

# ***HOW DO YOU LIKE ICELAND?***

*(Er Ísland eftirlæti yðar?)*

*by Benóný Ægisson*

**LÝÐVELDISLEIKHÚSIÐ 2005**

He

Hello friends of Iceland.

*(Pause)*

So? How do you like it?

*(Pause)*

Come on. How do you like it?

*(Pause)*

How do you like Iceland

*(Chooses a guest to hit on)*

You sir/madam.. how do you like Iceland?

Guest

Oh I like..

He

Yes it is great isn't it. What do you like best?

Guest

Oh I think..

He

The hot springs, the lava, the waterfalls, the ponies, the women..?

Guest *(if he hasn't given up)*

Yes and the..

He

Where do you come from?

Guest

I'm an American.

He

America! Really? We found it! A thousand years ago. And lost it too. And where complimented on our good sense to do so. There was an Italian that rediscovered it. Is there anybody here from Italy?

Guest

We are.

He

Do you remember the name of the guy?

Guest

Columbus?

He

That's right. The first Italian mobster in America. We also found Greenland. And lost that too by the way. Is there anybody here from Greenland? No, they're probably all out on the ice knocking out baby seals. We found the Faroe Islands too. Anybody here

from the Faroe Islands? That's where the settlers from Norway left the people who were seasick.

*And so on he rambles and we can make disrespectful phrases for all possible nations so he can belittle them to glorify Iceland. For example:*

English: How many cod wars have we fought? Do you know that? Do you know how many you have won? Yeah, I know.. a sensitive issue...

Danish: Shame on you. I'll get to you later on

Italian: Italian. You are the guys that are always taking the credit for discovering America. But we found it! And lost it too. Etc.

Spanish: I guess that you think that you discovered America. But let me tell you that you are wrong. We found it! Etc

Russian: Russia is a former viking colony. Before the Soviet Union. Did you know that?

French: My forefathers, the vikings, sailed up the Seine and had a party on an island in the middle of the river and nobody dared do anything.

Japanese: Very smart people the Japanese. It is because they eat so much fish. Like we do. Etc

She

Stop bothering my customers/these people.

He

What..? Oh, it's you.

She

So you remember me?

He

Who could forget?

She *(to the audience)*

Don't mind him. After all, all Icelanders are descended from foreigners.

He

Yes, you are probably right about that. But not from just any foreigners. From Norwegian kings. And princesses the vikings stole in Britain and in Ireland.

She

Nothing but true blue blood in our veins.

He

It's not only that. We are the happiest people in the world, too?

She

Can happiness be measured?

He

Of course it can. We live in enlightened times.

She  
Oh, how lucky we are.

He  
An international survey shows that we are the happiest people in the world.

She  
Probably because we hold the world-record in prozac and anti-depressant use.

He  
And the we are very religious.

She  
But don't go to church unless we have to. We do, however, use every opportunity to have a Christian holiday.

He  
We are very hard-working people.

She  
We have a second holiday to every major Christian holiday: the second of Christmas. the second of Easter etc., we even have a runner-up to Christmas. We've always been bad Christians, but that's probably because we were bad pagans too.

He  
We believe in elves.

She  
Nonsense! You don't have to believe in them. They exist. It is a well known fact, like when you light a cigarette with a candle you kill fishermen.

He  
We also hold the record in the consuming of chewing gum with Norway and Andorra. 900 grams per person every year.

She  
If you look at the sidewalks of Reykjavik you can verify the truth of this information. When most nations get rich they pave their streets with gold. We do it with chewing gum.

He  
What is your problem?

She  
Well, you should know.

He  
Why are you always so negative?

She

I can't just stand here and listen to you lie to these people.

He

Lie? I'm not lying. I am informing them. It is impossible to lie to them. They are tourists.

She

I won't have it. Not on my shift.

He

What are you doing here?

She

As little as I can and only when I have to.

He

Can you get me a beer (a glass of water)?

She

No.

He

A cup of coffee then?

She

No.

He

Why not?

She

I am not in the mood to serve?

He

Not in the mood? Why not?

She

I don't know. Maybe it is all the royal blood in me.

*(To the audience)*

Never expect good service in Iceland. We hate to serve. Imagine: You! Descendant of King Erik and princess Melkorka! Give me a beer! Doesn't really work, does it?

He

No. I guess not.

She

Why is it so important to you what they think?

He

I want them to get a good impression of Iceland. So many lies have been circulated about the country and the people through the ages.

She

Are you saying that foreigners lie about us?

He

Yes they do. At least when they write travel books. I shudder when I think of how misinformed all these people are about us.

She

Well it is none of my business. I just work here.

He

Work? Is that what you call it?

*(Pause)*

Of course it is your business. Every Icelander is an ambassador of the country.

*(Pause)*

I have an idea! Let us embark on a quest for the truth about Iceland

She

You must be out of your mind.

He

You don't dare?

She

Do I look like I'm afraid of you?

He

Come on then.

She

A quest? I? With you?

He

Yes. Let's do that.

*(To the audience)*

We won't lie to you.

She

Won't we? Of course we will. We want you to come to Iceland and leave your money.

He

Nonsense.

*(To the audience)*

Finally you will hear the truth about Iceland.

She  
Not from him, you won't.

He  
I know more about it than you.

She  
Hardly.

