

Insincerely Yours: Letters from a Prankster

Bernard Radfar

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Which one of us hasn't imagined writing the "mother" of all letters ... the one that makes it to the top of the heap and is not only noticed, but noticed now?

Perpetual prankster and author Bernard Radfar goes one better—actually, ninety better—in letters and emails written by his fictional character, the wealthy and eccentric Mark Black, to everyone from company presidents to customer service representatives; from artists, astrologists, and airline representatives to tantrists and life coaches; and from ostrich farmers to exorcist trainers. He even writes to the Grammar Lady and the Nobel Prize Committee for Literature. As ludicrous as the letters seem, and as laughable as Mark's unique circumstances and "needs," there's also something touching and sincere about the lengths some people are willing to go to accommodate his requests. In the ninety-plus replies included, the reader also learns things we never knew we didn't know: How the Greyhound Cruise Control system works ... why Santa Monica cannot accommodate travel on its beaches via elephant ... and how, with the addition of a snake to Rock, Paper, Scissors, the balance of the game would be ruined.

Running throughout this rib-tickling page-turner is the recurring story of Black's curious but troubling relationship with a Saudi Arabian lover—a woman he's been pursuing for twenty-two years. Author Radfar cleverly weaves this and other aspects of Black's life throughout the collection of letters and emails, revealing a man who seems oblivious about a life in disarray but who's aware enough to know that whatever he desires, he will, within "reason," be able to obtain it.

Insincerely Yours is divided into thirteen chapters, twelve of them specific to one of Black's "needs," described as: travel, dining, quirky, intellectual, nudist, sexual, spiritual, literary, schooling, Saudi lover's, residential, and marital. In the thirteenth chapter, "Mark's Letter to the President," Radfar ups the ante and loads up the mail satchel when, in that final letter, he says: "Please ignore those that offer ignorant opinions on things. If there's anything I've learned, and I've written to thousands of people, it is that all you have to do is ask the right person to get the right answer. The question contains the answer, in other words. In other words, we already know what they're going to say."

Insincerely Yours is sincerely funny, but Bernard Radfar delivers a lot more than laughs.

CHRIS HENNING (Winter 2013)

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