing aids in, you'll hear better!

Mum — They don't work, they make the whistling worse!

My parents, in unison — We always agree on what matters!

The journalist — Coraline calls you the locomotive and the anchor, you're a legendary duo! You've passed your diamond wedding anniversary — that's rare, and it's wonderful. So what do you think of marriage?

Dad — In our day, marriage was sacred. *Now it's the leading cause of divorce!*

Mum — That's because young people have no patience! They walk out at the slightest little upset. Your father and I made an effort every single day to put up with each other!

Dad — We have no patience either, so we shout louder that we're right — it helps us put up with each other!

Mum — But deep down, your father is a big soft heart, you can count on him! Not like some... (*The Viking takes a lightning bolt in the other eye!*)

Dad — And likewise! Your mother is a pain in the neck, but I'd never have married anyone else. She's perfect! She has a valiant heart, and that's in short supply these days!

Mum — *So, marry the right one and you'll be happy!*

Dad — *Marry the wrong one and you'll become a philosopher...* as Socrates used to say.

The journalist — So do you think Coraline is a genius?

Dad — Genius? My daughter? Not that I know of — unless she's been rubbing a lamp?

Mum — A swollen head is bad for the circulation. She's an artist, she has a lot of imagination, she makes up stories in her head.

Dad — *Genius is 1 % inspiration and 99 % perspiration!*

Mum — *Work keeps away 3 great evils: boredom, vice and need.* I can't remember who said it, but I got it in!

Dad — She's got more of a hidden talent: she makes fun of her parents! I wonder where she gets that from?...

Mum — Jean has the gift of observing and reading the future,

Dad — and my wife has the gift of lighting the fuse! So I lend her my lighter!

Mum — And it has to be said, Coraline is a magnet for disasters!

Me — Are you saying that to back me up or to jinx me?

My sister — Loving means taking the hits.

Me — Staying calm is my only certified skill, to be honest.

The journalist — And speaking of which, what do you do to stay that way... honest?

The Viking — Ah, that's what you say, but it remains to be proved.

Me — Let's just say I grew up in a family where every flaw got blown up fast, as long as it got a laugh. So I learnt very early, after a few public mockings, that the best defence against criticism was to attack myself first, with a metaphor.

Mum — Metaphor or not, we're always there for you! We minimise the risks.

Me — Yes, it's true, you've never let me down! But that's no reason to load your fears onto my back! What are you actually afraid of?

Mum — Me? I'm not afraid of anything! Not like you! So there!

The author — I admit, sometimes... I'm afraid of everything. But I pretend I'm afraid of nothing, to reassure you.

Mum — I really don't know where you get that from? As I've always told you: step forward and fear steps back! But you, my darling, what do you do when you're afraid?

Me — I do what you taught me: I put things in perspective! I'm scared but I keep going; I improvise with style. I've got no plan, but I've got comebacks. Real strength isn't controlling everything, it's carrying on, in spite of the fear and the doubts.

Mum — That's exactly what frightens me! Me, I'm strong, I plan ahead. But you're too sensitive. You go forward blind, like an ostrich! And you, Jean, are you afraid for her?

Dad — Of course! But we hold her hand. We do our best.

Mum — Me, I'm not afraid! So there! But I hold Jean's hand all the same, to support our girls! We'll never let them down, we won't! Not like some... follow my gaze... *(Mum shoots the Viking a withering look. Lightning! His head is still smoking!)*

Dad — You're very lucky our daughter is so kind! I know another one who wouldn't have spared you in her book!

Mum — Except I don't write ANYTHING! *Spoken words fly away, written words remain.* I don't trust what's written. You must NEVER believe everything that's written, or be too gullible. You must ALWAYS step back. Just because it's written doesn't mean it's true! At best, it reflects the author's opinions, if he has any! Most of the time, it's just his passing emotions,

Dad — a dumping ground for rubbish.

Mum — That's why, *all I know is that I know NOTHING*, as Socrates used to say. That way nobody can accuse me of ANYTHING!

