

The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

My pen is my No — a novel by Karine Baridon · the first three chapters

The English version submitted here is a working translation that will serve as the basis for a final professional translation in collaboration with the future agent and publisher. French original: lehamacettescolibris.com

Chapter 1

The Viking prowls the scrubland...

I'm angry! And too clear-headed to stay that way. I'd rather laugh about it and be free than be right and cry about it. Better to stay humble! No to pathos, yes to the dignity of billy goats. Tender humour and joyful healing.

No need to blow on the clouds. Just wait for sunset and they catch fire... Magnificent!

Funny coincidence... This week, I spotted him twice, from a distance. Him, The Viking, the real one. As charismatic as ever. Same angel face, same sunny aura, same crocodile boots. Same hands, pure marvels! Two Michelangelo sculptures... covered in engine grease. Same blood, probably slightly soaked in beer...

Back then, he used to say he came down to see me... clearly, he doesn't come back for the same reason any more. He spends his holidays here out of habit... it makes him feel safe. Nothing has changed...

Two days later, without meaning to, I discover I have a LinkedIn profile. News to me! Probably a relic of my life before *the great reset*... I take a look: two views! Ah yes, that confirms it: this profile is completely obsolete. It obviously dates from before the update. I'd completely forgotten...

And right in the middle of all that blankness, a little red dot catches my eye. Apparently, I have something new to check, bound to be an ad or a LinkedIn notification... On reflex, I click:

— The Viking viewed your profile two days ago.

BOOM! What a slap! Now that's surely intentional! I get the nasty feeling he's watching me from afar... sneakily... and all at once, without warning, I feel an ANGER rising!

— This time, it's NO! I thought it was in the past, settled, digested. But it all came gushing back up like a geyser. A silent volcanic explosion. An implosion.

When suddenly, *Ding!* I remember! That's right... I'd forgotten that too... I pick up other people's emotions unbeknownst to my own free will, a bit like a long-range radar. But then, is it my anger or his? Never mind, it has to come out, or the molten lava might explode! The magnitude of the tremor is so intense it seems proportional to my past feelings. I must say, I was crazy about him! CRAZY!

BOOM AGAIN! Revelation! I'm going to write! My Heroine's Journey... or my Eros's? Both, actually! Everything becomes something to laugh about: *the XXL antenna, the mountain saga, shuffle mode activated*... I turn my chaos into a creative goldmine. Creating sets me free!

Forty-seven chapters later... Healed, not bitter. I've forgiven, I'm free. My motto: I came through it, I laugh at it, I live by it! So I'm fizzing at the thought of publishing my little book: *The Hammock and the Hummingbirds*. That way, if by chance I bump into him again, I could always sign him a copy:

Thank you, my beloved Viking, I had a good laugh, and that's worth all the gold in the world!

Did you know "The Viking" never existed?

Coraline.

Three years later...

Dimanche c'est Show !

The journalist — Welcome to *Dimanche, c'est Show* ! We're live from *Palmeria*, for the concert celebrating the release of the novel *The Hammock and the Hummingbirds*. While we wait for 7 pm, here's an exclusive interview between the author and her fictional character. It's a first, and we're very proud of it! They're here together for you on stage, in flesh and blood, or rather in ink and paper! I have the honour of welcoming Coraline Goldman and her famous VIKING! Make some noise!

The audience — (thunderous applause, cries of joy full of love)

The journalist — Good evening to you both!

The author — Good evening, thank you all for coming in such numbers!

The Viking — Good evening.

The audience — WE LOVE YOU, VIKING!!!

The Viking — Thank you! What a crowd!

The author — It's unreal, I'd forgotten the effect you have.

The journalist — So, let's get straight to the heart of the matter. What a surprising dedication! And without any double meaning... What was your reaction?

The Viking — My lawyers are looking into it.

The author — Don't worry, the real Viking is a myth. He didn't suffer.

The Viking — That's regrettable! It seems I survived your book... but not your royalties.

The journalist — Since you're both here together, I gather your chance encounter did take place. How did it go?

The Viking — Well, one day, I heard someone running behind me. I turned round and that's when I saw her: scarlet red, panting, all dishevelled, ready to breathe her last. She was holding out her book with a trembling hand, looking desperate, as if it were her dying wish.

