

SPACE GINGERS

Written by

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EXT. GUDMUNDUR'S BOAT - DAY

An ICELANDIC FLAG waves on the mast.

The crew heaves nets full of silver mackerel. GUDMUNDUR HREINSSON (30s), a redhead, oversees the operation.

A Scottish boat arrives; ANGUS, its black captain with a Scottish accent, shouts.

ANGUS

You're stealing fish from the UK's
sovereign waters!

GUDMUNDUR

Are we?

Angus indicates the coastline behind him.

ANGUS

That's literally Scotland there!

GUDMUNDUR

We'll just take these and go.

ANGUS

You will not!

Angus jumps on the Icelandic vessel. He pushes Gudmundur. A chubby Icelandic bosun isn't having it. He's ARNALD (70s).

ARNALD

He assaulted the captain; get 'em,
boys!

Fish flop on the deck. Crews brawl. Angus jumps on Gudmundur's chest and slaps his face with a fish.

Gudmundur yells between blows:

GUDMUNDUR

Put. My. Mackerel...back!

A CABIN BOY records it with his phone.

INT. GUDMUNDUR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

CHYRON: Höfn, Iceland

Gudmundur carries his boots wearily. His enthusiastic grandma AMMA (80s) appears at the kitchen door. Their conversations are always in Icelandic.

GUDMUNDUR

What if I pack everything and go
somewhere no one knows my name?

AMMA

Baby, we're bottle rockets, meant
to shine and drop a thousand sparks
on every corner on earth.

Gudmundur sighs wearily.

AMMA (CONT'D)

Would carrot cake help?

He nods, and she re-enters the kitchen.

REVEAL Arnald's here. He gives Gudmundur a knowing look.

ARNALD

When we're on the boat, you're the
captain, but here I'm your step-
grandpa: it's a classic power
reversal. So what's on your mind?

Gudmundur folds his arms and clams up.

ARNALD (CONT'D)

No offense, but you're kind of a--
what's the word? I just heard it in
my Netflix movies--ah yes, a man-
baby. That's it, you're a little
man-baby. You cry every time MCU
Loki dies. That's like seven times.

GUDMUNDUR

It's just that movies are really
important to me.

ARNALD

We're Icelanders, American movies
are important to all of us. But you
need to not be a baby, to do
something real in life.

Amma returns with a slice of cake.

AMMA

Don't stay up late making crumbs in
bed, watching those films.

GUDMUNDUR

I'm thirty-three, Amma. I think we
can trust me to make good
decisions.

INT. GUDMUNDUR'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gudmundur sits in bed with his cake and clicks the TV on; the film "Gravity" is playing.

Sandra Bullock holds a thin cable to keep George Clooney from disappearing into space. George realizes he's dragging her: he severs the line and floats away. Gudmundur is appalled.

GUDMUNDUR

What a horrible way to go.

He changes channels. An AMERICAN NEWSCASTER presents.

AMERICAN NEWSCASTER

The same time Russia and the US had a Cold War, the UK and Iceland had their own skirmish--The Cod War.

A floorboard creaks. Gudmundur pauses the TV guiltily. He listens suspiciously for a moment then unpauses the program.

AMERICAN NEWSCASTER (CONT'D)

Their rivalry over fishing grounds dates to the thirteen hundreds but really heated up between the fifties and seventies. The conflicts ended many years ago--

GUDMUNDUR

--with an Icelandic victory--

AMERICAN NEWSCASTER

--And for a long time, the two countries seemed to get along. Here's one theory from air and sea historian, Doctor Penny Prague.

DOCTOR PRAGUE speaks with a compassionate voice.

DOCTOR PRAGUE

We need periodic reminders of what's right. That's why the last Cod War was so powerful: it reminded us we make the world better when we love our neighbor.

AMERICAN NEWSCASTER

Wise words, but is the fight for fish starting again? A cabin boy recorded this confrontation between Icelandic and Scottish fishermen, and it's going viral.

The video of Gudmundur getting fish-slapped plays.

GUDMUNDUR
Embarrassing.

Gudmundur shoves cake in his mouth. The newscaster giggles.

AMERICAN NEWSCASTER
Just look at 'em slapping away at
each other. Now that's good
television!

GUDMUNDUR
Hopefully no one remembers
tomorrow.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INT. MODERN LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A TEENAGE GIRL watches Gudmundur screaming "put my mackerel back" on an app called QuaKwak. The clip blows up with views, comments, and laughter emojis.

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

A Senegalese EDITOR works at his computer, sampling the mackerel line so that Gudmundur now sings it with autotune.

INT. MODERN BEDROOM - NIGHT

A Persian INFLUENCER dances to the song. A robotic female voice reads the text on the screen a la TikTok.

ROBOTIC VOICE
New "Put my mackerel back" dance is
going viral!

INT. DANCE STUDIO - DAY

Several young BALLETT DANCERS do the dance and lip sync to the big finish: "put my mackerel back!"

EXT. COUNTRY PORCH - DAY

A YOUNG GIRL teaches her Chinese GRANDFATHER the steps.

INT. GEORGIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Someone scrolls on QuaKwak: everything in the feed is related to the original clip of Gudmundur.

END MONTAGE.

INT. GEORGIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

CHYRON: Kirkwall, Orkney Islands, Scotland

GEORGIE AITKEN (21), a fashionable ginger with an attitude, films herself doing the dance. STUART (50s), a fisherman with honest eyes, enters.

STUART

Hiya doll.

GEORGIE

You ruined my signature sign-off! I have to do it again.

She dances from the beginning, lip syncs the line, then says her typical farewell:

GEORGIE (CONT'D)

Georgie out!