He  
Okay, look, here's how to settle it: We will both tell our version and let them decide what is the truth.

*(To the audience)*

If you want adventure and fun listen to me but if you want cynicism and self-pity you can listen to her.

She  
Who is beeing negative now?

He  
Let's start.

She *(To the audience)*

In Iceland we say that the visitor has a keen eye. At best we can see our reflection in their wiews and at worst their cross-eyed vision can irritate us.

He  
So lets have a look at Icelandic history and what foreigners have been saying about us through the ages.

*(Pause)*

In 330 BC an explorer named Pytheas sailed from Marseilles to the British Isles and the northern seas. Six days north of Britain and one day short of the end of the world he found an island he named Thule. No one knows for certain if this was Iceland but Roman coins from this time have been discovered in the eastern part of the country.

She  
As you can see, tourists have been leaving their money here for over 2000 years. So your money is save with us.

He  
In the 8<sup>th</sup> century some Irish monks lived here. They wrote that in the middle of summer it never got dark and they could see to pick the lice from their shirts at midnight.

She  
They were celibate, of course, and had nothing better to do.

He  
But the Irish monks didn't stay in Iceland.

She

Fortunately, because it would've been difficult to populate a country just with men.

He

The first real settlers were the Norse vikings that came around the year 900. Many of them were fugitives from Norway because the king Harald the Shaggyhaired had vowed not to cut his hair until he had driven out all the other kings of Norway.

She

And there were a lot of them. A viking king was a guy who had some land, a ship and enough men to navigate it when he went looting and maiming and killing in more civilized countries.

He

Harald won a victory over all the other kings, killing them or driving them from the country. He then cut his hair and became Harald the Fair-haired, king of all of Norway. He is, in fact, responsible for all the royalty in our ancestry.

She

Our ancestors sailed from Norway to the British Isles and Ireland on their usual business, burning monasteries and getting loot and Irish princesses, then they went to settle the land they had heard of from a guy called Hrafna-Flóki which means The shaggy-haired guy with the ravens, so you can see that shaggy hair was obviously a common trait among the vikings.

He

This great viking visionary took three ravens with him on his journey. He sailed in the general direction of this mythical island and let his ravens loose and they helped him to find it.

She

This guy, Flóki, was a fool. Not only did he get council from stupid birds but he didn't gather hay for his livestock during the summer and in the hard winter that followed all his animals died. He had to return to Norway with his tail between his legs.

He

This unfortunate incident..

She

Incident? The guy was a moron.

He

This unfortunate incident caused the first really bad publicity the country got because Flóki named it Iceland..

She

Moron!



He

Iceland! When there are so many great names for a country: El Dorado. Shangri La. Utopia. Who would move to a country called Iceland? There was another man in his company that said that every straw in Iceland was dripping butter. Why didn't Flóki name it Butterland? Or Baconia? Iceland! Doesn't really sell, does it?

She

But if Flóki was a moron the next guy was even worse. He was the founding father of Iceland, Ingólfur Arnarsson. He didn't even have ravens to lead him but used some wooden poles, probably in the image of his gods.

He/Ingolfur

Slaves! Throw my poles into the sea. I will settle down wherever they drift ashore.

She/Slave

Ok boss.

*(Pause)*

But why don't we just find a good place to settle.

He/Ingolfur

No. That is too simple. We are vikings and heroes. We will do it the hard way.

She/Slave

Stupid viking!

He/Ingolfur

What did you say?

She/Slave

I said: You are a credit to your race Ingolfur.

He/Ingolfur

Oh, thank you, little slave. Let us go ashore and look for my poles.

She/Slave

This is good farmland, why don't you settle down here. See, every straw is dripping butter.

He/Ingolfur

Where are my beloved poles? Do you see them? I don't see any poles. Keep on going.

She

When they had travelled along the entire southern coast through the best farmland in the country they came to a place that was mostly rocky hills and marshes

He/Ingolfur

There are my beloved poles. I will settle down here.

She/Slave

Why did we pass good land to settle in this godforsaken place?

He/Ingolfur

Well I don't know. The poles I guess.

She

The slave, probably a smart guy from Ireland, ran off with a woman, and started his own settlement on the south coast.

*(Pause)*

Makes you wonder doesn't it?

He

About what?

She

Who descends from the slaves?

He

What on earth do you mean?

She

What happened to the slaves? There must've been more slaves than masters. Did they go away like the monks?

He

How should I know? At least they are not my ancestors.

She

But..

He

On with the story.

She

Future travellers would describe the town that would rise at Ingolfs settlement as tragic, dark and miserable with smell of rotten fish so overwhelming that it was a wonder how plagues and illnesses could be avoided. Ingolfur named his farm Reykjavik.

He

Erik the Red and Leif the Lucky were much better PR-men than Flóki, the shaggy-haired guy with the ravens. Erik named the country where he settled Greenland, even though it was mostly glaciers and ice. And Leif Eriksson named the part of Amerika he discovered Wineland.

She

Which must have been very attractive name to his fellow Icelanders with the liquor prices they have to pay.

He  
Those were great days. Our Imperial days. By historical right we could claim  
Greenland. And America too.

She  
There's a slight catch.

He  
What's that?

She  
There were people there when we came.

