

# Humor with Heart

Readers worldwide are falling head over heels for the hilarious and heartwarming characters in Fredrik Backman's novels.

BY RACHEL GUYAH

**I**t takes a special kind of skill to make readers double over in laughter one minute, then wipe away tears the next. Luckily for Nordic writer Fredrik Backman and his fans, it's a skill he not only possesses, but also wields to great success through his blog, columns and books. The New York Times best-selling author has written three books, most notably, "A Man Called Ove." In May, his latest novel, "Britt-Marie Was Here," was released. Backman credits Astrid Lindgren, author of the beloved Pippi Longstocking series, as his biggest influence, which is no surprise: Backman's books are highly imaginative stories, centered around quirky, loveable characters whose idiosyncrasies are often grounded in grief and heartache. *Viking* caught up with the author to talk about his new release, as well as the influences and inspirations behind his books.

**Q** Did you always have a passion for writing?

**A** I think most kids search actively for their way of communicating; to some it's talking and to some it's music or art. To me, it was writing. I never wanted to be a "writer," I just wanted to tell stories. Writing is a tool for that, not the purpose.

If you like to tell stories, at some point you probably want to try to tell a longer one. Novels have no limits and no budgets — if you want a dragon, you can have a dragon. You can have two if you want. Go for it. That seemed like a good format for me.

**Q** What inspires you to come up with the characters in your books?

**A** I have a very active imagination. I really don't find my characters very eccentric; I find them very normal. When I read stories about perfect people who know what they're doing all the time, that's when I think, "this is not a real person." I don't know any perfect people.

**Q** What was the inspiration behind your latest novel, "Britt-Marie Was Here?"

**A** The character existed in my second novel, and I thought it would be nice to give her her own story — partly because I like Britt-Marie, but my wife says it's because she's the one of all my characters who is most like me. I also wanted to write a classic coming-of-age story, but those are always about 19 year-old-men, so I wanted to write about a 63-year-old woman instead.



*up close*

**Name:** Fredrik Backman

**Instagram:**  
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**Website:**  
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**Books:**  
"A Man Called Ove"  
"My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry"  
"Britt-Marie Was Here"

**Q** How has your Scandinavian heritage influenced your writing?

**A** I think there's a strong storytelling tradition in Scandinavia, especially in writing about relationships. All writers I grew up with wrote about real people. I really think the biggest reason Nordic noir is so successful abroad is the fact that Scandinavian crime writers write so well about people you can relate to and feel for, even when it's under very grim circumstances.

**Q** Can you give us any details on your next book?

**A** It's more serious, and it has a lot more characters. I always had a one-person perspective in my books, so this is the first time I change perspective. It could be a really stupid idea, but I might as well do it now while my publisher still lets me write whatever I want. 🍷

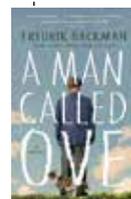


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