Chapter 21

Fridge on Wheels

I'd rather be sucking Mr Freeze ice pops with my feet in turquoise water!

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I put a question to *Mr Freeze*, the Viking of the Far North.

— What was your childhood dream?

Him — A treehouse!

Me — And your teenage dream?

Him — A boat!

Me — And your grown-up dream?

He looks at me with shining eyes, like a kid in front of a Christmas shop window.

Him — A refrigerated lorry! Not a toy fire engine. No, a 38-tonne XXL!

Me — The kind that carts dead fish from Rotterdam to Naples?

Him — Exactly! I'm going to convert it into a *rig*! It's already insulated, so I'll plumb in water and electricity, cut some windows and live in it.

Me — Given your relationship with the shower, you could last for weeks in there.

Him — Yeah! I'll park it on an isolated plot, deep in the forest of *Norborea*, with 400 km of trees in every direction. I'll hook up the pipes and we'll live completely off-grid.

He dreams of stainless-steel screws sorted by mood. And me, of the sweet life. Just not one that smells of herring.

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Me — Oh yes! I can just see myself in your dream: fleece-lined plastic Crocs caked in engine grease, a summer dress, wrapped in a foil space blanket, praying for one ray of sunshine to break through the treetops.

Him — I'll put in a solar shower for you!

Me — Thanks for the offer, but I'm not a two-for-one deal. I'm happy to join you at Lake *Luminör* now and then to discover your world of legends, but not to have your commando lifestyle forced on me. My needs get a vote.

Him — I'll save you the best spot, snuggled up in my arms!

Me — Except in winter it's dark 20 hours a day!

Him — Don't worry, my *rig* will be a palace. Super comfy. Super insulated. Super isolated. And there'll be room for everyone.

Me — I don't fancy living in your thingy. Unless you turn it into a yoga studio. It's called a couple, not a fan club. What if I invited you into my dream, just to see how you react?

Him — Go on then, what are you actually suggesting?

Me — My dream is always summer, even at the end of November. Between land and sea, between sunshine and starry skies, in *Palmeria*, on the *Presqu'île du Sel*, where pink flamingos rule and nature is wild and beautiful. We swim at sunrise. During the day, we go kitesurfing. And in the evening, we watch the sun set and it takes our breath away.

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We do up an old single-storey house. All white, all simple, right by the sea. With a hammock in the garden. And a yoga studio on stilts, where my sister teaches, looking out over the garden where I meditate barefoot.

My parents nap in the deckchairs on the terrace, in the shade of the palm trees. We each have our own space. Me, a bright room for massages, a glasshouse studio to paint, write and dream up stories like this one. I can create.

And you tinker away in your big converted shipping container facing the salt marshes, fixing your vintage boats, building your crazy projects and sorting out anything you can lay your hands on. Happy as a kid in a toyshop.

An open house, life outdoors. Family and friends drop by, we sing, we laugh. We take the dinghy out to the Île du Croco for a picnic on the beach.

Or else we each have a house on a plot of farmland and see each other whenever we like. In short, life! We go on holiday somewhere hot, the Mediterranean or the tropics. And now and then, to your Far North.

Him, worried — Hang on, let me get my spy map out: there, too many mosquitoes. There, too many people. There, too dangerous, the regime's too shaky. That leaves only here: on my land, in my refrigerated lorry, slap bang in the middle of the forest of *Norborea*, near Lake *Luminör*, 400 km from another living soul!

Me — Fine! While I swing in my hammock with a view of the lagoon, you eat frozen herring by the fire you lit with my novel, in your log cabin, deep in the woods.

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Two dreams. Two opposite climates. Each as good as the other. And we meet up often: doable!

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Sunday Is Showtime!

The journalist — Viking, have you always dreamed of adventure?

The Viking — Always! A treehouse, a boat, a refrigerated lorry. Being self-sufficient is the greatest adventure of all!

The author — Except all his dreams are hiding places.

The journalist — And where are you both now?

The author — Today, it's different. I write, I create, from home, with a certified hammock. Family, loyal friends with degrees in patience, experts in warm ties, whom I see without armour or an escape plan. I'm rereading *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* without leaving my palm trees.

When I've finished writing, I go for a picnic with my nearest and dearest on the *Presqu'île du Sel*, facing the Île du Croco. After a swim, life is good, *todo va bene*. And I spare a thought for the Viking, who has finally settled down.

The journalist — Really? Incredible!

The Viking — In the end, I did up the old harbour master's office and made it my home. 5 minutes from my boat shed and from my office at the top of the lighthouse. I've found my haven of peace, on the harbour at *Haldorholm*. My three one-metre-tall *Big Dogs* guard my treasures. And in case of nuclear attack, I head out to sea in my longship. I'm 100% self-sufficient. Nothing can happen to me!

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The journalist — Don't you miss the greenery?

The Viking — I've kept a pitch at the *drak-car camp* for when I go sailing!

The author — Shame you didn't think of it sooner: it would have spared us six months of telephone siege, three emotional crusades and an unfunded thesis on verbal harassment.

The journalist — You can't turn back the clock!

The author — Yep, we had to live through it to learn. Him to settle down, me to say no.

The journalist — Viking, are you still tuned in to war zones?

The Viking — Of course! You never know.

The author — I've changed my GPS frequency. I've gone for the nature-and-hummingbirds option, in every colour. A living painting!

The journalist — And this time, what do you suggest to the reader?

The author — Make up your childhood, teenage and grown-up dreams. And if someone tries to force theirs on you, make up a funny comeback. And share it with us!

The journalist — One last question for the Viking: why a 38-tonne lorry, a palace of a drak-car, an XXL hangar?

The Viking — It's standard size for giants.

The author — Hmm... I have another theory...

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