

Viking Time

It was, the 31st of October, All Hallows Eve, in Aberdeen, Scotland.

It had all started months before, "Project Manhunt", the day after her birthday, and now she had made it happen. Yes, she thought:

It will work! It must work!

Time was running out.

They might take him away, before she could make him 'oblige'.

ooOoo

Catherine had been looking forward to the Office Halloween Party.

It was her idea, she had organised it, getting the funds from the Staff Social Fund, making the room booking at the pub with wee nibbles, first drinks for all, and a prize for the Best Fancy Dress. Easy peasy!

Her 'Viking Maiden' outfit was inspired by that old film, "The Vikings", one of her Dad's favourites. She had cut down her old faux fur jacket, used old denim shorts cut very short now and dyed red, new naughty red bra and a blond wig that she had put into pleats, under a Viking Helmet with horns, (her 'horny helmet' she had thought, looking at herself in the mirror). The girl in the "Court Jesters" the shop that Jane had mentioned, the shop that specialised in Theatrical Clothing, had said it was a 'real' Viking Helmet, made years earlier for the "Up Helly Aa" Festival in Shetland, that she had bought with lots of other Viking gear after the Panto flopped. How lucky for me, Catherine thought! Then the girl found high furry boots, from the back shop, also ex-Panto, and just the right colour, the deep dark blue that Catherine had set her heart on. At first she had thought that the asking price for the items was way OTT, but the girl knew how to hook her, and Catherine had never been good at haggling.

"Try them on," said the girl, "go on, why don't you!"

Catherine loved them, and they were comfortable too, a bonus.

"Look, take everything home. Go on! Try them with your whole outfit, why don't you? Only pay when you're sure. Go on, why don't you!"

With her sparkly red tights, well, she felt amazing, just like a Viking Maiden! She let her credit card take the hit. But now, after all that had happened...

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Catherine knew she could not and would not go to the Halloween Party. She opened the door to her flat, slid inside, and slumped back against the front door, stared at her image in the tall dressing mirror.

She would never be the Viking Maiden, and she would never win the Prize.

She would never see Asgeir again; she had lost him too!

Her psyche twisted, dripping dark thoughts into her consciousness:

"Well I hope you all have a bloody great time! NOT!

"Especially not you, Asgeir! Oh My God! How could I have got it so wrong about you? I was sure you were 'the one!'"

She sobbed into the empty apartment. And then came the flood, a torrent of self-pity, ruining her make-up and making her eyes puffy.

When had she cried like this before? Never!

The whole horrible video of these last months, all the details of her sordid "Project Manhunt" played and replayed in her head.

Project Manhunt

"Project Manhunt" had all started as another of her 'good ideas', about six months earlier.

Catherine was tall, attractive, gym-fit, hard-working and excellent at her job. She looked much younger than her age, everyone said so.

She had always found it easy to find guys on a 'casual' basis. An 'encouraging smile', an 'appreciative giggle', then it was a matter of 'control', like with a dog:

Come!

Sit!

Jump!

Walk!

NO!

Down, Boy!

Lie Down!

Since graduating Catherine had made sure she enjoyed herself, always steering clear of a 'commitment'. At thirty-two she could hear her 'clock' ticking, ever more loudly, every day. And she could hear her Mum, inside her head, nagging:

"Aye, our Catherine, yer jist about by yer sell by date, lassie. It's time for ye to get married, my girlie, settle down, have kiddies, before it's too late..."

Kids? Catherine used to scoff at the idea. But over the last year or so, since her sister had started 'shelling them out like peas', Catherine's mind set had changed. Of course Catherine wanted kids! Her sister back home had three now, all under five years, all gorgeous, cuddly, with that nice baby smell, making her heart melt. Increasingly she had found herself staring at those lucky girls with their babies; in the supermarket, in the park, in the streets.....

Working in HR, Catherine knew everything about everyone, especially the men. So she decided to use the HR files to look there for a 'Suitable Boy'. Everything in the Office was a "Project Something or Other", so she started 'Project Manhunt', her files well protected from snooping eyes with a ridiculous twenty-five character password.

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At the outset she had thought it would be easy. But her in her search range (age 28 to 40) most were already taken. Those 'still available' were 'available for good reasons'. Even when someone 'looked good' in the HR file photo, he could turn out to be 'Ugh!', as she had already found to her cost with Crawford.

Crawfurd Ewing

He was from Edinburgh originally. She had 'found' him in West Africa, in the Nigeria Team. A Project Finance Officer, a Chartered Accountant, like her Dad. On paper, Crawfurd had seemed almost ideal. So she had had him 'relocated' him here to European HQ in Aberdeen, bringing him into her web of influence. Crawfurd had been very pleased to be 'rescued' from Nigeria, which he had hated, he had told her, many, many times.

Crawfurd had turned out to be pretty hard work. Not as attractive in the flesh as on paper, and not really her type at all but, being 'driven' by Project Manhunt, she had cajoled an increasingly reluctant Crawfurd into this and that activity or outing. She had even almost managed to get him to 'oblige', twice, but both times he took fright.

After two months working on Crawfurd, she took stock:

- earning power - pretty mega
- face - OK but not terrific
- body - OK (but he was a hopeless swimmer)
- in reality he was tubbier and shorter than her ideal man
- the main downside was that Crawfurd a great talker, an orator, a man who loved to hear himself speak

Perhaps I should trail him back to Elgin, to Mum, for an 'opinion', she considered. But there was no need: at once her Mum's voice rang in her head.

"Aye, he's got grand views, has yon Crawfurd laddie, as he's right quick tae tell a'body!"

Again the feeling that she was becoming her Mum tugged at her mind, irritating.

