GRIFFIN&SABINE

An Extraordinary Correspondence

Written and Illustrated by Nick Bantock



Chronicle Books · San Francisco



Griffin Moss

It's good to get in touch
with you at last.

Could I have one of your
fish postcards?

I think you were right—
the wine glass has more impact
than the cup.

Sabine Strohem

P.O. Box I. Katie. Siemon Islands. South Pacific.



22 FEB



SABINE

THANK YOU FOR YOUR EXOTIC POSTCARD. FORGIVE ME IF IT'S A MEMORY LAPSE ON MY PART, BUT SHOULD I KNOW YOU? I CAN'T FATHOM OUT HOW YOU WERE AWARE OF MY FIRST, BROKEN CUP. SKETCH FOR THIS CARD. I DON'T REMEMBER SHOWING IT TO ANYONE. PLEASE ENLIGHTEN ME.

GRIFFIN MOSS



SABINE STROHEM P.O. BOX ONE F KATIE SICMON ISLANDS SOUTH PACIFIC

By air mail Par avion

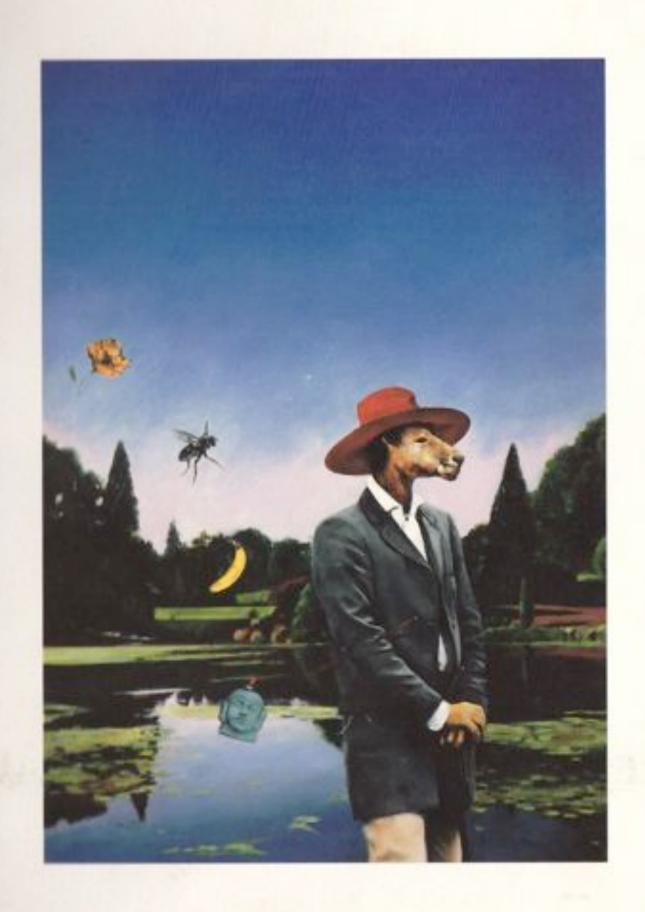
Drinking Like a Fish



Solfin Moss

No, Griffin, you don't knowne, not in the way you mean, though I've been watching your art for many years. Having finally established who and where you are, I feel compelled to reveal myself.

The phenomenon that links us has taught me much about you, yet I am ignorant of your history. Please tall me something of your life. It is such a pleasure having your images in a tangible form. I really like the kangeroo in the hat, but I wonder whether you should have darkened the sky?



MS. STROHEM

15 MARCH

WHAT'S GOING ON? HOW IN THE WORLD
COULD YOU KNOW I DARKENED THE SKY
BEHIND THE KANGEROO? IT WAS ONLY A
LIGHT COBALT FOR ABOUT HALF AN HOUR.
AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "PHENOMENON"
AND TANGIBLE"?

OK . IF GETTING ME INTRIGUED IS WHAT YOU'RE AFTER, YOU'VE SUCCEEDED, BUT YOU CAN HARDLY EXPECT ME TO SPILL MY LIFE STORY TO A STRANGER.

WHY ARE YOU BEING SO RUPDY MYSTERIOUS?

GRIFFIN MOSS

GRYPHON CARDS

P.S. YOUR POSTCARDS ARE HANDMADE - DID YOU DO THEM YOURSELF?