The journalist — And how did you react?

The Viking — I was caught off guard. I knew she was dying to write it, which I dreaded, like all of us, in fact. I thought she wouldn't be able to, and above all that she wouldn't dare. But she actually did it! And that surprised me, I was very worried about her mental health, because she is very dear to my heart!

The author — Admit it, you were terrified I'd tarnish your reputation.

The Viking — I don't see what makes you say that.

The journalist — I believe her book came with a rather troubling note. Can you read us what it said?

The Viking — If you insist... (he takes out a piece of paper and puts on his glasses)

My hero is a fifty-something with crazy charm. Vain, controlling and slightly singed. I thought you'd be perfect for the part.

She was very frank. I had to take it on the chin. But I'm a gentleman, I let it go. I preferred to apply the mafia technique. I told her:

— Pay up first! while twisting her index finger. Then I took steps to have my henchman ensure her protection. La Hache is a big shot, she's safe with him. So, to please her and out of sheer compassion, I came to help her promote her novel: *The Viking and Me*.

The journalist — You mean *The Hammock and the Hummingbirds*?

The author — Bingo! Nothing beats being a pair to reveal our inner conflicts...

The journalist — And why did you look at her profile?

The Viking — Because I care about her! I was really worried. She was very ill! She had cold sores all over her face, it was unbearable to look at, a horror! She was contagious, so I watched her from a distance to take her temperature...

The author — How sweet of you! In truth, "controlling" is the right word for you! You just can't help it!

The journalist — So in the end, it all started with a simple click on LinkedIn?

The author — Exactly, I took back humorous control of my life, without his approval!

The Viking — I don't like that tone! Watch what you say or I'll sue you.

The author — Yes, I know, what you can't stand is people laughing at you, we know the tune! But let me reassure you right away: All the characters in this novel are fictitious. You can sleep soundly... and kiss your damages goodbye.

The Viking — This woman is vile, she's using me to make a fortune!

The author — Just a precaution. I'm protecting my copyright. I learnt that from the king of trade, alias Vik le King, who got me fired from my job and cut off my income... Oh sorry, I'm wandering off... What was the question?

The journalist — What made you want to write?

The author — The irrepressible need to recycle my anger into creative compost. It's very eco-friendly.

The Viking — You should have had a nice cold beer, to cool you down! (La Hache steps closer.)

The author — Is that a threat? Sorry to disappoint you, but I chose to create, not to drink to it! And anyway, I'm not really one for drama. When I take myself too seriously, I'm bored to tears.

The Viking — I don't agree. You have that kind of natural gift for being both funny and very attractive, especially to disasters! But you think too much, it's rather touching actually, because you get lost all on your own in your wild ramblings. The other day, it took La Hache a whole day to find her, he turned her house upside down from floor to ceiling. She was in her garden, perfectly calm, dreaming in her hammock. Apparently that's her way of writing. She wakes up with an idea as soporific as you could wish for. Lucky I'm here to put a bit of life into her lullaby!

The journalist — Coraline, why do you love your hammock so much?

The author — It's my protected zone, not an *open space*. It's where I recharge, where I turn my fears into laughter. My novel was born there: Hammock, hummingbirds and Freedom! The rest can wait!

The Viking — Yeah, right, you've always dreamt of being "the star", admit it.

The author — Impossible, you'd already taken the part.

The Viking — Naturally, I'm a demigod... It's thanks to me that your book is a success! I'm your emotional catalyst. You should thank me, actually! After all, you don't really have a choice, I'm the one driving up your sales!

The author — Indeed, I don't really have a choice... especially since La Hache has been ensuring my protection!

The Viking — I make sure I look after you and this is how you thank me!

The author — Thank you for what? For keeping an eye on me? I'm not a prosecution witness out on parole!

The Viking — But are you aware that you'll have to forgive me one day, especially since I've done nothing wrong?

The author — Oh, that's already done! I know you're not mean, just hurt...

The Viking — I don't know what makes you say that?

The author — *So British!* You have so many layers of defences you're almost impossible to break through. But correct me if I'm wrong, it was you who chose your last line, wasn't it?
— I close the book definitely !