Crawfurd? Overall Score: 6/10 max. Maybe less.

Decision: 'Mouldable'.

And so, against her better judgement, her instinct, Catherine had persisted long after she could hear her Mum's voice:

"Catherine, be kind lassie, let the wee mannie go back tae the wild."

But that was not Catherine's way: once started, she seldom gave up on a thing. On she went, hoping that if she could persuade him to 'oblige', then everything would improve, and then when had 'control', she could make it work for both of them. For

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another month she stumbled along with the reluctant *Crawfurd*, until AOA (Aberdeen Office Angels) sent the temp girl *Angelika*.

Newly arrived from Poland, dainty, shy, always blushing bright red, not well turned out, mousey even, *Angelika* had only been in the Office for a few days when *Catherine* spotted the danger. She arranged at once to 'send her back' to AOA as 'not suitable'. But, wham! *Crawfurd* was already hooked! *Catherine* had lost him to *Angelika*, 'The Beetroot Mouse', as she had secretly daubed her.

Well, *Catherine* had got her own back on them. Although it had taken quite a bit of effort, she had managed to get *Crawfurd* moved again, to the *Gulf of Mexico Team (GoMT)*. See how *Crawfurd* liked that! 'The Beetroot Mouse' would never get a Visa for the USA! Try making love by SKYPE!

But, when things settled, *Catherine* saw that *Angelika* had done her a favour, really. She knew in her heart that *Crawfurd* would have been a big mistake. And of course that was how she had 'found' *Asgeir*, ensconced in the *GoMT*.

It is Fate, *Catherine* thought, it is simply meant to be.

Asgeir Andersen

Catherine had been flicking through the HR photo-files. It had been an OMG moment. Asgeir was such a good looking guy, at least from his photo, with a strong handsome Nordic face, white-blond curly hair and sparkling, smiling blue eyes.

And a true Viking at 2.05 m tall!

Andersen, Asgeir: 29, Born Oslo. PhD Petroleum Engineering (Deep Water Techniques) Herriot Watt University: Hard worker, flexible mind, good team player, goes the extra mile to help everyone. Fluent in English and Italian. Cross-country skiing, curling, likes cooking and wine. Salary: (*****). Marital Status: single.

Catherine knew the code "Salary (*****)".

It meant - Mega-Mega Bucks!

It also meant - *Retain this person at all cost. Destined for the top echelon.*

But in the after-glow of her first rush of enthusiasm, Catherine began to realise that Asgeir Andersen would be a problem. A guy like this *must* have a girlfriend, she had felt. According to his record, he was not yet married, but perhaps he might be getting married soon, it was happening all around her, every day, people were collecting for wedding gifts for colleagues.

Asgeir Andersen seemed too perfect!

At first she had been nervous about doing it, worried about getting caught. But there he was, this gorgeous unmarried guy beavering away in the GoMT, his face smiling out at her from her PC Monitor, as if saying to her:

"Hi, Catherine, why not bring *me* to Aberdeen?"

"Well Asgeir, what do you think? Let's give it a whirl, eh?" she had shouted with glee.

Alarmed, she glanced around furtively. She was doing her 'research' working late at the Office where there was always someone about - this place worked 24/7. Thankfully no one had heard. She had logged this on the system as a CPD session. Continuing Professional Development was always seen as a positive thing by the hierarchy. This made her smile, because this was *personal* development and, hopefully, it would be 'continuing'. When had she *ever* worked late like this before? Never!

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Buoyed by her successes moving Crawford, twice, without apparent detection she set about her self-appointed task and put Project Manhunt into over-drive. She was careful, applying little HR pressures to the system, trailing his merits to the Aberdeen Team as if by accident and, after about three weeks, his relocation move was set in motion.

On Google she found that his name, Asgeir, meant 'The Spear God'. Over these weeks she spent long hours studying his face, with his eyes staring straight at her. One evening, the phrase that would repeat and repeat sprang into her mind:

Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh yes, please!

ooOoo

Then, after her weeks of scheming, her Viking arrived. She met at Aberdeen Airport. She was desperate to see him and as nervous as a kitten, like a schoolgirl, holding up the sign with his name. She saw him walking towards her. Her heart flipped:

OMG! Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh yes please!

'Hi Asgeir, I'm Catherine, you know, from the Office?'

'Oh! Yes, eh. Hi, Catherine! Good of you to come for me. I do know Aberdeen a bit, of course, from my Uni days, but well, I'm shattered, all those flights and my long legs.'

'Oh, Asgeir, I hope you're not *too* tired! I've got a really nice meal nearly ready for us at my place. Oh please, please come. Its Italian, I'm sure you'll love it.'

'Ah, but I need to find a hotel and have a shower, change out of my travel clothes, you know how it is when you've been on the go for ages.'

'Don't worry; I've managed to get you into a great hotel. It's small but really nice; so hard to find in Aberdeen, but they know me and I've got you their very best room.'

'Sounds terrific.'

'It is! I went round earlier and checked it out myself. You've got a nice big extra-long bed and a walk-in wet room. And there's Wi-Fi, a big Plasma screen with loads of channels, and a small kitchen with a fridge/freezer. It's more like a studio flat, really. I think it's the best place in Aberdeen. It even has a spare room. Amazing, really, I could hardly believe it!'

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'Great, thanks. But is it expensive?'

'Yeah, but great value, you know. But no worries! You get it on the firm for the first three months, as part of your relocation package. I'm sure that we can find you a nice place of your own soon. And don't worry; I live just round the corner, so if you need anything I'll be round to help you. Anything you need, like, anything at all, you know, I'll just pop round and, you know.....'