Dad — Says *Madame Advice*! That's a new one, hot off the press! Well, *when you know nothing, you keep your trap shut!* as Coluche used to say.

Mum — You can always try, but you're not the one who'll shut me up!

Dad — Some people don't even know that much... as Socrates would say.

Mum — Another scapegoat who bothered the powerful because he exposed their ignorance... He ended up in the dock, sentenced to death, poor man!

Dad — Another bloke who asked clever questions, judged by idiots!

The journalist — What a family!

Dad — Yes, in our house, family is sacred! We love each other, we support each other, we hold each other up!

The journalist — Sometimes that can be the source of the problem...

Dad — I own it, so what? Nobody's perfect.

Mum — Least of all the ones who pretend to be!

Dad — *In every church, there's always something that doesn't ring true!* Me, I couldn't care less, I'm a Protestant!

Mum — We just do our best!

Dad — And as I always say: *Mektoub!* It is written! We can't master everything. We can't control everything.

The author — So there's no point planning everything!

Mum — Indeed, better to act straight away.

Dad — Family is our hard core. So if things are a mess, we sort out the problem and move on! Done and dusted.

Mum — Exactly, every problem has its solution. So you might as well laugh about it!

My sister — When you think about it, Coraline has carried on the family tradition. She turns serious ideas into a smile, and that makes you think! With her novel, there are other ways to cry than in front of *TeleKata*! You can cry with laughter, it makes up for it!

The journalist — Do you agree with your daughter Helena? What do you think of Coraline's book?

Mum — No! I don't agree!

Dad — That would have surprised me!

Mum — Well, what? I say what I think too, what did you expect? In fact, I've already told Coraline: *The secret of being a bore is to tell everything. The best is the enemy of the good...* as Voltaire used to say... All that is just waffle for people who'd rather gaze at their navels than act! Thinking means saying no... politely. Acting means doing it, straight away! Nobody imposes anything on me! It's not her Viking who's going to impress me!

Dad — The secret of being a bore? You should tell that to the politicians!

Mum — I agree! *When you see what you see, and you hear what you hear, you're quite right to think what you think!* as Coluche used to say!

My sister — We all think it... but not for the same reasons.

Dad — The truth is fragile, but stubborn: politicians are all idiots!

The journalist — You're a pessimist!

Dad — *I'm a realist who's ahead of time!* as Jean Yanne used to say! Politicians, *they're like nappies: they need changing often, and for the same reason!*

Mum — Jean is clear-sighted, he's rarely wrong! His exact logic is icy! It sends shivers down your spine.

The journalist — Careful, you might make enemies!

Dad — You have enemies? Good! It means you stood up for something once! And anyway, what? We're not allowed to say what we think any more? The man who'll shut me up hasn't been born yet, as Montaigne said: *on the highest throne in the world, we are still sitting on our own arse.* And the politicians have taken the biscuit!

Mum — It's like the other one... the great donkey: *I have understood you...* Oh, sure! I don't trust people who've understood everything... They always have a knife hidden in their pocket to defend their own interests.

Dad — Exactly! *War is too serious a matter to entrust to military men.* They torture innocent people and then blame the people for their crimes!

Mum — *You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.*

Dad — All of them hiding behind their grand speeches: Vote for us! And afterwards it's always the people who pay the price!

My sister — Universe, what else is possible, how does it get even better than this?

Mum — *Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt* — like them!

Dad — Me, I've got common sense, I don't turn my coat. I watch politics, and it's nothing but hot air! Whatever side they're on.

Mum — *So better to stop the idle speculation and cultivate your garden in peace*, as Montaigne used to say.

My sister — Here we go! *TeleKata* is back! Don't get them started on that subject, or we'll be here all night!

The author — You see, it's the same for me: I stopped voting for my ex... Better to be free.

The journalist — Let's get back to the Viking, if you don't mind.

Mum — When I think we fell for it! But he won't get me twice! Mind you, he's got bags of charm, the great nitwit. We liked him right from the start, we were fond of him!

Dad — Yes, that's true. I even said to Coraline: Now I won't have to worry about you any more! But in the end, he's just a little jerk!

Mum — Jean! That's rude!