The Viking — I had to put a full stop to my sentence one day!

The author — And you chose an exclamation mark! Why am I not surprised?... Well, I just answered you with a little time lag...
— Fine. I'm opening the book you've just closed... To tell my truth.

The Viking — It's too late, you don't reopen old files.

The author — Better late than never! And don't worry, I've stopped loving you, but not loving life! Cupid has more than one trick up his sleeve, my little heart keeps on beating, it's in its nature.

The journalist — So, would you say your novel is a sort of literary reconciliation?

The author — Let's say I've recycled my conflicts into laughter, it's good for the emotional planet, apparently. It's my antidote to pathos, the best kind of resilience.

The journalist — I read that you toss scenes out at random. Is that true?

The author — I'd rather say I write my emotions as the memories come back to me, which is to say a bit randomly, I must admit, especially since *the great reset*. Then I investigate, I try to untangle the invisible threads, to see what's going on behind... and try to make sense of it all. But sometimes my little inner voice is complete chaos. So I fall asleep a bit discouraged, and after a good night's sleep, I often see things more clearly.

The Viking — You mean you're feeling your way in the dark!

The author — A bit, yes, I admit it. I follow whatever draws me in the moment. No need to understand the logic straight away. I trust my instinct.

The Viking — That explains everything!

The journalist — Indeed, it's still a bit confusing... So, if you don't mind, why don't you introduce yourself to announce what comes next...

The author — With pleasure! Well, I very much fear I am the author of the novel *The Hammock and the Hummingbirds*... And now, I regret to inform you that we are going to review a few extracts from my book, of which I am not very proud.

The Viking — And with good reason!

Chapter 2

My Gallery of Imperfect Jewels

I no longer believe in love at first sight,
but I keep pretending.

Full of naive optimism, and probably under the influence of a magnesium overdose, I have decided to sign up to a dating site. New life, new *mindset*, new fabulous bloke. So I post my little ad, carefully thought through, not too long, just mysterious enough to intrigue, not too far out there so I don't come across as a total space cadet.

☒ Avoid spiritual references in the opening lines.

Come on, girl, let's get this over with, and fast. Dating sites aren't your thing, so:

☐ 1 little ad,

☐ 1 first contact,

☐ 1 date,

☐ 1 single goal: 1 real encounter.

Come on, stop beating about the bush. No waffle, get straight to the point. Chin up, be brave! Fortune favours the bold! Off we go, Bob's your uncle!

A lucid and vulnerable confession about my gallery of imperfect jewels.

RARE MODEL! LIMITED EDITION!

My presence is unforgettable!

☒ Original bodywork.

☒ In forward gear, my chest goes ahead as a scout.

☒ In reverse, my bum warns me of obstacles.

☒ I was the hand double for snow shovels.

☒ My eyes don't always agree on the focus.

☒ My hair fully exercises its freedom of expression: airy bohemian.

☒ My smile makes up for everything: neither white nor straight, just honest.

☒ My skin is magnetic: you can't have it all!

Genuine gem

Free and fully embodied:

☒ I am a living gallery of wholehearted self-mockery.

☒ Lucid and tender, out of respect. But only in writing.

☐ Out loud, I'm completely unretouched. I have less time to think.

☒ I'm jet-lagged.

☒ My comeback often turns up at pudding.

Apart from that,

If you think I have no flaws, you're mistaken.

But let me reassure you straight away: I don't own up to all of them.

Non-negotiable bonus:

- ☑ I'm past the half-century. *COLLECTOR'S ITEM
- ☑ You will meet my parents.
- ☑ With me, it's serious.

Small hidden clause

That nobody wants to read in the contract:

- ☑ I suffer from an incurable allergy to control and unsolicited advice.

Selective, I meet only:

- ☑ By REAL appointment 😊

And if you feel like travelling the road with me, I'm more of a:

- ☑ Long-haul voyage kind of girl...

Absolutely unavoidable:

- ☑ I come out with daft punchlines.

Looking forward to meeting you, to smile together facing the sea.

Because if we change our angle of view, we end up facing the road. 🗡️

- ☑ 1 little ad.

There, done! *Go!*

Operation let's-meet!