So much for cool, reserved, sophisticated. Well, he was *so* fabulous. She had never met anyone like him before. He had something really different about him, really special, really sexy.

Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh, yes please.

'*Superbo!* I love Italian food. I love Italy. I love Italians. Crazy people really, but,'

He yawned, covering his mouth, then ran his fingers through his mop of hair, staring openly at her, as if actually seeing her for the first time.

'Ye-es, I know what you mean, I think...'

'Oh, but does this Hotel have a Gym?'

She could feel herself flush under his gaze, feel his eyes giving her a good inspection. Ignoring his question, she stared back, boldly, hoping that she would pass muster.

She was wearing her nicest outfit, carefully matching shades of green, tight blouse, to show off her good figure, short skirt, to show off her long shapely legs, and new shoes, four inch heels, their first outing. She had taken lots of care with her hair and make-up; first impressions are so important. She could feel his warmth towards her and he had that same wistful little smile he loved from his photo. Such a strong face, like a warrior, with quite a big nose, but it suited him, and really nice teeth, his smiling mouth, and his lips.... gorgeous! She just loved that slow quiet way he spoke too, voice deep and rich with his slight accent too, so nice.

He was staring at her, wondering why she was just standing there, saying nothing.

'Oh, sorry! Has the Hotel got a Gym? Yeah, but it's only a tiny one. My Gym's much better, and it's an easy walk, just next to my place. There's a fabulous new Cross Country Ski machine too, fully automated, with lots of programmes. You wear a special

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helmet with a syncro-video, so it's just like real Nordic Skiing! I tried it out too, yesterday, it's brand new and it's really great, I'm sure you'll love it! And I can get you a great deal on Membership as my Aunt runs it, the Gym I mean, and the ski machine too, of course. I made her get it!

'Fantastico! How can every repay you, Catherine?'

Well now, she definitely had some ideas...

Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh, yes please.

Normally she wasn't so out of control, but he *was* so much better than she had allowed herself to imagine.

His Score: at least 10 /10 so far, maybe even 12/10!

As they waited for his luggage, she went off on another burble, this time about cooking, trotting out her recipe secrets, even telling him about her 'specials', recipes she had refined, stuff she wouldn't even share with her Mum. She could see that he was listening carefully, with his little smile, his eyebrows rising slightly sometimes in surprise and perhaps delight? At other times frowning a little with concentration as she explained some detail, perhaps because she was exaggerating, but only a little. Asgeir was not like Crawford, not at all like Crawford. Asgeir actually listened. What a lucky escape she had had! Suddenly she could hear her Mum's voice:

'Catherine, haud yer wheest laasie, let the mannie say a wordie.'

But she couldn't stop; she was so excited, chattering away like a silly teenager!

ooOoo

That meal at her flat went quite well, she thought. But after the sweet course, and a nice glass of malt, he was definitely dozing off, jet lagged. She had talked like an express train. The whole time! Was there a single thing that she had *not* told him? Did he think she was some sort of demented budgie?

She insisted on walking him back to the door of his Hotel and received a little peck on her cheek as a reward. He smelled so nice. She wanted to grab him and well, *make* him 'oblige'!

The next day he sent her an enormous bunch of flowers and a bottle of Amarone. God, he had been listening after all, her most favourite wine, but *so* expensive. She decided to save it for the next time he came round, so that they could share it and, well, hopefully, recovered from jet lag, he *would*'oblige'.

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Her elderly neighbour Georgie, who had taken in the gifts in for her because she had still been at the *Gym*, had been very impressed by her new 'friend'. She and Catherine were bosom buddies, sharing past experiences and secrets. Georgie knew that Catherine was not in the habit of getting flowers and wine from her boyfriends. And she could tell that this one, the Nordic God, the Spear God, had definitely struck right to the girl's heart. Listening to the girl rave about him, she had frowned. Usually Catherine just "*lifted and lay-ed them*", (their little joke), and then moved on. This one was definitely different. "*I just hope **he** does not lift and lay her, and then move on*", Georgie thought. But, pleased to see Catherine so genuinely happy, Georgie kept her reservations to herself.

Diligent Pursuit

In the weeks that followed, Catherine thought back to that first night, over and over again. She knew it had been such a good opportunity for.... OK, OK, she knew it would have been too, too soon, but she was getting 'needy'. Project Manhunt was taking its toll. From the outset she had decided to remain celibate, as an incentive and to keep her life 'uncomplicated'. But living like a nun was just *not* what she did!

In the Office she had taken to passing by his workspace, by chance as it were. When he wasn't on the phone or SKYPE, he always stood up to chat with her, or, to be more accurate, to 'listen', as she shot off on one of her excited rambles. Although Asgeir did not say much, he was always friendly, happy to see her, smiling wistfully as usual, chuckling at her silly jokes. Each time they met she wanted him even more.

Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh, yes please.

Surely he can tell that I want him, need him! Why does he not make a move? There *must* be a girl somewhere, waiting, lurking, she told herself. But from their conversations, when she had learned to moderate her rambles, she had gradually established that Asgeir was single, definitely no girlfriend at the moment, never married, and no legacy of kids. As the days turned into weeks another darker thought began to haunt her, but she suppressed it at once. Asgeir was all man!

Asgeir owned an apartment in Oslo and had bought a Villa in Malaga, both rented out. And his 'portfolio' had been mentioned a few times, too. An immediate lewd thought came into her mind, "*Wonder how big it is?*"

No car, didn't drive, had never got around to learning, always on the move around the world. Great, she had offered her services as his chauffeuse, his 'On-Call Girl', as she had said, but without drawing from him the response she had hoped for.

As she knew from the HR file, he earned a top wage, but she knew now that he was not a not a high spender. In fact he bordered on frugal.

