

A Fable From a Stranger's Mail



GRIFFIN & SABINE: An Extraordinary Correspondence

By Nick Bantock (*Chronicle Books: \$16.95; 48 pp.*)

Nick Bantock, an artist, writer and creator of pop-up books, has combined his talents in an extremely original volume of letters and postcards purporting to be correspondence between the lonely and disaffected Griffin Moss, a London postcard artist, and the exotic Sabine Strohem, stamp designer from a tiny and fictional South Pacific island.

Classical myth, reality and fantasy are blended artfully in this modern allegory of the artist's relationship with his Muse. The reader examines the postcards and pulls actual letters, both penned and typed, out of their brightly daubed envelopes as the story develops of the lost Griffin, who is surely named after the fabulous beast of Greek mythology who had the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion. Yet, this Griffin sees himself as a weary Saint George delivering ungrateful maidens from imagined desultory dragons. Sabine's postcards convince him that she is in telepathic contact with him and at first that enchants and intrigues him. In her mind, she can clearly see his artwork at the time that he creates it despite her being on the exact opposite side of the world.

The mysterious Sabine, too, is lonely. In the exchange of words and pictures, she discovers her "kindred spirit." As a relationship develops, Griffin demands facts, a photograph of his dream girl. Instead, he receives a painting of the exotic young woman. It has the effect of turning his Muse into his Siren. Stamps cease to be necessary. Their correspondence has moved into subtler realms. "We were lovers and I hadn't realized it," sighs Griffin.

From pieces of pop psychology and fragments of mythology, Bantock has forged a charming and unusual book, as well as a cautionary tale. It compels the reader to sift through a stranger's mail and discover a modern fable.

—Hunter Drohojowska