Air Mail Par avion

SOUTH PACIFIC





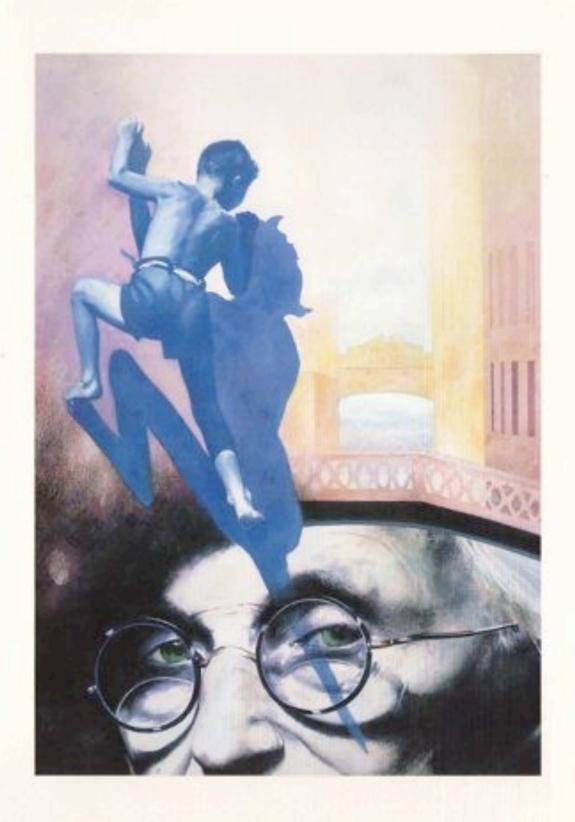
Griffin - you're right. I am being mysterious, but I assure you it's for good reason. What I have to say will be disturbing, and I wish you no distress.

I share your sight. When you draw and paint, I see what you're doing while you do it. I know you work almost as well as I know my own. Of course I do not expect you to believe this without proof:

Last week while working on a head in chalk, you paused and lightly sketched a bird in the bottom corner of the paper. You then erased it, and oblite ated all trace with heavy black.

Don't be clarmed - I wish you only well.

Yes the pictures on the cards are mine.



16 APRIL SABINE THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE, AND YET IT MUST BE TRUE. THERE WAS NO ONE IN MY STUDIO ALL THAT WEEK, LET ALONE WHEN I SCRIBBLED THE BIRD. I'VE CHECKED THE DRAWING AND THERE'S NOT THE SLIGHTEST SIGN OF THE CREATURE FRONT OR BACK GOD KNOWS HOW, BUT YOU REALLY CAN SEE ME . CAN'T YOU? WHY DOESN'T THIS ALARM ME AS MUCH AS IT SHOULD? I SUPPOSE BECAUSE I'VE ALWAYS SENSED THAT I WAS BEING WATCHED, BUT I'D PUT IT DOWN TO EVERYDAY PARANCIA. I'VE A MILLION QUESTIONS . AM I THE ONLY ONE YOU SEE? WHAT FORM DOES YOUR SIGHT TAKE? HOW COME I CAN'T SEE YOU?