He  
That has never stopped anyone from colonizing a country.  
(Pause)

Ah, the glory days. The historical era. No language was more widely spoken in the  
Middle Ages than the Norse language. It was spoken from Asia to America, from  
Istanbul to Manhattan. Icelandic poets could work anywhere. They were sort of pop  
stars, performing in the courts of kings.

She  
Yes. Between the the court fool and the dancing bear.

He  
And I speak this noble language, the Latin of the North.

She  
And since the Icelanders were the only Nordic nation that was literate they had to  
write the history of Northern Europe. They probably learned to read and write from  
their Celtic slaves and if it were not for this backward and isolated country a lot of  
history, ancient mythology and poetry would be lost.

He  
Norway wouldn't have any history before the year 1000 had not Snorri Sturluson  
written the story of their kings.

She  
There are also theories that we saved the European music of the middle ages too. It  
was so completely lost that when European travellers in Iceland heard it again they  
didn't even recognize it as music and asked the singers to stop, please, or they would  
go mad.

He  
Let's sing one of these songs for them.

She  
There are limits..

He  
The text is only about a hundred years old..

She  
I said no.

He  
..but the melody.. no one really knows how old it is.

*(He looks at her pleadingly like a puppy dog)*

She  
Oh my god.  
*(She waits, but he keeps the face up. She finally breaks)*  
Okay, okay; just stop doing that  
*(To the audience)*

We must warn you, though: We will not be responsible for your mental health while we are performing and any legal action against us will be absolutely fruitless because we are typical Icelanders and have nothing except creditcard debts.

Both <i>sing</i> Feginn vildi ég far´á hana fósturu mína þó af því bið´eg bráðan bana bara til að gleðja hana	I will gladly service my old nanny even if it will kill me just to make her happy
Nú á ekki nokkur maður nokkurn dropa Englarnir af himnum hrapa heimskingjarnir stand´og gapa	Noone has a drop of anything now The angels fall from the sky and the stupid stand and stare
Guð er sagt að gefi allt hið góð´og holla Fjandinn sendir allt hið illa öllu góðu til að spilla	They say that God gives all good and wholesome. The Devil sends the evil things to corrupt everything that´s good
Samt þeir báðir sá og plægja hinn sama akur hvor um sig er kóngur ríkur hver er sínum gjöfum líkur	But both of them sow and reap the same field They are both prosperous kings and can be recognize by their gifts

He  
Was that Björk?

She  
Where?

He  
There. She just went out the door, I think.

She  
I didn´t see her.

*(If there is somebody famous in the audience it is possible to talk about him/her)*

He

There are so many famous Icelanders. Have you heard about Egill Skallagrimsson the poet-warrior?

*(Pause)*

He was a character. He was only three years old when he first got drunk and at six he killed a boy with an axe because he had beaten him in a ballgame. He would get drunk, kill somebody or poke his eye out or puke in his face and then go on to recite immortal poetry.

She

A very loveable guy.

He

You have heard of Egill? Good. What about Halldor Laxness our nobel-prize winner? Not one of you knows? *(Or)* I see. Many illiterates in the audience today *(Or whatever fits)*

*(Pause)*

Do you know Joe the Giant? Joe Borg the Wrestler? They were very big in America in the early 1900's. Especially Joe the Giant, being a giant and all. Let's see: Do you know Bjarni Tryggvason the astronaut? No? / Only one *(or whatever fits)* I must say that I find you very poorly informed about Iceland.

She

You should check if you can get a refund from your travel agency. They haven't briefed you properly.

He

What about Kristjan Johannsson, the singer?

*(Pause)*

No? *or* Only one *(or whatever fits)*

*(Pause)*

You heard about the three tenors? Carreras, Domingo and Pavarotti? Yes? If the three tenors were four he would be the fourth.

She

Yes. He is very world famous here in Iceland.

He

But you do know Björk though? Surely you must know Björk?

She

She is the one that dressed in a dead bird on Oscar night.

He

But do you know who the most famous Icelandic is? You should know. Eidur Smari Gudjohnsen of course!. You don't know him? He plays football for Chelsea and is the captain of the Icelandic soccer team.

She

Sport is a beautiful thing. Nations can wage war on each other without actually killing anyone.

He

Yes. Unfortunately we don't have players like Egill anymore.

She

The good old days of maiming and killing.

He

But back to history. From 870 to 930 AD Iceland was settled and a parliament was established in Þingvellir. The country was ruled by some sort of elitist democracy until the year 1262 when the Icelanders consented to become the subjects of the king of Norway.

She

But foreign influence came also from the English and Germans that began to fish and trade in Iceland especially in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

He

And with the newcomers came the dreaded travel-book writer!

She/Blefken

There are many peculiar animals in the ocean. The dogfish lifts his head out of the water and barks. Now and then his puppies play around him but she always puts them back into her womb so they can grow better. In the ocean there are also horses and cows and so on and it is wonderful to see how Nature in its wisdom recreates all the land-animals and birds in the sea.

He

That was from a book by Dithmar Blefken, or the lying bastard Blefken as he was called in Iceland. He was a German and he was here in 1563 and at that time you could write almost anything about Iceland. Now, let's pretend we are ignorant foreigners.. well you are anyway, listening to this lying bastard.