He's more Aberdonian than an Aberdonian, flitted through her mind. He's just like Dad!

In a strange way this seemed good now, although in the past she had always hoped for a generous man, someone who would be happy to fund her many extravagances. And again and again the phrase surged through her being:

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Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh, yes please.

She had tried very hard to get him alone, after work, out on a date, but so far without success. The main problem was that he seemed to be a workaholic. She knew that he was some sort of specialist 'Deep Well Engineer', very highly regarded, and always in demand by the Aberdeen Operations people, and by other teams around the world. He was obviously some sort of guru, but he never bragged or bored, not like Crawford. She had soon discovered that the GoMT were angry and confused that what they had been led to believe was a short, temporary move to Aberdeen had been made permanent.

After his first month with her in Aberdeen, the GoMT HR Group had been upping their pressure, trying to get Asgeir back. She had read their many FBNRs (Formal Business Needs Requests) as they bounced around in the bureaucratic system and she was working hard to thwack them back, to deflect them away from Aberdeen, suggesting many other names they might try, from the other Deep Well hotspots. Thankfully the Aberdeen HQ Team had already decided Asgeir Andersen was **'their'** man now, and would not easily give him up.

Initially she had felt safe, but then the doubts had crept back. She was worried there could be 'consequences'. If someone took trouble to check into the fine detail of how these 'moves' had come about in the first place. Catherine liked her well paid job and she didn't want to lose it.

Another factor was that Crawford had not settled in the GoMT, and was running a separate personal campaign through their HR people, grinding on about his unexpected and unfair sudden transfer to the GoMT, just as he had started to settle after his sudden move to Aberdeen from Nigeria. He had also emailed a PTR 'Personal Transfer Request' direct to his old boss in Aberdeen.

Catherine knew how this game was played and there had been a rumour of some sort of a swap. She must act soon, take a risk again. The thought of losing her chance at her Viking was dominating everything she did and thought.

Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh, yes please.

ooOoo

With increasing boldness she re-doubled her efforts to get Asgeir out on a date, so that they could be alone, secluded, and get him to 'oblige', certain that this would release the floodgates of passion, for both of them, make him want to stay, to

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resist a move away. If he stood firm and said he wanted to stay in Aberdeen, 'they' would never risk upsetting him, not with the "Salary (*****)" code against his name.

'Hi Asgeir, fancy coming round to my place for a meal tonight? I've been saving that bottle of Amarone for us.'

'Thanks Catherine, that would be really nice, but sorry, no can do. I'm in a Video Conference with the GoMT guys again tonight. It's the time difference thing. They keep saying I have to go back, re-join their team.'

Similar invitations to her nicest restaurants or even for a coffee at the weekends had also proved fruitless. He always some 'reason':

"Sorry Catherine, no can do, I've got to make a SKYPE call tonight, sorry....."

She thought of catching him at the Gym. Her Aunt told her he visited every day, but at odd hours, often when it opened at 5.30 am or just before it closed at midnight. No way! How could a girl look good at those God-forsaken times! There had to another way.

So she kept asking, almost pestering him. Always he had excuses. She began to think that his 'excuses' might not be real, just invented, that perhaps he was only being polite to her? But to balance that thought, she did 'feel' he was interested, seeing his face light up when their eyes met, and always his knee-trembling gorgeous smile. It made her tummy churn. He wasn't faking anything, was he? The chemistry was flowing, for her anyway, absolutely no denying it; her body cried out every time she saw him.

Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh, yes please.

Did he feel it too? That was the big question!

Still, there was something, she could feel it, although so far she hadn't sussed what it was. Then her instinct told her she had to ease off, not to push it too hard. Perhaps it was as Jane had said, that deep down Asgeir was shy, like Crawford had been, and that he would 'come round' in his own good time?

Or was it something else? A medical condition? Gambling? Drugs?

Or, God, NO!

Could there be someone else?

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Someone undercover, (*someone already under his duvet!*). Perhaps someone he had found here, in Aberdeen, or an old flame from Uni days, someone off her radar, someone that she knew nothing about?

Italian Nights

Insofar as Catherine knew, none of the other girls in the Office had managed to get close to him either. She was absolutely sure of it, maybe. Catherine knew she wasn't part of what she and Jane called the GiGLers, (the Girls' Gossip Loop, in the Office), the only tittle -tattle she got was usually from Jane. No, both Jane and Catherine were sure. Or, rather, Catherine was *almost* sure, because of those girls she had overheard in the 'Ladies':

'Isn't that new guy Asgeir absolutely fabulous?'

'Yeah, so big and strong. He looks so Viking, like from Norway or someplace, you know what I mean!'

'You Dimmy. He is from Norway, he is a Viking!'

'No! Really? But I heard he speaks Italian a lot! Always SKYPE-ing someone Italian.'

*'So, maybe I'll go to Italian classes then, you know, "Ciao Asgeir, fancy a Cappuccino, or maybe, errr, Something Else? I'm **especially** good at Something Else?'"*

'Bet he earns a packet. Maybe I'll try to learn Italian too!'

'Do you know what 'Asgeir' means?'

'Oh YES! On Google, hah, hah. 'The Spear God!' I really wonder if he is!'

'Only one way to find out!'

Spitting mad, Catherine had flushed the loo and stormed out, slamming the doors. She had forgotten to wash her hands and had to take the lift to the other 'Ladies', two floors below, muttering angrily all the way. No doubt they would have talked about her afterwards. She hated them. "He's MY Asgeir!" she had mouthed, sub-vocally.

ooOoo

This incident did give her the idea of going online and signing up with *Rosetta Stone**, to learn Italian, as another means of hoving to, getting alongside Asgeir. In her past, just after Uni, because of Carlos, she had attended evening classes for Spanish. Then, after two years, the rat had dumped her, breaking their engagement, to go back

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to Seville, to someone he called Juanita, someone he suddenly discovered "*he had always truly loved, from childhood!*" She had given up Spanish and in the backwash, set out on a new adventure, one in which *she* would always be 'in control'.