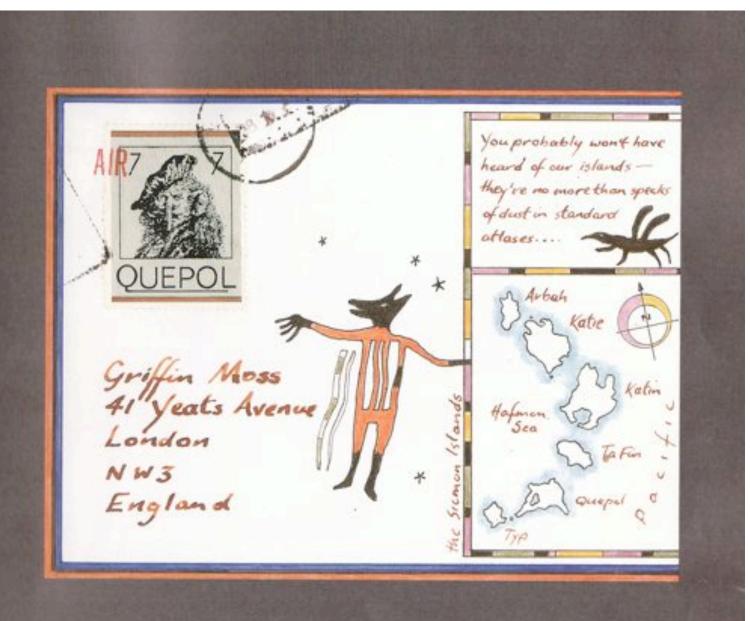
GRYPHON CARDS

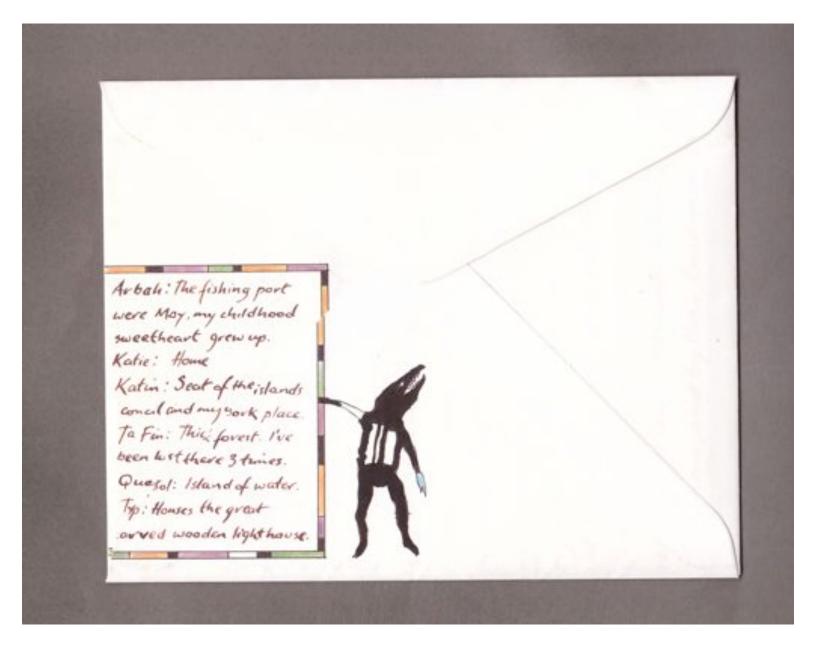
I WANT TO HEAR EVERYTHING. WRITE IN DETAIL . TELL ME ALL ABOUT YOURSELF. I DEMAND TO KNOW - PLEASE.

GRIFFIN

P.O. BOX OUTH PACIFIC ICMON ISLANDS BINE STROHEM





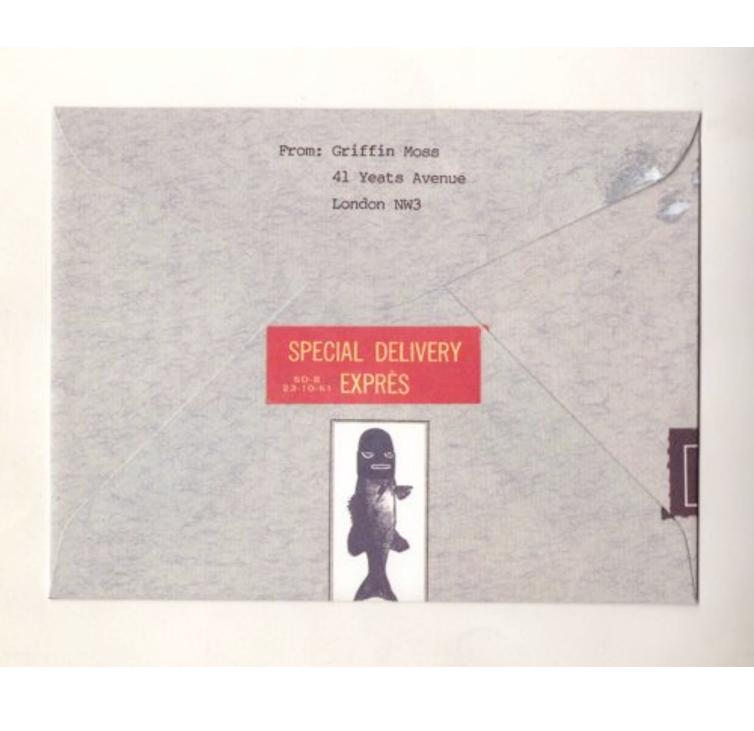


Now that it comes to answering your questions and telling you about myself, I feel oddly shy. Not that this is a reason to hold back; in fact I deem it a sign to press on. I know nothing of my real parents. I was handed to my father and mother by an old picker who'd found me on the slopes of Pillow Mountain, bellowing among hot black metal and broken grass. My father (who was at that time the only European on the island) went with neighbors to search the area. But it was the rainy season, the mountain was deserted and one of the regular mud slides had obliterated everything. Later he tried in vain to find record of a plane crash - but I had, it would seem, appeared from nowhere. I must have been six months old when farrived, hungry but otherwise unharmed. In this way, I became Jabine, daughter of Gust and Tahi Strohem, and by their kindness and caving have grown to my present age of 28 years. During my early wildhood, I sport most of my time with my mother, who is a notive of Katin and Sicmon's only midwife. She's fun and wise, but by the age of 7. I'd grown bored with babies and birth. I decided to trade her company for that of my father, who'd once been a curator at the Natural History Museum in Paris and had a mind that retained information like flypaper. He and I would go wandering in search of specimens for his Catalogue of the Islands (a book that would document every species on the Sicmons). I'd skip along by the side of hem, clutching his canvas bag and clinging to his every word. He loved to talk as much as I loved to listen. Sometimes it would be about Paris or Amsterdam or the other cities he'd lived in, but mostly he spoke of the

islands and the things we saw and heard. He encouraged me to drawp those things, promising me the position of official illustrator to 'The Catalogue', when I grewup.