I start scrolling...

After two hours, the verdict comes in, final and beyond appeal: National depression.

Out of 100 % of profiles:

90 %: 0 comments! 😞 Is introducing yourself a paid extra?

5 %: 1 word! 😞 *Hello, Hi... thank you, poetry of life!*

2.5 %: 1 sentence! 😞 *I love life. Me too. Lightning connection!*

Where did the remaining 2.5 % go? 😞 I was hoping for... at least 1 complete sentence! 😞

And suddenly, right in the middle of this emotional-literary desert... a photo.

💣 *Boom!*

No, seriously, the kind of photo that sets off a hot flush, even without air con.

💣 *BOOM!!*

And yet, nothing special, just a face... but... one that intrigues me.

I take a closer look: one eye laughing, one eye hiding something... something really deep! I need to know more. I click.

At last, a long text! *Yes!* 😊

... in a completely unknown language... *No!* 😞

I check to be sure... No, not English, not Spanish, not even a dialect vaguely resembling German. A Martian language. 🙄

I tell myself: *fake profile*. Has to be. Unless he's a Baltic spy on a mission?

Far too dodgy. I close it. No energy for a geopolitical love conspiracy.

And I go back to scrolling... until psychological exhaustion. I close the app with the grace of a collapsing soufflé. Drained, knackered, shrivelled to the soul.

I need to...

☑ *sea-air* myself. Round 1. [Translator's note: the author's invented verb "maérer" blends *mer* (sea) and *aérer* (to air out).]

I go to the *Presqu'île du Sel*, facing the *Île du Croco*. The sun, the sea, life, happiness! I come home revived! Right, back in I go! The very same day, yes, I know... emotional weakness. But I've made a commitment to myself: persevere for at least 48 h before declaring love officially dead.

And then, a sign from destiny or algorithm magic? The same photo pops up again!

💥 *Re-BOOM!*

Ok, Universe, I see you...

Yes! This time, the text is in English! 😊

Revelation!

It's deep, intelligent, sensitive. A real human being, with a brain and a heart. Now a protected species. I should point out that ChatGPT doesn't exist yet. Well, it does, but nobody uses it. Well, they do, but not me. So I write to him in English, with two fingers, my tongue poking out slightly, *casual* but charming (well, I hope so). And I suggest we meet: such-and-such a day, such-and-such a time, at such-and-such a well-known place.

☑ 1 first contact. *Todo va bene!*

...

No reply.

Fine, very well. I refuse to mope around waiting. I line up two other dates, on principle. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. I close the app and go off to live my life...

☑ *sea-air* myself. Round 2.

2 days later... *Bling!*

☑ 1 notification!

— *Sorry, it was my birthday yesterday...* Blah blah blah...

In short: *OK to meet at the beach, this Friday, late afternoon.*

☑ 1 date.

Perfect!

☑ 1 summer date, the sun sets at 11 o'clock at night.

☑ 1 plan B all ready, just in case:

☑ 1 live concert, 1 minute away, feet in the water, how lovely!

☑ Dignity preserved.

At worst, I can always...

☑ *sea-air* myself. Round 3.

Chapter 3

Code Rose

I've always considered humour
a weapon of mass seduction.

— Hello, *Code Rose*?

Midnight Rose here.

Rose in the crosshairs. Target locked.

Affection-guided missile armed.

...

BOOM!

That day, I'm massaging a terminally ill man.

100% immersion. Attention. Affection. Precaution. Compassion...

— Breathe! ... Live in the present moment.

I get into my car, check the time: Oh blimey, I'm late!

180° turn. First date with a stranger. I need to recentre!

— Breathe! ... Live in the present moment.

I tear off like Fangio, to grab a quick unsold loaf at the bakery just before closing. Whoosh, into the bottom of my bag. I skid to a controlled stop in front of the sea. Late, hair a mess, not dressed up, a whiff of massage oil arriving before me...

He's waiting for me by the beach, next to his bike, in crocodile boots. Huge, smiling, charming, polite... he smells good... drop-dead.

I see him. And I know.

I don't know what I know. But I know it.