*(Rosetta Stone is an on-line language learning site: visit <http://www.rosettastone.co.uk/>)

At *Rosetta Stone* her on-line assessment her grades were good. Italian came to her quite easily. Some of what she had learned from these long ago Spanish classes and her life with the rodent Carlos had stuck. She would keep her new found language skill a secret, meanwhile, until she was more fluent. At least it gave her something to do in her new life as a 'nun'.

Soon she was really into Italian. She went to '*La Lombarda*' to try out her new found skills, practicing her halting Italian on the waiters. They were very patient with her, offering gentle corrections on vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The youngest waiter, a small slightly built man in his early twenties, from Sardinia, had been especially attentive, and, egged on by the older men, Giancarlo had boldly offered her extra help:

"Ti offro una lezione privata, stasera, Signorina Caterina, dopo lavoro?"

(May I offer you a private lesson, this evening, Miss Catherine, after work?)

Although Giancarlo was quite good looking, he was small, and not really her type. But it was nice to be wanted, pursued, rather than being the pursuer, and she was tempted. But she had resisted, sticking to her plan to stay 'uncomplicated' and so responded:

"Grazie a te, Giancarlo, ma no! Grazie mille, sei molto gentile, ma no."

(Thanks to you, Giancarlo, but no! Thanks very much, you are very kind, but no!)

ooOoo

Re-visiting Asgeir's file she saw that he had been part of the 'Norway Youth' Curling Team. She organised a night out to Aberdeen Curl for '*The Roostiebooties*', the informal Office Social Club. She was jubilant when Asgeir had said signed up for it, and, being the Organiser, made sure she was the only girl in Asgeir's team.

Although she was actually quite good at Curling, she pretended to be 'hopeless'.

'You're so GOOD! Asgeir! Come on, show me, help me, or we could lose!'

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It had worked. Soon she had him wrapped around her, his right hand on top of hers as she held the stone, his grip firm and warm, guiding her hand as they stooped together, his cheek now against her own. Oh God, she was feeling so needy. She could smell his minty breathe she could feel his heat against her back and her bottom. Bliss.

Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh, yes please.

Her left hand swung back accidentally and touched his crotch. Wow! Definitely a spear! Biblical! She went a bit red in the face but he seemed not to notice. Pity!

Of course she had shown a 'miracle improvement' under his guidance and their Team won easily. Well, it was to be expected, Asgeir was superb.

She had hoped, planned, to ask him out for a pizza or pasta at that other really nice, quieter, more intimate place, '*Rustico*', just the two of them. She would stun him with her Italian, ask him those special questions she had prepared, like what does '*Amore*' really mean and how is it different from '*Tesoro*' and a few other far more suggestive ones she had researched.

Now she had him close by, she had to try to make this thing with Asgeir 'go somewhere'. She didn't want to lose him, to those other girls, or to lose him to the GoMT, or to anyone.... She really wanted him, needed him, and thought about him all the time.

However she was thwarted by a process of group osmosis. Without debate, or not any she was aware of, '*The Roostabooties*' moved on to a Sports Bar to watch the Scotland football team on TV. Catherine loathed football, but she didn't want any of the other girls getting near her Viking and so she went anyway, to 'guard' him, hoping to coax him away, get him alone at last. When she returned from the loo after freshening her make-up, Asgeir was gone.

'Ah, Catherine, there you are, said Jane. Asgeir asked me to say thanks for the Curling, but he's sorry, he got an urgent call to sign in for a Video Conference. The Big Boss is with the GoMT apparently, some giant some cock-up! They need Asgeir's input!

Disaster! Catherine stormed off home, stomping along the dark wet October streets, tears of frustration running down her face. "*What about me*", she mouthed to the roiling gutters, "*I need Asgeir's input!*"

ooOoo

Next day the idea for an Office Halloween Party came to her. She kept the details of a prize for Fancy Dress very low key in the emails, hoping to limit any

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competition, sharing her ideas only with 'Aunty' Jane. Jane, from Operations on the floor beside Asgeir. Jane was an expert in Logistics and at fifty-two she described herself as '*single, but still hoping*'. Catherine knew that own her prettiness and easy success with men made her less than popular with the younger females. This made Jane even more important in her life, an Office version of her neighbour Georgie.

Catherine's plan, as always when she had a great idea, was to '*go for it, full on!*' She was very pleased with 'the look' that her Viking Maiden outfit gave her. On the night before the Party, Catherine mounted a full dressing-up rehearsal, posing in front of the tall mirror in the hallway, fine tuning her make-up, examining herself critically.

Final Judgement? The words flashed to her lips:

"Catherine my girl, in all modesty, YOU DO LOOK FABULOUS!"

She even practiced various Viking Maiden 'looks'; pouts, coy smiles, sexy smiles, downright naughty smiles; all the time running various scenarios in her head. Thank God I bought those things from the girl at Court Jesters after all, she thought, they were worth every penny. She was so excited she felt herself vibrating.

Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh, yes please.

She would NOT allow too much food at the Party, only crisps and nuts, keep his appetite sharp. She rang the DJ and talked over what songs she wanted. This was a first chance to get Asgeir in her arms, at last, up tight against her needy body. She would make sure he 'got the message'.

Catherine was confident that she would win 'The Fancy Dress Prize'.