She/Blefken

The houses are holes in the ground and everybody sleeps together, men and women, and snore and fart like pigs under one woollen blanket. In wintertime the men lie in bed, dirty with lice, and play chess and their children or servants have to bring them food. It is always dark and the servants have to go out into the eternal night to find sheep that have died or rotten fish that the farmers devour.

He

They eat rotten food?!!

She/Blefken

The Icelanders don't like food unless it is rotten and a special delicacy is shark meat they piss on before they make it rot.

He  
That's horrible! Is it true that the gate to Hell is there?

She/Blefken  
Yes it is. In the volcano Hekla.

He  
Tell us more.

She/Blefken  
I can't. Not in the presence of ladies

He  
Please tell us more. We want more don't we?  
*(Urges the audience to respond)*  
More! More! More!

She/Blefken  
Well then.  
*(Pause)*  
In Iceland dogs are expensive but the Icelanders give their children to foreigners so they can get bread.

He  
They give their children?! More. Tell us more

She/Blefken  
The Icelanders drink as long as there is anything to drink in the house and nobody gets up to pass water while they are drinking.

He  
What do they do? Do they burst then?

She/Blefken  
No, their wives or maids stand aside with pisspots that they pass to the needy. In the morning they wash their hands and mouths with what they have in the pot.

He  
That's very sensible. And how are the women? Tell us about the women.

She/Blefken  
They are beautiful and when the Icelanders go to town they offer their daughters for one night for bread or bisquits or such trivia.

He  
Oh yes..

She/Blefken  
Girls that have slept with foreigners are highly respected and will get better suitors.

He  
And..?

She/Blefken

Promiscuity and adultery is mandatory in Iceland and even the parliament has passed laws that says that a girl can have six children out of wedlock without losing her virginity.

He  
Wonderful.. I mean: How immoral!

She/Blefken

There is not much good you can say about this country. But nowhere on earth do they catch more fish because the Icelanders have spirits and demons in their service and the devil wakes them at night and sends them out to fish. When I was there I did nothing except carry fish, stack fish, eat fish and shit fish. I would not mind if I never saw a single fish again.

He  
Tell us about the country. Is it all ice?

She/Blefken

Rocks! Rocks, rocks, rocks and more rocks! I don't think I ever saw an uglier country. There is not a single tree there. You should see it. It is like the land has leprosy.

He  
No this is too much! Like the land has leprosy! This is slander.

She/Blefken

Fooled you! This wasn't from my travel book. It was from a book written by an Icelandic bishop in defence of Iceland against the travel-book authors.

He  
When you have friends like that you don't need enemies. This is the 16<sup>th</sup> century version of *Fancy a dirty weekend in Iceland?*

She

So. Is it a land with leprosy? Today's travel books claim that Iceland is beautiful. What is beauty? Can landscape be beautiful?

He

Only once, in the Icelandic Sagas, is beauty in a landscape mentioned. An exiled man admires the hillside by his farm, decides not to go into exile and is promptly killed.

She

And because of this strange conduct some scholars think he was gay. Once upon a time some travellers visited an old Icelandic farmer and fisherman. They expressed their opinion that his land was very beautiful. The term was very unfamiliar to the man.



He/ Fisherman

Beautiful?

*(Pause)*

Beautiful, you say?

*(Pause)*

Yes it is beautiful when the fishing is good.

She

You might find this strange but you see, in Iceland cod is god or vice versa, god is cod.

He

But we don't eat it. Do you like fish? We prefer lamb but we catch fish to sell to foreigners. The first emblem of Iceland was the cod..

She

..and the second was the falcon, which is fitting because here in Iceland both these creatures are thought to be extremely stupid and cruel.

He

A cod is cruel?

She

You should see what a cod can do to clams. It makes your blood run cold.

*(Excited)*

Ooh, I know!

He

Now what?

She

Humour me.

He

Are you kidding?

She

I sang your song didn't I?

He

Okay. What then?

*(She whispers in his ear; he makes a face)*

No way.

She

Come on. It sounds better when you say it.

He

But I..

She  
Ladies and gentlemen...!

He  
Blunders and stupidity in the Icelandic sagas!

She  
Act one! The settler!

He  
Around the year 1000 a guy named Bjarni Herjolfsson sailed from Norway to visit his father in Greenland. They got fog and ill winds and got lost but when they had sailed for some days they saw land.

She  
But Bjarni wouldn't let them go ashore because he was going to Greenland.

He/Bjarni  
We are vikings and heroes and we are going to Greenland.

She/Sailor (*To audience*)  
Noone knows how far west they sailed but they saw many strange lands.

(*To Bjarni*)  
Come on Bjarni. We are tired of sailing. Let's go ashore and grab a burger and see a movie.

He/Bjarni  
I don't like this place. We are going home.

She  
It was said about Bjarni that he was not very adventurous or curious man. Later he sold his ship to a guy called Leif Eriksson and the rest is history.

(*Pause*)  
You know, the Icelandic word for stupid is *heimskur*. *Heim* means home so someone who is *heimskur*, stupid, is one that stays at home.

He  
Icelandic is a very transparent language. It has not changed as much as most languages and that is mostly because we don't take foreign words into our vocabulary.

She  
English, for example, derives from Celtic, Old Norse, Latin, Greek and god knows how many other languages.

He  
The word astronaut is from latin and means literally a star sailor or one who sails to the stars. But to know that you have to know Latin.