I remember one time when we'd just come up to the village from hunting shells on Polamy Beach and I dropped a monstrores conch on my foot. I howled with pain, and a tree ahead of us exploded with blue and yellow macaws. My father, who could see that I didn't know whether to attend to my toe or the feathered fireworks, loughed and whispered, "Pain and beauty, our constant bedfellows. Young as I was, I understood. On the dawn of my fifteenth year I was lying in that easy state between sleep and wake when the image of a halfdrawn flower came into my head I was entranced Gradually, it grew and changed, lines appeared and disappeared - it was so real and clear. I could see the picture but not the hand that created it. Eventually, a noise from outside broke my concentration and the image evaporated. It was your drawing, griffin - the first of hundreds of pictures I witnessed without knowing who made them. For Byears I've waited for a clue, anything that would help me locate the artist. You seemed destined to be an enigma forever, when a few months ago, I came across an article in Grafica about a one-man postcard company. It said that the art was all Moss's own work," and there was a photo of your fish card. It was the same piece I'd seen being drawn 3 years before. Finally, I knew who you were. I counselled myself to be cautions and find out what you were like before repreating myself fully. Please don't feel invaded its not like that I promise. But I am impatient to hear about you. Write soon. Yes I can only see you. Sabine







JUNE 8

Sabine

I am an honourable man (most of the time), and although I could spend this whole letter asking you more questions. I will hold back, do the right thing and spill my life story. But it's going to seem awfully dull compared to your colorful existence. I see what you mean about getting shy... I feel like climbing under the carpet.

My mother was Italian-Irish, my father Hungarian-Scottish, Iwas born in Dublin, and when I was one, we moved to England. As you might guess, I wouldn't know my nationality if it came up and bit me.

We lived off the Holloway Rd.in darkest London. Our small back-to-back Victorian house was as dismally predictable as the others in the row, at least from the outside. The inside was slightly different. Our house was a temple to The Book. We ownsed thousands, may millions of books. They lined the walls, filled the cupboards, and turned the floor into a maze far more comiex than Hampton Court's. Books ruled our lives. They were our demi-gods. Occasionally, I'd come home to a reenactment of The Battle of Britain in the front room. My beloved parents would be flying round like a pair of demented fighter planes, shricking and spitting venom at one another. My father would be wearing his traditional uniform of socks and moth-eaten dressing gown and my mother her lemon carpet slippers and housecost. My entrance would make no difference to their dogfight, but when one of them accidentally(and inevitably)knocked over a pile of books, they'd stop instantly and unite to examine the extent of the damage.

Life continued in this pleasant vein until the day my parents got run down by a newspaper van that thoughtlessly mounted the pavement in Islington High St.

It sounds heartless, but looking back, I would say that this was my great salvation, because at 15 I was whisked off to live with my mother's stepsister in Totnes, Devon. Vereker was a potter, and the kindest person I've ever met. The first thing she asked me was whether I wanted to carry on with school or learn to pot. No one had ever asked me what I wanted to do before. I would have made her my idol if she'd let me. Instead, I became her apprentice.

Some people find it hard to move from the big city to the country, but for me it was a piece of cake. Not only did I fall for Vereker, but also for the town of Totnes. In that green and pleasant land the cider is so strong you have to hold on to the bar as you drink it. I spent 3 blissful years in Vereker's house quietly being instructed on how to use my hands and my eyes. Eventually she convinced

me that I needed to broaden my skills and my horizons and packed me off to Bristol Art College to become a fine artist.

At college everyone was painting big flat canvases and becoming wizards with masking tape. To my discredit, I joined the geometric sheep, when all I really wanted to do was become a cross between Leonardo and Rembrandt. I'm forgetting... you probably saw for yourself how dazzlingly dreary my stuff was. My spell at college wasn't tot fally wasted, because I met Sarah, my first real girlfriend, and in the six months we were together, my horizons became broader.

When I left Bristol, I returned to Totnes, even though Vereker by then had moved to the States. I'd only been back a couple of weeks when someone called to tell me that Vereker had died suddenly, of a brain tumor, in New York. I stood in that cold little hall for ages, paralyzed with loneliness. Losing my parents had barely touched me(they were only cartoon characters) but Vereker was a real person. I didn't understand how she could leave me like that.