Actually it was a great prize and she had added fifty pounds of her own money to augment the meagre amount she had left from the social fund. It would be a voucher, 'A Romantic Meal for Two at '*Rustico*'. They had promised her a great night, an accordionist and singer with a guitar, singing romantic Italian songs, prosecco, roses and chocolates: a perfect setting for her encounter. When she won, she would choose Asgeir, and then insist that they go to '*Rustico*' at once.

That would mean that he would have to come back here to her flat, while she showered and changed into something more appropriate for the Restaurant. She had it all planned. She would actually have a special meal ready here, *con la bottiglia d'Amarone* that Asgeir had given her.

She would save the '*Rustico*' voucher, take him another time, after they had been together for a while. Who could tell what might happen then?

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Using her radio headphones she practiced her Italian phrases as she prepared her secret romantic meal, in accordance with her plan.

ooOoo

The morning of the Party arrived. Her dreams had been full of romantic encounters and she did not want to waken when her alarm shrilled. She had stabbed it down onto SNOOZE, and stayed in bed, snuggling back down under the duvet to cuddle into Big Ted, imagining that he was Asgeir, imagining those Viking ice blue eyes leering back at her naked body. At the third iteration of SNOOZE, she forced herself away from this fantasy to start her dream day. Tonight, at last she would have him all to herself.

Asgeir-MY Spear God! Oh Yes Please!

But her dream would not come true.

Derailment

It was late afternoon. Her desk phone trilled. It was Asgeir.

'Catherine, could you possibly help me, *please?* He's very important to me, a very special friend.'

She could hear an anxious edge in his voice.

'Of course, Asgeir, anything, just ask!'

'Well it's my friend, Enrico. He is arriving at the Aberdeen Airport very soon, from Rome, through Heathrow. He speaks hardly any English. Could you pick him up from the airport and bring him round to my place and let him in? Enrico's very important to me.'

'Of course, Asgeir. Absolutely no problem!' she lied, trying to sound normal.

She checked her watch - already after four.

Her mind was racing.

Oh God, it was all going tits up.

She had so much prepping still to do, party hats, name tags, parcel up the mini-prizes for the games that Jane would organise after she took over when Catherine sloped off with Asgeir in tow.

And her Viking Maiden make-up took ages to get just right.

Did this Enrico coming mean Asgeir would not make to the Halloween Party?

What did Asgeir mean by: "*He's very important to me, a very special friend.*"

To her it sounded weird. The old dark thought shouted from the back of her mind. No, it can't be that, she answered back. When they had been curling, she had been so sure, absolutely 100% certain - the warmth of his body pressing against hers, the accidental 'touch' that she had fantasised about almost constantly ever since. Her mind shouted at her:

No! It can't be....

Anyway....

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But could it?

Oh God, no! Bugger it.

This is what I have been up against all along!

Bloody Enrico from Bloody Italy!

ENRICO? HIS SPECIAL FRIEND?

At least it's not a girl.

All these thoughts raced across her mind in milliseconds.

And now Asgeir was speaking again.

'I'll have my keys brought to you, at your desk. I was going for him myself in a taxi but I have to do a SKYPE call with some guys in the Mexico Team. They can't wait. The Boss is still there. And Catherine, thanks, I felt sure I could depend on you.'

'But Asgeir, you can still come tonight, to the Party? You haven't forgotten, have you?'

She had blurted it all out before she could think, and now she wanted to take it back. She was virtually 'begging' him, something she had never done with any man before. How could that work? She blundered on, trying to make it sound better.

'Enrico could come too, if you like, something different for him, eh? A real Scottish Halloween Party?'

'Well, maybe. You could ask him, if you like. You see I have no idea why he is coming. He just phoned a few hours ago from Rome Airport saying that he was on his way. He seemed very upset but refused to explain over the phone. He just said 'I MUST see you, Asgeir, I MUST hold you', err, err.... well, anyway...eh. But the thing is, Catherine, he *knew* I was planning to go over to Rome next weekend, that we would see each other then. And now suddenly he can't wait, and he's coming tonight! Look, that's the SKYPE call starting, got to fly, thanks for everything.'

Her mind was frozen. This was ALL WRONG!

'No, wait, Asgeir....'

'Look, Catherine, I'm sorry to dump my personal problems on you, my dear, dearest Catherine. What would I do without you? Thanks, must, must go.'

She sat for ages, thinking over what he had just said:

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My Special Friend

He MUST see me, He Must HOLD me, err, err,well, anyway

I was planning to meet Enrico in Rome next weekend

*Dumping my **personal problems??***

My dear, dearest Catherine'

*Does he think I'm his *sister*?*

Again her mind swung back to her previous certainty, back to that moment; the heat of his body against her, his cheek against her cheek, his smell, the 'touch'. Surely she couldn't be wrong about him? But she had no experience in that area.

Before heading to Aberdeen Airport Catherine phoned Jane, explaining. Jane seemed quite happy to take it all on, make a start without her. Jane was going as a Can-Can dancer, she confirmed.

'Did I tell you about that great place, "Court Jesters"?' asked Jane, who could be forgetful. 'And yes, Catherine, even at my decrepit age, I can assure you my dear girl, I still **can** 'Can-Can', given the opportunity. Now, that new guy Eddie what's his name, in the Procurement Team, he looks quite dishy, don't you think? Wonder if he might like a 'Can-Can' girl?'

Enter Enrico

At the airport she held her sign high:

'Enrico Minozzo'.

In fact, there was absolutely no need, Enrico was unmissable.

Burberry overcoat draped loosely over his shoulders, black fedora at a rakish angle, lightweight tweed suit in muted shades of mauve and dark brown, a dark pink shirt, (really nice!) and an lilac tie with a big loose knot.