She

Astronaut in Icelandic is *geimfari*. *Geim* means space and *fari* means goer. So literally the word means spacegoer which is fairly easy to understand.

He

Kitchen is *eldhús*, *eldur* means fire and *hús* means house, that is firehouse or a house with fire in it.

She

And a man who moves into a woman's house with his belongings in plastic bags, eats her food, spends her money, maltreats her in every way and leaves her for another woman is called a *drullusokkur*. And what does that mean? Dirty socks.

He

Was that necessary?

She

They are also referred to as *plastpokamaður*, a plastic bag man.

He

I don't like those insinuations. If you can't be nice..

She *exclaims*

Ladies and gentlemen! Another episode of:

He

Blunders and stupidity in the Icelandic sagas!

She

Act two. The hero!

*(Pause)*

*Fostbræðrasaga* tells the story of the blood brothers Þormóður the poet and Þorgeir the hero.

He

Þorgeir was a great hero.

She

He never laughed.

He

He was not interested in women because love was a waste of energy he could use for maiming and killing.

She

He killed his first man at fifteen in revenge for his father's death.

He

In all deeds he was as unafraid as a wild beast.

She

And everybody was afraid of him like cattle are of lions.

He

At one time he rode up to a farm.

She

A shepherd had just arrived with his sheep and was resting on his staff talking to some people. The staff was low so the man was stooped over, with his head and neck protruding.

He

Porgeir spurred his horse, rode up to the man and chopped off his head with his ax and then rode away.

She

Why did you do it Porgeir? Did you have any grievances with this man?

He/Porgeir

No I didn't.

She

Then, why did you chop his head off?

He/Porgeir

I could not help it. He had laid himself open for the blow.

She

If they would make a movie about him he would be played by Win Diesel or The Rock.

He

When Porgeir died they cut out his heart and a smaller and harder heart they had never seen.

She

Death and misery. The story of Iceland. If you believe the Sagas it seems the Icelanders made quite an attempt to wipe themselves out. But there were also mightier forces aiding them in achieving that goal.

He

The volcanic fissure Laki erupted in 1783 creating the largest basalt lava on earth. Large amounts of gas were produced in the eruption which covered most of Europe in a blue haze.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the cattle in Iceland died from eating contaminated grass. And one quarter of Iceland's inhabitants died of starvation.

She

And in the year 1402 our Lord in his wisdom sent a blessed plague to Iceland that killed half the population.

He

And in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century one fifth of the population emigrated to America.

She

That isn't dying.

He

No, you are right. Leaving Iceland for America is worse than dying.

*(Pause)*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was very fashionable among the English aristocracy to travel to Iceland. Lets hear how those one of those good lords described the country:

She/ Lord James Bryce

There is something unique in the landscape, such a strange feeling, that the impression from it is deeper and longer lasting than from the landscape in other countries that are nobler and more beautiful. Everywhere there is silence, emptiness and monotony. And you are aware of a threat from the most frightening forces of nature – the fire that has moulded those mountainpeaks and poured out this enormous lava – and the frost that crumbles the rock and howls from the endless glaciers. You are in a country that seems unfit for humans but has been left empty so Nature can play with the materials not needed elsewhere and enjoy her enourmous force and strength. In the highlands of Iceland there is no manmade thing and nowhere could anyone be tempted to settle down. There is not a more useless desert in Sahara and no matter how crowded the world will become there is little chance of new groups of settlers heading their ships to the stormy shores of Iceland.

He

How wrong can you be? The highlands are changing into a reservoir for hydrolic power plants and people come from all over the world to build the dams.

She

And then there are all the lost tourists and the rescue squads.

He

If you loose your guests you have to find them again. All part of the world famous Icelandic hospitality

She

To be able to tell you what the good lords thought about Icelandic hospitality we need some help from the audience. We need some courageous stuntmen and women to play Icelandic country folk in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

He

To make it more authentic it is best if those volunteers are dirty and have a strong and unpleasant smell.

*The actors can ad lib their text while choosing the volunteers. Example:*

She (*to someone in the audience*)

Sir! You have long unkempt hair, you would fit very nicely. Do you have any lice there?

Guest

No, I don't.

She

That's a shame. It would have made it more realistic.

He

And we need a beautiful woman. As you must know Icelandic women are known for their beauty. We have had two Miss World's and a Miss Universe.

She (*points at Him*)

He will be the foreign traveller and you're the farmer, you're the farmers wife and I will be the farmers daughter.

He

Now, to be able to play Icelanders well, you must be bright, quick-witted, jovial in company and funny but ironical. As Icelanders you must be prone to laughter, be great talkers and talk quickly and well.

She

No no no. No smiling. Icelanders in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had nothing to be happy about. Be somber, serious and quiet.

He

But funny!

She

It should be as the overwhelming burden of nature is weighing you down. Your eyes have only seen tragic images, misery and terror, infertile earth burnt to ashes, no flower and no plants.

He

But jovial!

(*She gives him a look*)

Underneath!

She

Would you just play your part please?

He/A traveller

Okay okay. So here I come, an ignorant English nobleman, on my Icelandic pony, to an Icelandic farm. Knock knock knock. I want to stay the night.

She/A farmers daughter

Father there is an ignorant English nobleman at the door. Let's play noble savages, he will expect that. Everybody line up and welcome him.