(to Stuart)

Why'd you interrupt?

Stuart holds an envelope. Georgie snatches it and removes cash from inside without reading the message.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)

P.S. I'm the fastest growing Scottish QuaKwak-er, so I'm leaving university. Love you, byeee.

She runs out of the room.

Stuart considers his phone background: YOUNG GEORGIE (10) kindly hugs a crying toddler.

STUART

I hope one day you'll remember the world doesn't revolve around you.

He kisses the photo.

STUART (CONT'D)

Happy birthday, sweetness.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

CAMERON CAMERON (mid 40s), an enthusiastic Scottish politician with a widow's peak, holds up his phone.

CAMERON
Are you seeing this, Kolli?

It's Georgie doing her dance. KOLLI AGNARSSON (50s), a droopy statesman with a bald head, looks gloomily at the screen.

KOLLI
Why do you use this app?

CAMERON
Gotta keep the pulse of my constituents. Right now, everyone's talking about mackerel boy.

KOLLI
Don't mention fish. If our countries do another Cod War, the Althing blames me, and it's goodbye Kolli.

CAMERON
Parliament wants to replace me too. Literally all I want is to keep my job. I'll think of something.

The BARTENDER slides over.

BARTENDER
Top you off?

CAMERON
Want to hear a joke? Iceland's Prime Minister and Scotland's First Minister walk into a bar. They get fired cause of a tiny fish. Get it?

BARTENDER
I'm sorry, sir. I don't.

He walks off.

KOLLI
We're going to get it.

INT. GEORGIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Georgie refreshes QuaKwak's analytics tab religiously.

GEORGIE
Come on, come on.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

Kolli gestures to Cameron's phone, where Georgie is still doing the dance.

KOLLI
You don't see many of those in Scotland anymore, redheads. We even have more than you.

CAMERON
You're talking nonsense.

KOLLI
What about the studies where Iceland has the most gingers per capita?

CAMERON
Everything is "per capita" with you Icelanders. Like being the best at anything per capita matters with a six-figure population.

KOLLI
It's demonstrable.

CAMERON
You're demonstrable! We're twelve percent ginger.

KOLLI
But you haven't seen our newest statistic--we're thirteen.

Cameron slams his drink down.

CAMERON
I've seen every statistic that ever was. When I said ours was twelve, I was being approximate--it's really thirteen. We have more gingers than you, we've always had more gingers than you, and we'll always have more gingers, even per capita, than Iceland!

Cameron is heated. The bartender rushes over.

BARTENDER

Maybe it's time someone leaves.

KOLLI

It's past my bedtime anyway.

He slurps his drink and shuffles away. Cameron leans on the bar and calms down by people-watching.

Behind Cameron, a custodian mounts a ladder and fumbles with a light fixture. A mother checks into the hotel and her TODDLER with BRIGHT RED HAIR plays on the floor.

Cameron looks at the kid.

CLOSE ON: the child's chubby hands flying a toy spaceship. Cameron looks from the rocket to the child's hair then back to the rocket.

Several images FLASH over Cameron's eyes:

INTERCUT: Footage from the Cold War space race.

INTERCUT: Footage of Iceland and Scotland's Cod War.

INTERCUT: Words alternating with images--"The Cold War, The Cod War, Capitalism, Communism, redheads, fish, Patriots, Red Commies, nationalism, redheads, gingers, space, red, ginger, red, space gingers!"

The custodian twists the lightbulb; Cameron's face shows inspiration; the fixture LIGHTS UP.

CAMERON

That's it!

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Cameron pounds on Kolli's door. Impatient, he throws his shoulder against it.

CAMERON

Open up, Kolli!

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Cameron crashes into the room; Kolli wears seaweed strips on his scalp like a bob haircut.

CAMERON

What are you doing?

KOLLI
Seaweed. Tightens the skin.

Cameron sits Kolli down.

CAMERON
Our countries fight over fish for seven hundred years, and we're the ones to blame? I don't think so! So let's bait-and-switch: give them something to care more about.

KOLLI
Like what?

CAMERON
The classic move: a good, old-fashioned space race!

Kolli parts the seaweed in front of his eyes.

KOLLI
Do people care about space?

CAMERON
We'll tie it to gingers; make it about social capital, redhead representation. If we invent a race to put the first ginger on the moon, people will forget fishes and firings.

KOLLI
How do we fund it? Who are the astronauts?

CAMERON
I haven't worked that out.

INT. GUDMUNDUR'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gudmundur folds his hands and prays.

GUDMUNDUR
Am I just coasting? There must be more than this provincial life.
(realizing)
Hmm. Beauty and the Beast.
(praying again)
Please, help me do something big.

He thinks for a moment then speaks again.

GUDMUNDUR (CONT'D)
But not too big. Okay, thanks--
thank you. Good night.

Gudmundur closes his eyes with a peaceful exhale.

INT. GEORGIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Georgie SCREAMS. Stuart runs in.

STUART
You all right?

GEORGIE
My 'mackerel boy dance' was viewed
40 million times. I'm the top
creator in Scotland. Do you know
what this means? I'm one step
closer to being the "popularest"
girl on the planet!

She rushes out shrieking.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)
AHHHHHH!

STUART
No living with her now.

Stuart looks resigned to his fate.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Cameron and Kolli continue brainstorming.

CAMERON
This only works if my Parliament
and your Althing are in. Will you
agree to convince them?

KOLLI
It might be crazy, but it beats
unemployment. I think we should do
it.

Cameron lifts some seaweed.

CAMERON
Here's to a redheaded, red herring
space race.