He sashayed through 'Arrivals' towards her.

Small, slim, dark and very boyish. Gorgeous really, if you liked that sort.

Seeing her sign he gushed towards her:

'Caterina, preziosa! Grazie tanti, tantissimi, la mia Salvatrice! Asgeir ha detto che tu era bellissima! E' vero, tu e' bellissima!'

He wrapped himself around her, tears welling up, his beautiful, soft, deep brown eyes, glistening with emotion. Stretching up on his toes he kissed her on both cheeks and then, to her complete surprise, he pulled her down and smashed his lips against hers. He tasted like chestnuts and smelled like a summer morning. Out of the corner of her eyes she could see that the 'guid folks o' Aiberdeen' were thoroughly enjoying this unexpected moment of theatre.

Stepping back he dropped his hand luggage with a thud, gazed at her up and down then lunged forward to grasp both her hands in his. He swung her arms to shoulder height, stepped back, gave her a further searching inspection from head to toe, taking in everything slowly, appreciatively before and announcing his judgement.

Smiling coyly at her, he said:

'Si, Caterina, e' vero, tu sei bellissima, assolutamente bellissima.'

She was really struggling to understand what this beautiful little man/boy was saying as he bombarded her with his Italian, spoken with the rapid fire of a machine gun. She defaulted to what she knew and smiled back, *'Grazie mille, Enrico. Piacere'*, offering her hand to shake, which he swept up, kissed and then pressed against his heart.

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Immediately he again lunged forward and threw himself around her, sobbing deeply, clinging to her like a child. She felt she was in a soap opera, and glanced around to see if they were being filmed by a hidden camera crew.

A whole lifetime seemed to pass as he spilled out his story into her uncomprehending breasts, her blouse now wet with his tears of anguish. She recognised Asgeir's name said over and over, sometimes said with great fury, sometimes with great tenderness. Many times over she heard a few words repeated that she thought she knew: "*accanto al suo letto*" (beside his bed).

As Enrico ploughed on to what she thought might be his third re-telling, her thoughts strayed away to the Office Halloween Party, which would start soon. There was no doubt in her mind now that her evening would be a complete disaster. She was uncertain how to phrase the Italian words required to invite Enrico to the Party, or to explain what it was about. Given his mental melt-down, would he want to come, even if she could ask? Unless she could get Enrico to come, Asgeir would not be there.

It seemed obvious that what Enrico wanted was Asgeir, and all to himself. Enrico would not want to share him at a Party. And, given that his '*special friend*' had now arrived, why would Asgeir want to come to her stupid Halloween Party?

ooOoo

It had taken ages to get Enrico's luggage out to her car. Three cases! How long was he coming for? Was he moving in with Asgeir? What the hell was he telling her now in rapid Italian? She couldn't get any of it.

Eventually she got him settled, in Asgeir's place. Enrico certainly liked whisky, downing two large ones in quick succession, to 'calm himself', she gathered. She left him clutching a third, sitting up on Asgeir's bed, watching CBeebies, repeating words and phrases in very accented English.

Over to you Asgeir- he's all yours! Enjoy. Enjoy your Boy!

ooOoo

As she walked from the Asgeir Hotel back to her flat she phoned Jane and gave her the horrible synopsis.

'Catherine, look, trust me, YOU ARE WRONG! 100% wrong, no, **200% WRONG!** Listen, Catherine, I know guys, and Asgeir really fancies you. I know, right? I've watched him looking at you. He's the shy type. I've been there before. And when they break out, they are like Volcanos!'

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'No, Jane, you should have heard what Asgeir called him.....'

'Catherine, listen. The quiet guys like Asgeir are so, so hot, you know, when the floodgates release. Fantastic! Trust me.'

'No Jane, I'm not coming to that stupid Party. I've made up my mind. Asgeir won't come anyway. He'll be cuddled up with his *special friend*, Enrico.'

She was sobbing loudly now.

'Catherine, just listen to me. Please! YOU MUST come to the Party. Asgeir WILL be there, with or without this Enrico guy. You'll see. Just COME, OK?'

But Catherine had already hung up.

ooOoo

Opening the door to her flat she saw it was already 6.55pm. The Party would start around 8.00pm, so, if she was going, she had just about enough time to shower, do her hair, do her make-up and.....

'Right', she said to the hallway mirror, I bloody well **will** go. And I'll win the Prize. To hell with Asgeir! See if I care. I'll find someone else. Maybe have a few *lezioni private* from Giancarlo.'

She set about getting ready.

By 7.42 pm she was back in front of the mirror.

Fabulous! TRULY FABULOUS! Even though her eyes were still a bit puffy.

But what was the point!

There was no way that Asgeir was going to come!

It was all a waste of time.

She burst out crying again, hot tears running down her cheeks. She caught sight of herself in the mirror. Disaster! Her eyes all puffed up, her make-up ruined, and too late to do anything about it now. No amount of TLC or make-up could retrieve her. If she went now she would look so weird. No way!

'*Bugger, Bugger, BUGGER!*' she shouted into the empty Hall.

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She would just stay in, get sloshed, down a few glasses of Amarone, even try a glass of that special 18 year old "Glenlivet" she had got in for Asgeir, "one of his favourites", he had said.

And watch 'Pretty Woman' or 'Love Actually'.

Catherine had never been a drinker. She poured a large glass of Amarone. Gulped it down. Poured another, downed it right away too. The alcohol did not help. It made her self-pity more uncontrollable. The tears erupted and, wailing like a tom on heat, she ran to the bedroom, slammed the door and threw herself onto her bed, grabbed Big Ted and hugged him close to her. She lay in the darkness dark sobbing, hot tears wetting the pillow, her heart broken, her careful plan smashed to smithereens.