*(She embraces Him and kisses Him on the mouth and urges the others to do the same. The Father starts and She shows him and the others a cue card with their text)*

Father

God bless you.

She/A farmers daughter

Mother! Give this ignorant English nobleman the best food we have in the house. Fetch the pickled ram's testicles, the sour seal flippers, the blood pudding and the scorched sheeps heads.

He/A traveller

No no no. Don't bother. I am.. not really hungry. I think I will just go straight to bed.

*(She shows the Father a cue card with his text)*

Father

Give it to me. I'm famished.

*(They all wait till he has eaten something)*

She/A farmers daughter

Mother, shall I accompany this ignorant English nobleman to bed.

*(She shows the Mother a cue card with her text)*

Mother

Yes, my dear, do that. I am getting too old for it.

He/A traveller

Why is she following me into the bedroom?

*(Pause)*

I can not undress while she is here.

*(Pause)*

What does she want?

*(Pause)*

Is it possible that she..?

*(She makes him sit down and starts to pull of his clothes)*

He/A traveller

What kind of country is this? Mothers pimping their daughters?

She *(To the audience)*

It was considered good hospitality to send a maid, a daughter or a wife to help visitors to take of their clothes. And shipwrecked men got very special treatment too. The northern seas are treacherous and in the old days it was not uncommon that foreign ships sank by the coasts of Iceland. In the cold water the chances of surviving are very

slim. But if a shipwrecked man was saved by the Icelanders he was put in a bed with a girl on each side to thaw him out. So you see, some of our customs might have caused some misunderstanding.

He/A traveller  
Well, I say..

She/A farmers daughter  
Mother, the ignorant English nobleman is awake. Bring what is left of the pickled ram's testicles, the sour seal flippers, the blood pudding and the scorched sheeps heads.

He/A traveller  
Well I am not really hungry. I think I will go straight to Reykjavik. I am invited to eat with the Danish guvernor.

She/A farmers daughter  
Very well. We will now kiss this ignorant English nobleman farewell.

*She embraces Him and kisses Him on the mouth and urges the others to do the same*

She  
Goodbye ignorant English nobleman

He/A traveller  
When the Icelanders embrace it is as they never will see each other again, like they feel they are constantly in danger of perishing in a vulcanic eruption, Oh how I love those excellent men in spite of their coarse skin and aversion to washing it!

She (*To Father and Mother*)  
Goodbye and thank you jovial lice-ridden Icelanders!  
(*To the audience*)

The ignorant English nobleman didn't not get anything to eat with the Danish guvernor either. After reading his account of the dinner, which turned out to be a drinking orgy, one wonders how the Danes were able to govern the country at all.

(*Pause*)

One more thing. The man that does not recognize you today is not the twin brother of the guy you met yesterday. I am talking about the jovial man who danced on your table, told you everything there is to know about the gait of Icelandic horses..

He/Drunken Icclander  
You see, and this is very remarkable, the Icelandic horse has five gaits, more than any horse in the world..

She  
..and enlightened you..



He/Drunken Icelfander

The glacier Snæfellsjökull is one of four spiritual power stations on the planet and in fact the only one that is working properly..

She

..told you the joke about Icelandic forests..

He/Drunken Icelfander

Do you know what you do if you get lost in an Icelandic forest? You stand up. Ha ha ha ha.

She

..and sang the equivalent Icelandic song for *Home on the Range* for you.

He/Drunken Icelfander *sings*

Blessuð sértu sveitin mín  
sumar vetur ár og daga..

She

It's the same man you met yesterday and the explanation for his boorish behaviour today is probably that he does not remember much and has a bit of a hangover.

He

Yes, we leave no stone unturned to make you have a good time in Iceland. But this may come as a surprise to you: Icelanders drink less alcohol than most other nations.

She

Yes. They just drink it all at once.

(Pause)

But back to the friends of Iceland.

He

We love all foreigners. Except the Danes.

She

The Friends of Iceland is a world-wide-society.

He

You are now eligible for this very exclusive club, would you like to join it?

She

You don't have to answer because you will probably be recruited whether you like it or not.

He

We just want you to like us. Is that too much to ask?

She

And we have started to collect the friends of Iceland among the rich and famous.

He

Some have come here for the salmon fishing like Bing Crosby and prince Charles.

She

When artists, dignitaries or politicians visit they immediately become the friends of Iceland.

He

Among them are Yoko Ono, Damon Albarn, who has a house here, Bill Clinton who had himself the now world famous Icelandic hot dog and the late Pope that came and kissed our airport. But if our famous guests have some sort of attitude they become...

She

Enemies of Iceland?

He

Never!

She

The word for friend in Icelandic is *vinur* and the word for enemy is *óvinur* which literally means no friend. But foreigners never become enemies, especially not the famous ones. If they offend us or don't like us, which is worse, they become *ffjandvinur* which means a friend that is an enemy.