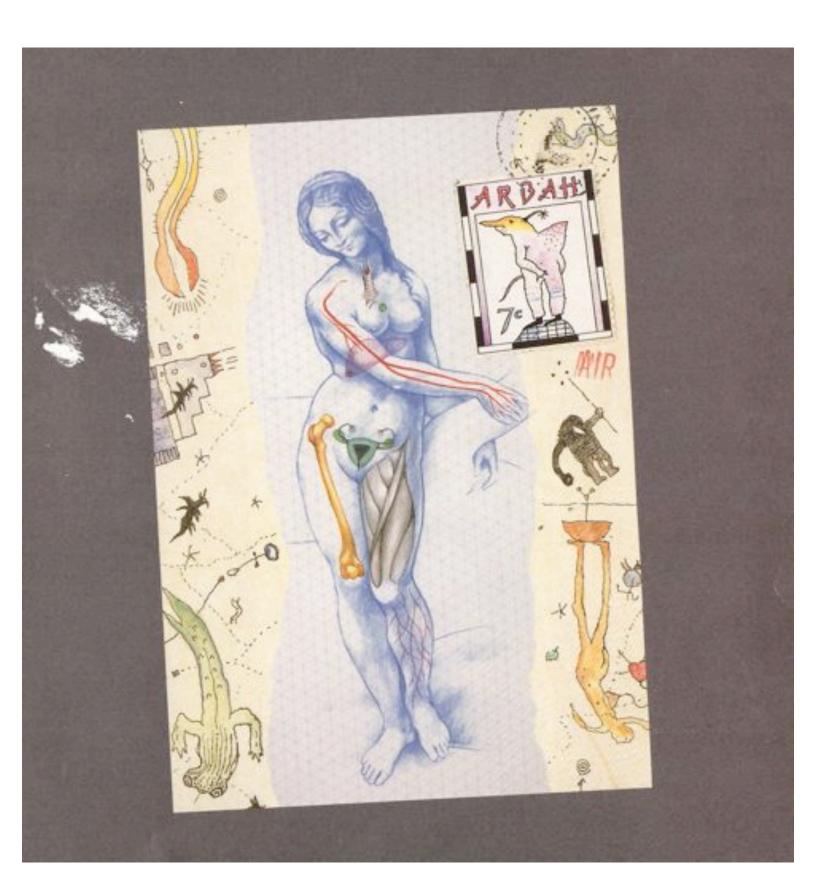
If I had grieved, I'd have probably been okay. Instead, I sunk into a dark, drowning depression and stayed there for almost three months. Remembering it now still makes me numb. It was a lawyer's letter that finally made me surface. Vereker had left me her money, and the combination of dealing with practicalities and realizing how much she cared for me forced me on to dry land. I came back to the world changed. I had an inner drum and I was going to march. I decided to use my inheritance to move back to London and set up CRYPHON CARDS, which was to be dedicated to my idiosyncratic vision of the universe.

And that's where I am now. Beavering away.

I presume you can't see my writing as well as my pictures,or posting this letter would be superfluous. Any idea why it's only my images you see? And why I can't see yours? Tell me more about your islands, and tell me what you do. Did you become your dad's official illustrator? I can't express to you how pleased I am that you're out there. Since Verekedr died, I've been alone. Now that you're there and have been all along, I feel whole again.

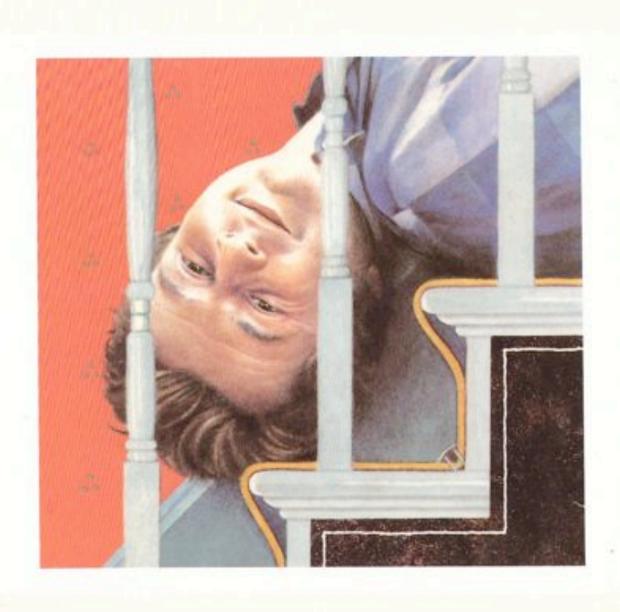
You don't think we're twins seperated at birth, do you? Or is that too simple?