I've known him forever, from another life, perhaps. We were meant to meet, it's obvious, it's written somewhere... all I have to do is follow. He's everything I dream of: the open sea, travel, adventure, arms. This is exactly the precise moment to run for it!...

First time he sees me, in a red dress, open smile, pure gaze, full of love.

He thinks: Wow!... Let's go and pick the rose from the garden!

He's planned everything, just in case... wicker basket, chequered tablecloth, home-made nibbles, flutes, champagne... he's pulled out all the stops. The big romantic gesture.

"Big" is the word... Then again, it's only natural. He comes from *Haldorholm*, in *Soumerland*. Over there, everything is flat: not a hill, not a hump, not a mound, nothing. So they have to compensate somehow. The taller you are, the further you see. As a result, the men shoot up like giant bamboo and look like mutant asparagus. We have mountains; they have giants. He's 2 metres tall: 200 cm of charm, 95 to 110 kilos of power... Gulp!

Angel curls, innocent child's smile, gap teeth, I'd buy him an ice cream on the spot! With that little space between his front teeth, just wide enough to park a bike in, this guy is luck personified!

[Translator's note: in French, gap teeth are called "dents du bonheur", "lucky teeth".]

He's gorgeous! Like an XXL Jeff Bridges. As tall and irresistible as *Magnum* in his day. A tooth chipped on the diagonal gives him a little *Tom Sawyer* look, utterly charming.

(Yes, I know, my references are out of date, but in my defence, I haven't switched on the telly since the 90s... my great age, no doubt.)

Little rock-rebel look, made-to-measure crocodile boots, sky-blue shirt, crease-proof sand-coloured trousers. He blends in so well with the scenery that, from a certain angle, he goes completely incognito. He's *The Invisible Man*. Only his blue eyes give him away. Mel Gibson in *Braveheart*. In short, when I see him, I melt.

My intuition knows. My reason, though, stays on its guard. His angelic gaze won't let go of me... It does worry me a bit all the same. I've got a little doubt. I don't know if he fancies me or if he's some weirdo looking for prey? His automatic target-tracking system follows me everywhere. It's as if his infrared radar has detected a target! His turret has armed its missile:

— Rose in the crosshairs, target locked.

DRRIING. My parents!

They must have detected something...

Oops, not now! Sorry. I kick for touch, unseen, unknown. This is no time to shoot myself in the foot! Above all, stay focused.

After ten minutes, I relax... Actually, he looks more like a kid on a sandy beach, aiming his water pistol at me and saying:

— You're mine! *Splash!*

I can't resist, I like him straight away! And behind his mischievous eyes, I feel... (yes, I know it sounds corny, put like that... but I feel a lot. Ever since I was born, I've been the type to feel... too much! Even with my eyes open, I feel everything! It just comes over me, that's how it is). Anyway. I feel something very human that touches me deeply... And with no innuendo whatsoever, you vulgar thing! It's not what you think...

Him — Champagne! Cheers! To love!

Me — Cheers! Happiness!

Mel's eyes lock onto me (alert, predator trap).

— You're as beautiful as a rose!...

And then, without warning, against my will, a teeny tear betrays me!

I fire back on the spot — Thank you, it's amazing how this champagne moves me! I'm very sensitive, I can't help it, the moment I hear the word thorn, I cry. (Thank you, *La Cage aux Folles!*)

In my head, the comments come thick and fast, having a field day. It's as if every planet in my birth chart has called an emergency summit:

My Venus in Aries — Oh my! He's pulling me in like a magnet! I'm falling in love!

My Libra rising — Ah, love! It's like champagne, it goes straight to your head!

My Saturn in Capricorn — And afterwards... You've got a splitting headache!

My Scorpio — A rose that pricks, with thorns as long as your arm.

My Virgo, ever practical — A flower allergic to alcohol, stop your monologue!

My Taurus Sun — Me, I ruminate, it's in my nature, that's different.

DRRRRIIIIIINNNG! My parents. Here we go again.

I interrupt the giant, embarrassed — *Skiouze-mi*, I'll just be a minute!

My parents are *pieds-noirs*. They call me every evening, to keep the bond alive. Come rain, come wind, come snow... real lighthouse keepers!

