



DEAR BOUVARD

FRAGMENTS OF A SECRET CORRESPONDENCE

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Photos by Gabriela Anaya Valdepeña, except *The Altar*,
Past the Black Door, *For All The Deaths Unnoticed*, and *But for the Ghost*
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PREFACE

Monsieur Bouvard,

She confessed to me, at last—this ridiculous
correspondence. I think she thought I cared, but she
could no more leave me than her heart could leave
her ribs, we are that tangled, she and I.
I was a poet once, like you Bouvard,
before I understood that the cold force
of my imperious will alone could bend
bones and steel as efficiently as words.
And that was when I left you fools behind,
with your paper castles, to ink my own epic
in cum, powder, blood, and the Congo River.
And now, after all I've seen, and after all
I've done, this little skit is nothing more
than children playing on a Sunday afternoon.
Children, poets, eunuchs, you're all the same!
And when my little Alma is all through,
and crying with exhaustion, I will take her
into my time-scarred arms, scolding, mocking,

and comforting at once, until she sleeps,
or weeps herself into oblivion.

Jacques Batârd
North Park, San Diego
October 2006



THE AIR IS ALIVE

My Love,

The air is alive with news of you today.
I know, I was to meet you at the old
Venus café, near the Odd Fellow's Hall,
in the shabby center of Sebastopol.
But there have been birthdays, and 18 long stem roses
died in my arms, and my lost shepherd herded
twelve and a half soccer players, and their ball.
No wool was shorn, and not a goal was scored,

and I'm running out of excuses once again.

We're on and off, like the clapper, like a bra.
My heart is heavy as your letter press,
and my fingers are stained. I want to love you
deaf, or blind, and anything but sane,
while trees and dollars wither in the drought,
while unpicked almonds roast in their narrow shells.
And I would have visited you in the asylum, but I
was not yet a thought, much less an arm, much less
this woman disarmed by your unending song.

Sinceramente,

Your Alma



THE WIND'S FORTUNE

Dear Bouvard,

These Arabic circles tell the wind's fortune.

Too long I've reclined against the sphinx's belly.
I shall return in a dance of eights and spend my soul's

wages on your frivolous touch. The earth that mocked
my bosom's quake now finds fault with your tidy dreams.

This abdomen, that speaks your birth, silences
the leave-takings ripening on your tongue.

My arms, rising like serpents, charm the charmer.
Beauty is in the eye of the storm.

As Always,

Anya



BOUVARD OF MY HEART

Dear Bouvard,

Bouvard of my heart, Bouvard of the lost mountain,
Bouvard, the bastard bard that I can't quit!
You dare use jazz to excuse your dalliance?
Do you think you've trapped fate by her fleshy thighs?
And, is it disappointment, or relief,
to know you've never had me even once,
keeping me thus both smug and unsatisfied?
Perhaps one day you'll win my love, and see
that I can only give my heart to reclaim it,
while you Bouvard, craving both sex and solace,
pipe-dream a prelapsarian paradise,
where you can sin again, for the first time.

No Peace For Us,

Gabriela



SHADOWS SIGN

My Boo,

I hold my eyes in reverence
to the parlor of dutiful shadows
that honor you in sign language.
Each one holds its hands
frozen in a letter of your name.
Of this I am twice sure,
reading also their lips,
as I once read your kiss,
when shadows perished
in the equilibrium of our light.

Besos Apasionados,

Anya



CORNER OF YOUR MIND

Dear Bouvard,

I hope you were not expecting a monody.
You are not yet dead to me; your indecision
haunts the thin dream I had last night.

You'll never rise to an apotheosis,
though you have become the water in my eyes.

I curse your curses, which keep us apart, Bouvard
of my heart, *de mi alma, de mis venas, mis uñas,*
mi sangre, mi ser. Misery is God's;
let him take it.

Come to me, my showy secret!

Give me back that cross, and yank your wrists
down from the nails in Claude's stretcher bars.

I still have two tickets to the game.
Apollo and Dionysus, so they say,
will likely go into overtime.
With our breath we will write our names
on the window at the back of the bus.

xo

Anya



BY THE TIME YOU GET TO SAN DIEGO

Dear Bouvard,

By the time you get to San Diego
I'll be tripping on my hair. And I'll be sure
to choke that parrot, before he squawks
number, seat, and itinerary, while the sea's
pale promises roll over Logan Field.