GRIFFIN



Griffen - Can you imagine what it would be like never to see the back of your hand. Then quite suddenly to turn it over and gaze at it? I read your letter again and again, nodding to myself as the events in your life matched my memory of the way you were painting. When I read of Vereker's death and your misory, I found it hard to breathe. And hearing that my existence eased your pain made my heart race. We have found one another, and I give thanks. Take care Griffin. I will, I promise, tell you more of the islands and my work when next I write. Griffin Moss 41 Yeats Avenue London NW3

England



JULY 3

SABINE
TODAY I PHONED THE
PLACE IN DUBLIN WHERE
THEY KEEP THE RECORDS
OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS. MY
TWIN THEORY IS BLOWN - IWAS
DEFINITELY A SINGLE BIRTH. I
ALSO DID A BIT OF RESEARCH ON
TELEPATHY - THERE WAS A MAN
AND HIS DAUGHTER IN ARGENTINA
BEFORE THE FIRST WAR WHO
SUPPOSEDLY COULD DO IDENTICAL
DRAWINGS WHILST MILES APART.
IT SOUNDS DUBIOUS TO ME AND
ANYWAY, I PREFER TO THINK OF

CADDECC

SABINE STROHEM
PO BOX IF
KATIE
SICMON ISLANDS
SOUTH PACIFIC

YOUR PICTURES - THE ONES ON THE CARDS - SEEM VERY SLIGHTLY FAMILIAR. MAYBE I CAN SEE YOUR WORK TOO, ONLY MY RECEPTION (AS IT WERE) ISN'T AS GOOD AS YOURS?

WINTER'S HERE EARLY. THE CITY IS GREY AND DREARY. I CHEER MYSELF BY DAYDREAMING OF YOU AND THE SOUTH SEAS.

Man Descending a Staircase

US AS UNIQUE.

LOVE GRIFFIN



Griffin - A photograph would not be possible. I offer myself in paint instead. It's self-flattering, but that's our prevogative as artists-to record ourselves the way we wish. Why, my kindred spirit, are you prepared to settle for a postcard of my face? If you wish to see me, why not come have? What is there to stop you - you're clearly unhappy where you are.

Come.

Sabine

Griffin Moss

41 Yeats Avenue

London NW3

England







It's six o'clock, and I've been up for just under an hour. Below me, under my balcomy, the street is starting to come to life. The sunlight is still soft and hasn't yet begun to cut its deap blue shadows across the kitchen wall behind me. I'll stay here drinking my coffee and writing for another few minutes, then I'll go down to the boat that takes me across to Katin. I work there 3 days a week. The rest of the time I'm either here at my desk or over on Quepel communing with some fascinating green sand beetles.

You asked me if I became my father's illustrator ? At first, yes. But then one day around 2 years ago, he and I were halfway up a palm tree woking for Mamit eggs when he slipped. I slid buck down to find him wascathed but woking ponsive. "You know," he said, "I would like to spand my remaining years with take and the grandchildren. Would you like to take over and finish the book?" I told him there was nothing in the world I would rather do.

The book, of course, does not provide me with an income—
the publisher's small advance is long gone. And although my
pavents would have supported me until I got married, as is
the custom, I wanted to earn my own living. So when I
was offered the grandly titled position of Sicmon Philatelic
Designer, I took it. The Island elders had noted that the
Solomon Islands made a healthy profit by issuing stamps
every couple of months to accommodate the world's stamp
collectors. They decided that we should do the same, so my
post as SPD came into existence. Each year I design 24

stamps; no one seems to mind what's on them because I'm the only one around who writes letters. The stamps are printed in Singapore and shipped straight out from there. The few that come back to the islands tend to sit in the post office gathering dust. I'm afraid this freedom of choice leads me to include myself in selecting subject matter.

Will you explain to me about those geometric paintings you did at Art college? I want to understand their hidden language of colour and shape. It's so alien to me. I wonder if we will ever understand how and why we are linked. Griffin, why try? Let us simply take pleasure in each other.

I am of the islands, yet I am from elsewhere. I have always waved a closeness that I could not find here. Now I feel it with you. My kinsman are responsive to me - but there is no one to reach my heart, and you who are so far away. have been close to me than any man on the Islands. It is evening now, and I've returned to the house. Outside it is dark and the birds are finally silent; but their place has been taken by the even noisier insect chorus. After dinner, I will lie down in my hammock in the higoe that you are at work. I never tire of watching those marks come and go. I remember your first evotre drawing; 1 was trembling from head to foot by the time you'd finished. Was that Sarah? No, don't answer; I'm only teasing. Why do I only see your images and not your writing? Because we dream in pictures, not in words? You have told me your history, but speak little of the present. Why's that? Much care Sabine



SABINE STROHEM
PO BOX ONE F
KATIE
SICMON ISLANDS
SOUTH PACIFIC

VIA AIR MAIL

From: Griffin Moss 41 Yeats Avenue London NW3

EXPRESS





AUG 10

Sabine

It is all very well for you to take this telepathic link between us matter-offactly. You've had years to adjust to it. And no doubt your society teaches
patience and acceptance. Mine teaches obsessive logical enquiry. I'm just sticking
to my programming. No, that's ungenerous of me. I promise to grit my teeth and try
to allow things to unfold as they will.