Officially, my father is retired. In reality, he has set up a special unit of the DGSI. *The Directorate-General for Internal Family Security*. James Bond on a mission to spy on my private life.

He has enlisted my mother. She's his cover, letting him pull the strings on the quiet. And it's good for domestic peace, apparently. He sends her on intelligence missions, because her speciality is worming things out of you. She's a true Libra — weighing everyone up and spilling the beans — extroverted, she loves making connections, and since I do too, we've woven ourselves a Kevlar umbilical cord!

They want to know everything.

My mother — Good evening, darling, where are you?

Me — Always in your heart, Mum darling.

My mother — Are you all alone, my love?

Me — No (I've never been able to lie), I'll call you back later.

My parents — Speak up! We can't understand what you're saying... Your phone isn't working! Why can't you talk to us?

Me — What do you think? Your calls are *the killer* of opportunities. My cover's blown all over the place! At this rate, I'll end up like Fortunée Sarfati!

My parents — Oh, you always have to exaggerate, here we go, it's a tragedy...

Me — I'm with a Viking, as tall as a basketball player and as muscly as a rugby player. I'm perfectly safe! *Todo va bene!*

My father is a control radar on high alert. His early-warning system spots danger before it arrives. In an extreme emergency, he turns up straight away.

My father — Who's this one? How do you know him? Where's he from? What's his name?

My mother — You shouldn't arrange to meet a stranger, it's dangerous!

Me — Thanks, I'll file that between *Don't go out alone at night at 54* and *Don't iron your clothes while wearing them*. Chill! Breathe!

They dramatise:

My mother — But it could end very badly!

Me — I've got a life jacket, in case the evening turns into *Titanic*.

My mother — Whatever you do, be careful!

They want to plan for everything:

My mother — And what time are you coming home?

Me — Right after the live concert. When the hens go to bed, at sunset.

My father, 83 — Call me as soon as you get in, send me a text.

Me — Do you want my itinerary too, for the club of adults under 24-hour surveillance?

My mother — We just want to make sure everything's all right.

Me — Yes, I know. Five times a day, at 10 euros a ring, I'd be a millionaire by now...

My father — And we'd be broke... so think of the royalties.

Me — OK, switch off your parental GPS. A bit of space, or I'm going into airplane mode.

They laugh, in cahoots... but worried:

My father — Take an umbrella, you never know.

My mother — Jean! Don't go putting ideas in her head!

My father — Don't worry! It's not her head he's got ideas about! I'm just warning her, that's all.

Me — Thanks. Have a good evening! *Click!*

I turn round... Phew! He's still there!

A few hours later...

I've had a wonderful evening! I fly home; he cycles home. We each fall asleep in our own beds, on the same pink cloud. Smiles on our lips, lulled by a sensual wave... Damn, I forgot. I switch the light back on, cancel the other dates and delete my account. Phew, relieved, I switch off.

DRRRRIIINNG. Mum.

It's late, maybe it's urgent? Just in case, I pick up.

Me — Good evening, Mum.

My mother — Darling! So, how did your evening with this Viking go?

Me — Excellent! We'll probably see each other again tomorrow.

My father — Where's he from? What's his name? What does he do for a living?

Me — Sverre af Haldorholm, he comes from *Soumerland*. He defends Vikings who are victims of sea monsters, but that's all I know. You'll probably meet him!

My father — All right, good night, darling!

My mother — Quick, put on Channel 2! *L'Agence* is on.

Me — I don't like detective shows...

My mother — No, no, it's property, luxury lofts in Dubai!

Me — I'm not interested.

My mother — Then put on Channel 1, there are children singing! You'll love it!

Me — Mum, I'm sleepy. I was just dropping off!

My mother — Why? Are you ill?

My father — What's wrong with her? Isn't she well?

Me — No, everything's fine. But you know I don't watch TV!

My mother — That's your father's fault! He told me not to call you. But you know me, out of sheer contrariness, I called you straight away. So there!

Me — Thanks, but I'm sleepy. What if we moved the evening call to 10 in the morning?

My father — Why, are we disturbing you? You don't do anything in the evenings anyway, do you?

Me — Well, yes, incidentally, my life... I don't want to end up like *Bridget Jones*.