Time passed. The tears subsided. Tiredness took over. Exhausted, physically and emotionally, she pulled the duvet over her head and drifted off into a horrible nightmare....

Asgeir and Enrico were lying on the bed beside her, naked, embracing each other, kissing.... She was lying on the ground, Enrico was standing just behind Asgeir they were looking down at her, smirking, laughing....Asgeir was standing over her, his face ugly, full of hate....She saw him raising his spear to stab her.... She was scrabbling to get away but she was stuck, could not escape... His spear was thrusting down to kill her....

ooOoo

She could hear a bell ringing and ringing and ringing. She tried to shut it out, to escape. But it kept ringing and ringing and ringing. She could hear a thumping and a deep voice calling her name.

Suddenly she was awake again! The bedside clock showed 8.55 pm.

The voice was shouting:

"Please Catherine, please answer, *please* open the door."

She sat up. Then stood up and walked to the mirror in the hallway.

Oh God! What a mess!

The bell was ringing again. Asgeir was shouting:

'Please Catherine, cara mia, Caterina, aperta la porta, per favore, please open the door, please, please.'

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There was panic in his voice.

'*Un momento, per favore,*' came from her lips.

She dashed into the Bathroom and washed her face. Her make-up was gone, but her face would have to do. She tidied her hair, sorted the wig, lowered her Helmet into place, sorted her hair, and moved to the tall mirror. OK! Not bad, really, given....

'*Please Catherine, please, please open the door to me!*

But she did not open it. She placed her cheek against it and said:

'Asgeir, go away. Just go away, please. And stop shouting. My neighbours!'

'Catherine! Thank God! Are you OK? Why did you not come to the Party?'

'Asgeir, it's good of you to come round. But don't worry about me. I'm OK, thanks. Just go back to Enrico, you know that he needs you, that he wants you.'

'Catherine, are you really OK? What did Enrico tell you? Jane said you were very upset.'

'I don't know what Enrico said, really. But I know he wants to hold you and that he is your special friend. I'm sorry I did not understand about you. I thought you liked me, you know....'

'Catherine, I *do* like you. I *really* like you. But Enrico, well..., God, it's so complicated.'

'Asgeir look, stop, please. Look, it is *so* nice of you to come round, to worry about me. But look, your personal life, your problems with Enrico, well that's none of my business, really. Look if you two love each other, well, that's just the way it is, you know....'

'Oh Catherine, Catherine, Catherine. Please open the door. *Please*. Please open the door and let me try to explain about Enrico and me. It's not what you think, honest! Please open the door, Catherine, *please*.'

She could hear the pain and anxiety in his voice. And somehow, even with the door that separated them, she could feel his desire for her, his need. She turned the lock and slowly opened the door, stepping back into the hallway.

Asgeir stood in the doorway, dressed as a 'Viking', holding a very realistic looking spear in his hand.

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She looked up into his anxious face.

Asgeir, the Spear God! Oh, yes please.

She smiled.

He smiled back at her.

Her heart flipped.

OMG, MY ASGEIR! MY SPEAR GOD!

He stepped forward, closed the door and placed his spear against the coat stand. He turned, smiled and said:

'Caterina, mia amore, you look Fabulous! My Viking Goddess. Si, assolutamente favulosa!

'Grazie mille, Asgeir, et tu, anche tu e' bello, molto bello, tesoro!'

'You know Catherine, after Jane told me your secret, that there would be a prize of a romantic meal for two, I decided I would try to win it, then ask you to come with me. Jane told me about this place, "Court Jesters". So I decided...'

'Jane told you?'

'And I did win, I have the voucher here. But if you had been there you would have won. No doubt about it.'

'But I'm only a fake Viking, you are a *real* Viking!'

'Catherine, *amore*, you look truly Amazing! *Meravigliosa.*'

'But what about Enrico, Asgeir?'

'Ah, Enrico. Enrico and Bjorn. It is a sad and sorry tale. Are you sure you want to hear it?'

'Eh, yes, please.'

'Well since he broke up with my cousin Bjorn, Enrico has been distraught. They had a big fight and Bjorn went home to Oslo. Enrico still loves him and wants him to come back. Enrico thinks Bjorn has found someone new but it's not true, Bjorn still loves Enrico still wants him. But Bjorn loves Oslo; he loves proper skiing, Nordic skiing, and loves Norwegian food. He says he does not want to go back to Rome, that he hates it there. If Enrico loves him he must come to Oslo. But Enrico has his old Mum, *la sua*

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vecchia Mamma, and she needs him too, to look after her, and so can't go to live in Oslo, which he says he hates anyway, says it's too cold for him. So Bjorn....'

'Ah, so it's Enrico and *Bjorn*, not eh....'

'No, look, I've got stuck in the middle, trying to help. Well, I'll explain later, eh?'

'So, that's what these late night calls in the Office were about?'

'Yes, Catherine, yes, but only some of them. Did you hear that there's been a big panic, an oil leakage, in the Gulf of Mexico? It happened just after they released me to come to help here. They do still need me on the Gulf Team, they have been struggling, but hopefully we've found a solution and they'll stop nagging me.'

'So, you won't be working every night....'

He smiled his wonderful smile!

'Caterina, mia amore vera, devi mi perdonare, piacere? Please forgive me. May I hold you, may I kiss you, as I have wanted to do since that first night all those weeks ago.'

She stepped forward into his arms and crushed her mouth up into his lips, exploding with desire, pressing her body hard against his.

Yes, he was all man, she could feel it!

Asgeir, my Spear God! Oh, yes please!