I'm kicking myself for not figuring out that you were the stamp designer. Looking back at the cards it's obvious. When I saw the parrot postcard the first time, I assumed you copied it from the stamp. I apologise for grossly underestimating your talents. What a great job you have. You wouldn't care to swap, would you? Those college geometric paintings of mine had no hidden language to them. They were an example of what happens when you take an interesting concept through to its ultimate conclusion. It's meaningless. Forget about them; it embarrasses me to think of them. Art for art's sake is best quarantined here in the old world. I crave an art that passionately transcends the mundame instead of being a device for self-deception.

Enough: I'll tell you about myself, although I'm not certain what there is to say. I don't have any close friends. I keep my own company most evenings. I work in the studio...

Maybe this isn't the best way to go about it. I'm making myself sound appallingly dull. I'll try again: Yesterday I was in town (the center of London) during the afternoon, talking with a card distributor. I didn't want to go back to the studio, so I shambled into the National Gallery, I reckoned I had ten minutes before the guards started slinging us out. When I've only got a short period of time likethat, I pick a painting and try to dissolve myself into it. Without conclously making any decision, my feet took me to Paolo Occello's 'George and the Dragon'. Do you know it? I'd been standing in front of itifor awhile, my mind a vacuum, when I had one of those moments of profoundly shocking insight. There was my life laid out before me: I charge around on a toy white horse, lance in hand, wearing funny shining armor that wouldn't protect me from a cigarette lighter, let alone a dragon's breath. I attack these pet dragons, in order to release beautiful maidens, who will, I assume, reward me. They, however, are utterly indifferent. They don't care to be released, and I've been fooling myself with a fake sense of purpose. Like George, my back is turned to an infinite sky filled with violent spirals of silver clouds.

As you might guess, this revelation had something of a deflating effect on my mood, and I trailed out into Trafalgar Square determined to take it out on the pigeons. But hounding the winged rats made me feel like St.George again. Defeated and utterly gloomy, I crawled onto a number 14 bus and headed home to South End Green. I tried to paint, but got nowhere. I put on some jazz, made myself a poached egg on toast, and gave myself over to self-pity. I'm making a joke of this, but I'm worried. Waves of depression are washing over me, I've started to see Vereker in crowds, and I feel like I'm slipping into my drowning pool.

It's only your cards and letters that keep me going.

I was finding it hard to get over the idea of there being other men in your life when I reached the part in your letter about my erotic drawings. I stopped being jealous. We were lovers and I hadn't realized it. The drawings weren't of Sarah; they were of you.

How strange to have a paper love.

Make sure you look after yourself.

All my love

GRIFFIN





Griffin - I had failed to understand how unhappy you are. You cover up with jokes and a front of being self-contained. I'm worried for you. Don't judge yourself so harshly. Why not get down from the white horse, take off the armour, and walk away from the uninterested maidans? So - you've been making love to me ten thousand miles away - how tantalizing. Griffin Moss It accounts for the extreme 41 Years Avenue potancy of those drawings. I'll have London NW3 to find a way to return the affection England Remember to be gentle with yourself - Sabine



SABINE SEPT 29 WHEN YOU FOUNDME, I THOUGHT MY LONELINESS HAD GONE FOR GOOD . I WAS KIDDING MYSELF.

I DESPERATELY DESIRE YOUR COMPANY, I HAVEN'T TALKED TO ANYONE IN THREE DAYS.