They say nothing. But I imagine... wrongly, no doubt.

My father — Too late, you're past the half-century.

My mother — This wouldn't have happened if you'd listened to us and married a nice *pied-noir* boy, like us.

My father — But you prefer the exotic! And what have they got that we haven't, eh, can you tell me that? Nothing at all! Proof: they fall out with their parents and their whole family! I told your mother straight away, there's really something not quite right about them!

But no... I'm imagining things! ... I've only just met the Viking. I'm on my little pink cloud.

Me — Good night. I love you! *Click*.

Pfff... Too late... I'm wide awake now...

OK, I'll read... But I can't concentrate. I've been rereading the same page for five minutes. I'm thinking about the Viking... No, actually, if I'm honest, I can think of nothing but the Viking. It's as if my brain can't switch off... Truth be told, there's nothing else but... the Viking, my joy and the relief that comes with it.

Dimanche c'est Show !

The journalist — How did it all begin?

The author — Well, the year before, they opened up my stomach. Twice, one after the other. I went back to work too soon: back under the knife. Long convalescence. I took the opportunity to paint pictures and do a distance-learning course on relationships. At the end, they told me to sign up to a dating site. I didn't like the sound of it. I went back to working for myself, to catch up. And then, after a while, I got a bit bored, and I finally decided to give it a go.

The journalist — What attracts you to his profile?

The author — Beyond his photo, you have to understand that ever since I was a child, I've been lulled by dreams of faraway places. So maybe it's linked to the fact that I often have a crush on foreigners. And among the profiles, I come across one that catches my eye. I don't understand his language, but he seems familiar to me, which is rather strange.

The journalist — And you trust him straight away?

The author — No, at first I'm wary. I don't want to let him into my hammock before he's shown his credentials. Then he invites me to visit him on his *drak-car*. And we quite quickly become this slightly odd couple, with this big kid freewheeling and me, longing only to share my hammock with my darling.

The Viking — Come on, admit you dream of turning your life into a novel. It's a bit absurd, but it's what drives you.

The author — It's more that it would let me give up this hare-brained idea of opening a dance school, because apparently I'd make a rather sexy dancer... I have to say, I dance the way I breathe; rhythm is second nature to me.

The journalist — Let's go back to your *Gallery of Imperfect Jewels*. (he projects Coraline's dating-site profile picture onto a big screen) Is self-mockery your armour?

The author — Well, I was born into a *pied-noir* family. So I learnt very early to be the first to laugh at myself, to cut the ground from under the dementors' feet!

The Viking — Or for fear that someone would point out your flaws.

The author — Nobody's perfect... aren't you?

The Viking — Me, I'm a demigod, only half human, that's different.

The journalist — 90% of profiles with no description, it's dismal!

The author — Nobody writes any more these days. Dating sites are a bit like visiting a graveyard of good intentions, full of zombies pouncing on anything that moves. Better to scroll than to sink!

The journalist — Why look at a profile in a language you didn't understand?

The author — I followed my intuition. I must say his photo broke down all my resistance. So I satisfied my curiosity. I had to know who this writer from elsewhere was. I really couldn't leave him sleeping in that site's bathtub, empty of substance!

The Viking — Or you were just too lazy to look for a dictionary.

The author — At the time, I couldn't have guessed you spoke *Troll*.

The journalist — Your little tear arrived like a comet. What was it hiding?

The author — Something I quickly pushed down. When you're sensitive, you protect yourself... you don't show yourself vulnerable on the first date. I thanked my parents for interrupting me, to stop me blowing my cover, while blaming them for doing it.

The Viking — Female logic! It's simpler than admitting what you feel.

The journalist — Your parents call you in the middle of a date... is that a habit?

The author — A sacred habit! The *DGSI-F* never takes a day off.

The Viking — Personally, I found it touching, knowing her family could identify her body if she disappeared at sea.

The author — Don't worry, they can track my position, they invented GPS.

The Viking — Anyway, when my heart's beeper went wild, I knew straight away I'd hit the jackpot. Target locked... *boom!*

The author — Hit the jackpot, you can say that again! I thought so too. Nobody told me you had to scratch...

The journalist — That's handy, I've got coins. Shall we scratch together after the break?