



Markus and Diana

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“A brainless worm.” That’s what poor Markus Simonsen’s classmates call him, when they aren’t calling him Wormster or laughing at him because his father is the only parent to telephone during the sixth-grade camping trip. Markus patiently endures these humiliations, as well as the void left by his mother’s death, by taking refuge in writing letters from his little Norwegian village to celebrities all over the world.

Markus requests autographs in these letters, and he receives hundreds of them in the mail. Markus imaginatively writes each letter posing as someone other than himself; he impersonates characters as diverse as an eighty-four-year-old grandmother and an athlete whose career was ruined by performance-enhancing drugs. In dry, often droll language, each persona describes a life of tragic beauty that seems to reveal the depths of a lonely soul: “If you would send me your autograph, it would be something I could take out and enjoy when the bitterness threatens to overwhelm me, which it so often does.”

When Markus’s correspondence with Norwegian starlet Diana Mortenson heats up, his best friend Sigmund gets in on the act. Together, the two plan an elaborate deception in which Markus plays the part of an unhappy millionaire’s only son. To carry out their plan, Markus must learn the most arcane rules of tennis, golf, and etiquette. With the help of a startled but supportive librarian, Markus learns how to “market” himself by “imprinting” his name on people and how to be “charming” to others in the most formal (and unusual) situations. Along the way, Markus makes new friends, reconnects with his father, and learns a lot about how to handle himself in the world.

The author, also an internationally acclaimed filmmaker, has written many books in his native Norway, and this is the first of a series of five novels featuring Markus’s adventures. This English translation means that millions more middle readers can now enjoy this self-deprecating young hero. The translator, whose versatile work also includes translations of Swedish author Per Nilsson’s books for middle readers, has done a superb job of making this gentle, witty novel accessible to American tweens.

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