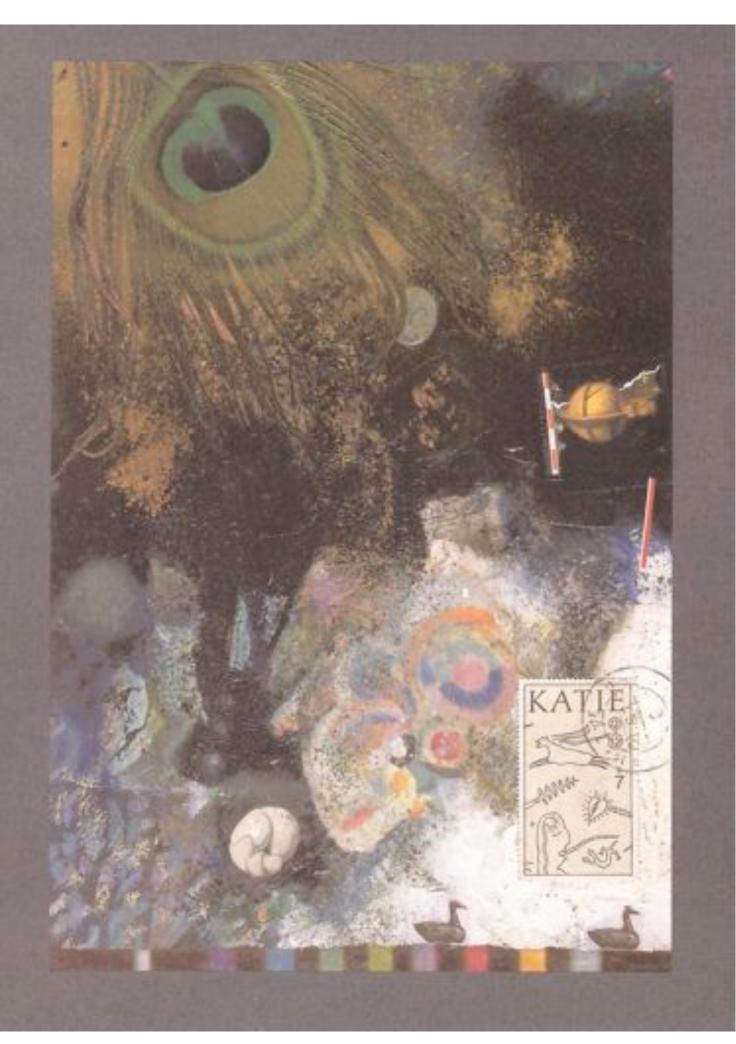
I WAS SURE I WAS GOING TO START SEEING YOUR PICTURES LIKE YOU SEE MINE. I'VE TRIED SO HARD.I'VE CONCENTRATED, I'VE MEDITATED, I'VE DONE EVERYTHING EXCEPT STAND ON MY HEAD, & I GET NOTHING. NOT A FLICKER. AND I THINK MY OWN WORK IS GOING STALE. I HAVEN'T PRODUCED ANYTHING WORTHWHILE FOR WEEKS -

P.O. BOX ONE F KATIE SICMON ISLS. SOUTH PACIFIC

SABINESTROHEM

AND MY STOMACH HURTS. PATHETIC ISN'T IT (ARN'T I)? SEND ME SOMETHING FROM THE ISLANDS. SOMETHING MAGIC THAT WILL HEAL MY AILING SOUL.

HOW CAN I MISS YOU THIS BADLY WHEN WE'VE NEVER MET? Frankie and Johnny LOVE GRIFFIN



Griffin - 1 miss you too. If you don't see my pictures there's a good reason. Jometimes willpower alone cannot make things happen. As for your work being state, I disagree. What I see is not staleness, it's change. I feel you moving to your dark side. give your shadow a chance to unveil itself. You said that Gryphon cards was dedicated to your perception of the universe — then let the cards reflect the night. Island magic works on Island souls you and I will hear each other. Sabure Griffin Moss, 41 Years Av.

London NW3 England.



Nov 24

SABINE THIS PLACE IS WEARING ME DOWN. I FIND IT HARDER AND HARDER TO GET UPIN THE MORNING, I NEVER USED TO BE LIKE THIS. I WAS ALWAYS DISGUSTINGLY BRIGHT AS SOON AS MY EYES OPENED. I'VE STARTED TO HATE THIS CITY, THIS COUNTRY ALL THESE STUPID FILE PEOPLE. I ALMOST GOT INTO A FIGHTIN A CAFE YESTERDAY. I WAS SICK OF BEING ALTERNATELY IGNORED & ABUSED BY THE WAITER AND WAITRESS. I WAS OVERTAKEN BY

SABINE STROH PO BOX IF. / KATIE SICMON ISLANDS SOUTH PACIFIC



AN ANGER LIKE NOTHINGI'VE EVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE. I STARTED YELLING AND KICKING CHAIRS. I GUESS

I FINALLY SNAPPED. MY DAYS ARE BARREN BUT MY NIGHTS ARE HEADY WITH YOU. I WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE. WILL YOU SEND ME A PHOTOGRAPH?

The Blind Leading the Blind

ALL MY LOVE GRIFFIN



JAN 1



SABINE, THINGS HAVE BECOME 50 DIFFICULT. I MUSTN'T WRITE AGAIN . THIS WHOLE AFFAIR HAS GOTTEN TOO INTENSE. TOO REAL SABINE, YOU DON'T EXIST. I INVENTED YOU. YOU, THE CARDS, THE STAMPS, THE ISLANDS, YOU'RE A FIGMENT OF MY IMAGINATION. I WAS LONELY AND I WANTED A FRIEND. BUT I'M ALMOST OUT OF CONTROL. I'VE STARTED TO THINK I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU. BEFORE IT TAKES ME OVER IT HAS TO STOP. GOODBYE.

GRIFFIN

Pierrot's Last Stand



Griffin

Foolish man. You cannot turnme
into a phantom because you are
frightened. You do not dismiss a muse
at whim.

If you will not join methen I shall come to you.

Sabine

... The ceremony of innocence

These postcards and letters were found pinned to the ceiling of the otherwise empty studio of Griffin Moss. Griffin Moss is missing.