He

We can call them.. frenemies in English, or ends.. no, frenemies sounds better. Among the Frenemies of Iceland are for example Bob Dylan who never left his hotel room while he was here and did not sample the famous Icelandic hospitality. Jerry Seinfeld who was not impressed by us and Staffan Olson a Swedish handballer that scored more goals against the Icelandic team than we care to remember. But how do you become a frenemy of Iceland? Let us demonstrate:

She/News reporter

Iceland has become the playground and resting place of the stars. You can expect to meet Harrison Ford or Nicholas Cage having a drink at a local bar while their jets are being refuelled here at Reykjavik airport. We are broadcasting live and are expecting a new star in the Friends of Iceland collection.. none other than Mr. John Travolta. Travolta, who is a pilot, flies his own plane and will be landing any minute now. So let's go over to Jon Jonsson the air traffic controller who has been in contact with Mr. Travolta. Are you there Jon?

He/Air traffic controller

Yes, I am.

She/News reporter

And how is he?

He/Air traffic controller

Well, I have only talked with him over the radio, of course.

She/News reporter

I see. And what does he know about Iceland?

He/Air traffic controller

Well, it didn't really come up in our conversation..

She/News reporter

It didn't? How does he sound.

He/Air traffic controller

He sounds like a nice guy. If you will excuse me, he is landing now.

She/News reporter

Travolta's plane has landed and is taxiing towards the terminal building. What will he do? Will he go downtown and have a drink or a meal or will he go out dancing in a Reykjavik disco.

*(Sings)*

You should be dancing, yeah

*(Talks)*

Is he married? – I can't remember – he'd be a great asset as a son-in-law of Iceland.

I can see him in the cockpit!

*(Shouts and waxes)*

Mr. Travolta! Mr. Travolta! How do you like Iceland?

*(Jumps up and down)*

He waxed back! He waxed back! Come on mr. Travolta. A little interview with Icelandic TV.

*(Pause)*

Why doesn't he come out of the plane?

*(Waxes and beckons)*

Come on mr. Travolta. Come out of the plane. You can't become a Friend of Iceland unless you touch Icelandic soil.

*(Pause)*

He just waxes.

He/Air traffic controller

I don't think he is coming out

She/News reporter

He can't do that.

*(Shouts)*

Come on Mr. Travolta. Please! Beautiful girls, nude under their woollen sweaters. Strongest men in the world, if you go for that. Glaciers. Hot springs. World famous night-life. A spiritual hot-spot of the world.

He/Air traffic controller

He is leaving.

She/News reporter

No. He can't do that. Mr. Travolta! Mr. Travolta!

He  
That is how you become a Frenemy of Iceland  
(Pause)  
But we love all foreigners. Except the Danes.

She  
But we don't hate the Danes.

He  
No no no. We just don't love them.

She  
Iceland was a colony of Denmark for over five hundred years.

He  
But we forgive them for that.

She  
Iceland has only been independent for sixty years. Therefore we remember the Danish rule only to well.

He  
And we forgive them for everything.

She  
We forgive them for all the wealth that went from Iceland to build the palaces of Copenhagen while the only decent house they built in Iceland was the Reykjavik jail.

He  
And we forgive them for the Icelandic manuscripts that were burnt in the great Copenhagen fire because the Danes had moved them there after they'd made us so poor that we had started to eat them.

She  
We even forgive them that we had to learn Danish in elementary school.

He  
And that is a lot to forgive.

She  
Ja det kan du, kræft æde mig, tro det er.

He  
But there is one thing that we can not forgive.

She  
14:2

He  
We can not forgive Idrætsparken Stadium 1968

She  
14:2

He  
We can not forgive the humiliation when the Danish soccer team won our team 14:2.

She  
Shame on you.

He  
Yes, shame on you. Which by the way was the title to the Danish Eurovision song last year and the singer was half Icelandic. We gave them 12 points for their song, which of course was half ours...

She  
Danemark twelve points, Danemark douze points.

He  
..and they gave us 2 points for our song.

She  
Iceland two points, Islande deux points.

He  
As you can see there is no end to Danish oppression..

She  
Shame on you.

He  
But we forgive them.

She  
Ja det gør vi. Så er den skid slået.

He  
A forgiving and modern nation, you see.  
(Pause)

You would expect the descendants of the vikings to be at a primitive cultural stage after centuries of isolation. But you will learn that we are among the most progressive countries in the world. The people on the streets of Reykjavik are no longer dirty and dressed in rags but in clothes that are wind and watertight, in Gore-Tex, fleece or woollens and wearing sensible shoes.

She  
If somebody in Reykjavik is dressed in windproof, rainproof and fireproof clothes, in short dressed according to the weather, you can be sure that he is a foreigner. The Icelanders, on the other hand, are inside the cars that pass by.

He

The modern Icelandic national costume is designer T-shirt and jeans and a car that serves as an overcoat. We keep our houses as hot as greenhouses for tropical plants and the cars as hot as steam baths and wouldn't dream of dressing in clothes that aren't sexy and in the height of fashion.

She

The Icelanders never adapted to the northern climate like the Eskimos or the Sami. We tried to maintain European lifestyle even though the country and climate made it impossible.

He

Then there are the shortcomings of a small nation. If we want to have everything then we have to make and do everything.

She

A dwarf state of 280.000 people. With every modern convenience and high standard of living.

He

And rich cultural life. Seven published books per every 1000 inhabitants, the highest rate in the Nordic countries. There are 9 theatres, 23 professional theatre groups and 44 amateur groups.

She

It is inhuman to remember things like that.

He (*looks at his watch*)

Well, time flies.

She

Are you going somewhere?

