

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, all the better to show off its driver.

The Viking wears no brands, they stress him out. 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 what I buy be worth more tomorrow? 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, with a built-in satellite chip... Even his rustle is premium.

Him — Thanks to my chip, I can cross the Atlantic in a force 10 gale and you always know where I am. Handy! I like to own very little. Just the very best.

I look around: *little* is a slightly different concept for the Viking giant. His 300-square-metre XXL hangar is a retail park all by itself: 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. At his place, objects retire and never die.

I asked for a corner to set up my massage table. He offered me the terrace. There wasn't one. Massage in a yellow oilskin on the pontoon, 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, projecting an image as proof — You're forgetting your own brand!

The Viking — That's our royal coat of arms, my identity! I'm proud of it! I am Sverre af Haldorholm, the demigod, alias *Iron Lance*! Direct heir to the kingdom of *Haldorholm*, in *Soumerland*.

The author — Okay. Well, if it's all the same to you, I'll keep wearing the T-shirt from my sister's little yoga studio. Family loyalty.

(The journalist projects a photo of Coraline doing yoga, wearing the famous T-shirt.)

The author — The logo is her silhouette. A bit weathered by time, maybe, but it reminds me fondly of my sister... and, incidentally, that royal or not, nobody's perfect.

The Viking — 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 — Fine works, sure. Good works too? 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 — Or maybe because it wasn't my scent?

The journalist — Is collecting in his blood?

The author — Of course. The collector looks after his treasures, not his health: he drinks too much. Bjornulf *the Flawless* got there first...

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

The journalist — 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 — To understand him better, I had to watch his habits and the weight of seemingly trivial details.

The journalist — Such as?

The author — Oh, he always sits in a corner near an exit, to keep an eye on everything, 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 3 seconds. Earpieces, wallet and keys within reach. And I'm off like a shot, nobody the wiser. I always look shipshape!

The author — There you go: the rock'n'roll look fools people easily. Laid-back outside, on red alert inside. His salt-crusted 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 — Fair point. It's the first thing I saw when I met you.

The author, to the audience — Lucky gambler, daredevil: his contradictions make the demigod human. Between you and me, I find that reassuring. Deep down, he's like me, half human, half... absurd?

The Viking — That's absurd! You're away with the fairies! 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!

The journalist — True, according to the ratings, you're "The audience's favourite Viking". We're all won over by your radiant charm!

(The audience goes wild, thunderous applause.)

The audience — We love you, Viking!!!

The author — A real rock frontman: 2 metres of charisma.

The audience cheers him — Vi-king! Vi-king! Vi-king!

The Viking — Thank you! (He takes a sip.) Thank you, thank you!

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 total flap, to tell 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, tins of 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 and a little worried... I couldn't tell if he was pulling my leg or dead serious. I wouldn't have long to find out.

The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

A novel by Karine Baridon



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