



PARTY TIME!

‘Parrtee-parrtee! Les-all-parrtee!’ bellowed the Berserker. He leaped over the gunwales of the Viking ship as soon as the keel hit the sand. All of his companions did the same, and floundered about, roaring with laughter, splashing each other, in the surf.

But at a sign from the Queen, sitting proudly on her elegant travelling throne at the rear of the longship, they sorted themselves out and began to heave the boat out of the waves and on to the beach.

The Queen turned to her Bishop. ‘What is this place?’ she demanded.

The Bishop consulted his chart, which still bore bloodstains from their last landfall – a difficult matter of an unpaid account with their ship’s chandler in Stornoway. The account remained unpaid. ‘This, Your Ladyship,’ he announced, ‘should be Portobello.’

The Queen was unimpressed. She turned to her husband, who was busily urging on his men to go further up the beach – he knew how the Queen just hated getting her stockings wet; silk ones, they were, all the way from Constantinople, and costing a pretty penny.

‘This is Portobello, Surli,’ she said.

‘Yes, dear,’ he replied absently.

‘That’s not Edinburgh, though, is it? Edinburgh - like you promised.’

‘Ah, no dear. But -’

‘And I was promised Edinburgh. Parties, year-round you said. Culture, festivals, feasting, all that?’

‘Quite right, dear,’ sighed Surli Surlison. ‘The thing is, Edinburgh doesn’t have a beach, or a shoreline or anything. This is the nearest we can get.’

‘Disgraceful,’ muttered the Queen. She looked long and hard at her husband. The Bishop retreated slowly out of sight. The Berserkers roared each other on. Eventually the longship bumped up against the stonework of the esplanade. With a great communal grunt and considerable slapping of thighs, the Berserkers dropped the boat onto the sand.

The Queen lurched somewhat. The King shouted abuse at his men. The men looked shamefaced. But not for long.

‘Weerall gonna parrtee,’ roared the principal Berserker. ‘Weerall gonna parrtee tillwe fallover deid!’

‘Aye-aye-aye, deedwewull deedwewull deedwewull!’ sang his companions, rattling their swords, brandishing their beards and looking dead fierce. ‘Weer them Lewischessmen, aint-wejust! Aye-aye-aye!’

The Queen stood up slowly. She was not very tall, but she had on a tall hat that many a Norse maiden would be proud of. It framed her blonde hair to perfection. All the way from Muscovy, too – also not cheap.

‘All right, then,’ she ordered, ‘fetch me my horse and let’s get on up the road.’

The Knight, who was in charge of the horses (‘ponies’ would be a better description) went below decks and soon returned with a rather sickly-looking animal.

‘What’s wrong with the creature?’ demanded the Queen.

‘Sea-sick, ma’am,’ announced the Knight. ‘Happens all the time. If you remember, I suggested we just pick up horses as we made landfall: Park and Raid, that’s what we were going to call it.’

‘Remember that, Surli?’ said the Queen in a snippy voice. ‘This perfect knight here had a good idea. Who was it blocked it, then?’

The King looked sheepish. ‘Must have been me, dear,’ he admitted. ‘Sorry.’

The Queen snorted, then allowed herself to be heaved over the side of the ship and placed on the

pony. Which staggered a bit, then settled down to tremble in the sand.

“Off we go, then,” commanded the Queen. The Berserkers took up position around her, eight on either side, two at the front, two at the back. They trotted along the beach, then up the first concrete slipway they reached. The King came along behind, looking glum, with Knight, Bishop and other retainers in tow.

At that moment, two police-officers climbed out of their patrol-car. One of them held up a hand.

“What’s all this, then?” she asked.

“Parrtee-parrtee! Lesall-parrtee!” bellowed the Berserker. He waved his battle-axe around fiercely and frothed at the mouth. All his fellow-berserkers laughed uproariously.

The policewoman stood her ground, although her male companion could be seen fidgeting nervously with his taser.

“Are you aware of the laws governing lock-down and social distancing?” she asked.

The Queen stood up in her stirrups, and beckoned to the group around the King. “Come here and sort this out! Bishop - you!”

The Bishop made his way forwards in as stately a manner as he could. His cassock was full of sand-flies which he longed to shake out. “What seems to be the problem, officer?” he asked.

“Your friends appear to be planning a party,” replied the police-woman rather coldly.

“Well, yes, that was the idea,” admitted the Bishop. “Several weeks at sea, you know what young men are like...”

“Yes, I do,” said the policewoman bitterly. “But the thing is, sir, you’re not allowed to do any partying. As you must be aware.”

“Wossat?” interrupted the lead Berserker, who had been listening with some astonishment to this exchange. “Weerno-taeparrtee? Wossallthatthen?” He waved his battle-axe in the air, narrowly missing a companion's neck.

“And if you persist, I will be obliged to take you into custody,” continued the policewoman in a steely voice. “As it is, I will have to issue a fixed penalty notice.”

“A what?” gasped the Queen, outraged.

“Fifty pounds, madam, for violating social distancing measures. Thirty pounds if paid immediately.”

“Over my dead body!” exclaimed the Queen, no longer able to contain herself. “Berserkers, up! Up and ready to die for Odin!”

“And God,” muttered the Bishop awkwardly.

The Berserkers needed no excuse. “Death! Deathtaeall parrtee-poopers! Kill, kill!” And with one high, blood-curdling yell, they surged forward, determined to defy the Scottish Government’s lockdown legislation.