He

To the office. I did my cleaning job last night after choir practice. What about you?

She

I have a shift at the hospital when I'm finished here and then I'm going to help my brother at the restaurant.

He

Tonight I have some genealogic work and I have to write an article for a magazine. Then I have to learn my lines for the new Batman film. We start shooting next week.

She

Have you met him?

He

Who? Batman? Yes.

She

How is he? How does he like Iceland?

He

Not much. He is afraid of falling into a crack in the glacier. And he thinks we are barbarians because we eat whales and puffins.

She

Oh, a frenemy. Well, you can't expect a guy in pantyhose to understand real food.

*(Pause)*

There are three reasons why it is possible to maintain a modern society in Iceland: 1) We all have three jobs. 2) We're all artists and scholars in our spare time. And 3) We are all overworked raving lunatics.

He

There is also the possibility that we are miscounted. We might actually be 3 million.

*(Pause)*

But there is an advantage with being so few and that is that you know everybody.

She

And the disadvantage is that everybody knows you.

He

And when you walk into a place there's a high probability of meeting one or more of your ex-girlfriends.

She

Or ex-wives.

He

I had no idea that you worked here.

She

So, now you know.

He

And.. how are you?

She

I'm fine.

He

And the kids?

She

Did we have children?

He

Didn't we? I seem to remember lots of children at Christmas. There was Siggi..

She  
I had him with Jonni

He  
..and Þór..

She  
You had him with Halla.

He  
..and Gunna..

She  
She was your stepdaughter from your marriage with Vigdís.

He  
..and Dóra..

She  
I had her with Óli.

He  
Well it seems that we didn't have time to have children

She  
Well, it doesn't really matter, does it? There is enough to go around anyway.

He  
The complexity of modern life!  
(Pause)

In Iceland we are very big on equal rights. Iceland was the first country to let women vote and to elect a woman as a president

She  
But strangely enough the Icelandic president doesn't have any real power.

He  
No matter what we do for you, you're never satisfied. You have always had superiority and now you want equality too.

She (To the audience)  
It is impossible to talk to them. Get four Icelandic men together and there are five different opinions.

He  
Yes. Go on. Badmouth us to the foreigners.

She  
What is superiority worth with a nation that dislikes order? Where people are unable to be punctual or stand in line.



He

We are individualists and freethinkers. The one with the greatest elbowing powers survives.

She

Where politicians are mocked and despised.

He

No. We just pity them. Poor sods have no skills and have no other options than to go into politics.

She

Where nobody stops for a red light and tax evasion is a national sport.

He

Nag nag nag. Always negative. Anything more?

She

Yes. You can't plan ahead. You are last minute fixers.

He

And what are you?

She

I'm smart. I descend from the slaves.

He

Are you saying that I'm not smart?

She

You can't help how you are. Not with all the decadent royal blood in your veins.

He

Now you listen..

She

No. You listen..

*(They embrace and kiss passionately)*

He *(Becomes aware of the audience)*

People are watching us.

She

I can see that. Say something.

He

Well, this has been a pleasure. I think we should wrap this up now.

She

Yes. Bring it to a conclusion if that is possible.

He

Iceland was settled by vikings, heroes and great seafarers..

She

..who never adapted to the country because they were probably going somewhere else, but their ships rotted away and there were no woods.

He

They were great scholars, writers and poets..

She

..that were so isolated and bored that they had nothing better to do but to save the cultural heritage of Northern Europe.

He

Iceland is the home of the dogfish..

She

..and a land of legalized promiscuity.

He

The Icelanders are funny and jovial..

She

..dirty and smelly..

He

..emotional and peaceloving..

She

They eat strange and mostly rotten food..

He

..and are very sensitive of what foreigners think about them.

*(Pause)*

She

You might find us a little strange.

He

But probably not half as strange as we find you.

She

But are we so different?

He

How would mankind's alleged differences look to anyone coming from outer space.. say from Betelgeuze? Would they see a difference?

She

Perhaps in color and size but if they could look into our hearts they wouldn't see any .

He

We're the same really

She

We all want the same things.

He

Peace and prosperity and a decent place to raise our children.

She

And to have some fun.

He

Is that too much to ask?

She

Yes. Is that too much to ask?

He

And now our little show must end. We hope that you're a bit closer to the truth about Iceland.

She

My show is at least as close as fiction can be. In art there are moments when truth can be such a burden.

He

But a tale well told is probably closer to truth than truth is.

She

Thank you for listening to our lies. And in appreciation we're going to sing you a love song.

Both *sing*

Augun mín og augun þín  
ó þá fögru steina  
Mitt er þitt og þitt er mitt,  
þú veist hvað ég meina.

My eyes and your eyes  
oh those beautiful stones  
All that is mine is yours and yours is  
mine, you know what I mean

Langt er síðan sá ég hann  
sannlega fríður var hann.  
Allt sem þrýða má einn mann,  
mest af lýðum bar hann.

It is a long time since I last saw him  
truly beautiful he was  
He had all that a man could have  
and he excelled everyone

Þig ég trega manna mest,  
mædd af tíra flóði.  
Ó, að við hefðum aldrei sést  
elsku vinurinn góði.

I mourn for you most of all  
exhausted by a flood of tears  
I wish that we had never met  
my good and beloved friend

*CURTAIN*