Dad — Well, what? He shouldn't have hurt my daughter!

The journalist — Sverre, nothing to say?

The Viking — A gentleman always keeps his cool, especially with the elderly! But it's your fault she can't say no! You mollycoddled her! At least I tried to save her, so that for once she'd manage on her own. It's a question of honour!

Dad — Honour, my foot! Honour is all very well, ACTING is better! I may be a grumpy old man, but at least I'm loyal! I grumble, but I deliver! I protect her, I do!

Mum — Good thing we're here, I tell you! You don't choose your family, but you choose to defend it tooth and nail!

Dad — Just because we're uglier than you doesn't mean we haven't got a heart!

Mum — And we know how to defend ourselves. So don't you try to pull a fast one on us!

The Viking — I love your parents, they're great! They don't let anyone push them around!

My sister — That's the least you can say — it's one of their many talents.

Mum — I don't trust people who pay compliments, they've always got something up their sleeve! I can see you coming a mile off.

Dad — Just because you like us doesn't mean we like you! So there!

Mum — We feel sorry for you, that your family didn't support you! It's sad! And it would never have happened in our house!

Dad — But that was no reason to take it out on our daughter, poor thing!

Mum — She never did anything to you! I know my daughter, there's no one kinder!

My sister — You're strong enough to bear her misfortune, you forgive her everything, except succeeding without your permission. That's why you're here, actually. We're not fooled!

The author — All right, we get it. Enough of the group lynching. Honestly, *to err is human*, and we make mistakes out of love more often than out of real malice...

Dad — Yes, but still... He's like his father: a pain! And he keeps pushing, on top of it! He reminds me of your mother. She's like her father too, and she keeps pushing!

Mum — That's because you've rubbed off on me over the years! So there! Right, that's all very well, but time's ticking, so I want to know what time it is! Jean, have you got the time?

Dad — Yes, it's time to go, or we'll be late!

Mum — Right then, we're off, it's time. Come on, my darling, big kisses, and don't let that great donkey push you around!

Mum, to the Viking — Come on, no hard feelings, you had it coming!

Dad — We're proud of you, my darling! Speak later! Goodbye, Mr Journalist, thank you for having us. Goodbye, Sverre... Careful, we've got our eye on you!

Mum, *to the journalist and the Viking* — Oh, by the way, I nearly forgot... Here, I've made you each a *coca*, because I know the Viking likes it... And we're not going to stay cross. It's a pied-noir speciality, let me know what you think!

The Viking — What a thoughtful gesture! Thank you so much!

The journalist — Thank you. Come back any time!

Mum — Coraline, don't eat any, she's on a diet! Right, goodbye, my darling, and don't be home too late!

The journalist — What a wonderful duo... Quite a family!

My sister — Yes, 2 forces of nature, you have to keep up! Mind you, nobody can say "no" to my parents! It's not the done thing in our house!

The author — Yes, in our family, we love loud, we shout loud, we embarrass each other loud, we laugh loud... and the rest is just the why-oh-why? of life.

The journalist — And your sister?

The author — Mind your own beeswax! No, my sister has a great sense of humour. She's funny, she makes people laugh, she's sensitive, intuitive, she picks up on everything, she guesses before you've even spoken.

My sister — Right now, for example, I can guess you're about to ask me a favour.

The author — Gentle, funny, attentive, she smooths the edges. She knows how to swim with the tide, she adapts, she keeps everyone happy and does exactly as she pleases.

My sister — Don't give away my techniques!

The author — Her presence is soothing, she understands before you've even explained. She is free.

My sister — That's worth more than being right!

The journalist — As a tribute to your parents, you've decided to hold a quotation contest?

The author — Yes, to everyone who wants to take part, I'm setting you a challenge: slip some quotations into your funny story, and share your gems to make our little hearts beat.

Driiiiiiiing!

The author — Oops, sorry! My parents!

The journalist — Already? But they've only just left!

The Viking — They remind me of the *Nøkk*, the prankster spirits that stick to boats like suckers... they're full of energy too!

The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

A novel by Karine Baridon



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