You are my phantom; I will be
your ghost. Together we dreamt
of anemones in a blustery field, of fish
stuck in a mallard's craw, of ant bites
blossoming on my well-kissed arms.

But the last nickel cadmium flares
are fading in this cool light,
and I just might finally get somewhere—
between gaiety and the ghetto,
between Cannery Row and the Left Bank,
between confessions and the dawn.

Gabriela del Alma



YOU CAN'T TAKE IT BACK

Dear Bouvard,

In your living room
a mooch sleeps,
snores in time
to the cacophony of spirits.
Don't say it.
Don't say it;
you want back
what you gave.
I can resurrect

dead heroes;
I can make hunks
from romance novels
kiss my feet.
This is a superficial world;
not even the seas
are deep enough.
You, with your assemblage
of *borrachos*,
mooches, and *mujeres*.
I did not; I did not
make you swear it:
amor, love—
four letter words—
you closed your eyes,
kissed your mutant cross
and put it around my neck.

Enamorada como nunca,

Alma



UPON A SLOW RISE

Dear Bouvard,

Meteors cannot be reasoned with.

You do not know the pressure
my knees have been under.

Stars do not have points
and they do not like
being drawn as such.

Just kidding;
they do not have thoughts,

only fits of fire.

I have many thoughts
unwinding like a galaxy,
as I rise in the aftermath
of a million backbends.

In the club, men love
to see a woman's ribs
accentuated, the fragile
arch of the neck as the
hair fans the floor.

Men cannot be reasoned with.

Yours always

Anya



THE ALTAR

Dear Boo,

Beneath this elm, I said things I couldn't say
in the coffee shops, where the cups clatter
like angry China moons, under cold eyes.
I thought things I could never think,
here, under the popcorn ceiling of my room.
I coined words that even the sun
could not decipher, and underneath
the trellis of branches and fortress of leaves
I laughed at its fat rays.

I loved you in ways that frighten me, now,
more than the crumbling walls split by these roots.
You, Bouvard Pécuchet, your artificial self
made this wreck of my sincerity,
you, an unfinished novel, that yet may finish me,
now that the Chinese elm is as short as I.

This corpse is my altar, where I mourn
my own nakedness, where I bring
plastic flowers stained with purple tears.

Un Beso Eterno,

Alma



PAST THE BLACK DOOR

Dear Bouvard,

When in a fit of fallacy
you are suddenly surreal, I am filled
with desire to believe
in your divinity—at times
lurid and indisposed—
drawing me past the
black door of dreams, beyond
the beaded entrance of your waking,

guided by a pentagram
poised unhidden in the sky—
all five points leading to desire,
constant as the purple-gold
nuclear moon outside my window
that asks for signatures in blood, the
blue basket of unassumed wanting.
I am so much—you—
my own body wrapped in satin, enveloped
in an awful light.

What a shock it would be for you
to discover that I, soft

in your arms, am real terror,
deeper than sleep without dreaming,
fever and life, succubus,
your own hands
drenched in prayer oil.

As ever,

Alma

FOR ALL THE DEATHS UNNOTICED

Dear Bouvard,

Neither bury me in excess, nor embellish my tomb.
You know I want to live simple in Eden. Swallow me up,
or still the stars and grant them penance.

The sea is not deliberate, and yet you love her. I am
tortured by this rhetoric, and yet you torture me more.
I'm certain of the sun, and yet you pinch my arm.

So I wear black for all the deaths unnoticed. Bequeath your
insolence to the moon, for she has waned into benevolence.
Time is a ghost that must resume its flight.

Decidedly,

Gabriela



BUT FOR THE GHOST

Dear Bouvard,

Do not regret the rival to whom your hesitation
has given way. The history we have formed is too short,
and not yet sweet enough, for you to claim powerlessness.
My thighs are no savants, yet they calculate the distance
between desire and action. Is it too great for you?
Is a sonnet too high a price for your redemption?
Your bed has many visitors, yet will remain empty, but
for the ghost of my black hair, which your careful fingers
once brushed from my neck to make way for your lips.
Imagine the scents of magnolia, tubereuse, and gardenia.
I dare you not to think of me.

Goodbye again, for the last time,

Gabriela Anaya del Alma