

Chapter 17

A Stopover on the Presqu'île
du Sel

The Viking heads down South, and me... down to hell!

"We can finally leave!" He calls that good news? Before I left for the mountains, I had a job, a life, holiday lets booked, plans. I head back South with nothing but the clothes on my back. The Viking tells me to hire a Rune Reader to raise my shield. I just want to move on, but he insists I fight back.

And he carries on — I gave up everything for you. I drove 2,000 km in my XXL *drak-car* so we could be together.

I want to believe him. Maybe this time it'll be beautiful? But before I can even park, a neighbour comes charging at us.

The neighbour — No, no, no! No parking here, sir, madam!

And here we go again, stuck between two hotheads... I try to calm things down, again. Round three.

Me — Are you the car park attendant, banning everyone else from doing what only you do? You park your camper van here "all year round"! You've got no credibility! Have you no shame? As far as I know, I've got the same rights as you, I'm an owner too, so what business is it of yours? Look, I've had a long day full of hassle, and I need to let off steam. Keep playing traffic warden with your neighbours and you'll end up with a knuckle sandwich!

Except, obviously, I said nothing, *not-at-all-at-all*, rows bring me out in hives. So I stayed very polite, I handled him with kid gloves...

Me — Dear sir, thank you for your concern, but I've just driven 900 km, I'm a little tired and I'd really like to get home and rest. No worries at all, I'm an owner too and we're only here for a few days!

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 warm under my duvet, and sleep for 24 hours! Dream as much as I like of hummingbirds in my hammock facing the sea. Later, when I wake up, I'll calmly think about what to do.

But no! The Viking panics! His blood freezes in his veins, he revs up, steam comes out of his ears. Result: he loses it! The neighbour legs it. We go in through the cellar, *Boom!* a violent clang of cast iron, I spin round with a start, that's all I needed! He's 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 building went up, back in the 60s. But the Viking's head is harder than cast iron. Too offended by the neighbour's welcome, he refuses to stay at mine and rest, or to come to the family lunch the next day. Oh no! He can't smile and pretend all is well! He's suffocating, he wants out, far from here! He's got a better idea!

Destination: extreme, on the peninsula of the loonies, where only 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, battered by wind and salt.

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

Me — -3 °C? 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! He accuses me of not loving him! Of preferring warmth to true love, rather than joining him in the thunderstorm, in the middle of a gale!

I think — So, bye-bye hammock and hummingbirds? Soft touch that I am, I give in, I go...

Out there, there's nothing! Apart from the icy cold, his *drak-car* that I've nicknamed the *Blizzard*, his wounded-angel eyes, Big Dog, and a refrigerated lorry parked right in front of him. His dream! Thrilled to bits, barely arrived, the big kid goes straight to knock on the door for a tour. And takes the chance to down a few beers with the kitesurfing couple. He urges 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 put me through hell, and kicked me out of HIS *drak-car* several times, at night, in the snow? Who 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! (Stuck, with a risk of eviction? Never again!) Sorry, I'm staying. I'll find work again and rent out my flat in the meantime, to avoid carnage, like the Toxic Tentacled Urchin.

After many a row, both of us digging our heels in, he heads back up, all alone, to his home in *Soumerland*...

I didn't follow him! I kept my dignity and my heating. So I went back to my parents', always ready to help me out, them! Far from my beloved Viking, but... in peace! Or so I thought! Because on his drive back, he's hatching a plan...

Sunday Is Showtime!

The journalist — And yet you did go and see him on the *Presqu'île du Sel*!

The author — See? It's pathetic! I wanted us to settle down, but he panicked and ran! He turned everything into mini chaos, so I went, to 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;
The blow must barely have touched it:
No sound would ever let it show. [...]
Do not touch it, it is broken.¹*

The Viking — I wanted to leave with you as soon as possible.

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 author — I thought I'd get my peace back. But he wasn't going to let it go that easily! As they say: *"I'm in for it now!"*

¹ Sully Prudhomme, *The Broken Vase* (Le Vase brisé), *Stances et poèmes* (Larousse).

The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

A novel by Karine Baridon



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