

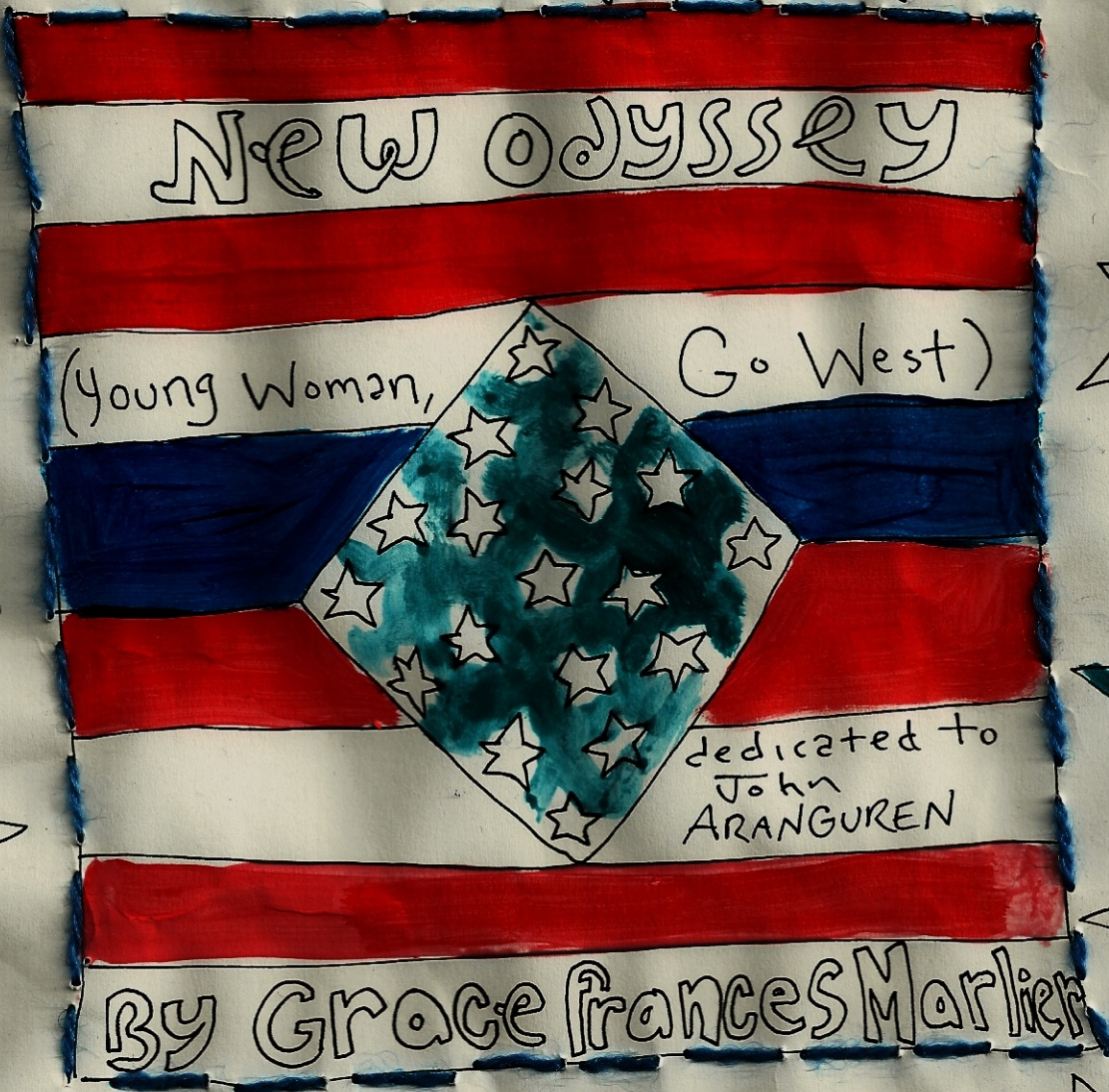
New Odyssey

(Young Women,

Go West)

dedicated to
John
ARANGUREN

By Grace Frances Marlier



Did the scent of Jasmine reach you
ever there? -

Through dust, wet brick, salt of South Boston air,
or Pizza crust, burning rubber of an 86th street drag race,
75 cent Chinese milk tea, serious, hurriedly inhaled
cigarette smoke, fruit and diaper garbage
through perfume-anointed Italian grandmamas and
false Rose-lotioned Baby Phat madonnas of South Brooklyn -

Did the scent of California Jasmine
float over the dying dwarf orange tree
potted on the roof where you tried to train grape vines
to the laundry lines and failed?

Did the scent of Jasmine alarm the parakeets?
Is that why they fluttered with panic one afternoon,
their beaks emitting shrill reproach?

Simone, shrewd, sleek, pale yellow, looked at you
through one black eye. Her nostril quivered.
She refused your finger.

Scent of Jasmine, warning of migration
was filling her soft breast where trust in you
had recently swelled.

Bertrude had already given up on you,
accepting, like a grandmother, what she couldn't change.
She was usually still, though - as if thinking.

Then Simone too turned her indecipherable
eye away, jumped to a further perch.

They smelled it first. They knew,
before you knew, that you'd fly west.



Suddenly I visualize my pride
as a Bright gold Ball
Heavy as the oldest cannon-shot
recovered from battlefields
"It's the real thing" I think
unalloyed

Ancient in my elk's chest.
No wonder there's fear of me
Sometimes - I've smelled it on men
who can't match me,
less often, but sometimes on women who see
gleaming, hard, heavy
My pride, to which nothing substantial
can be done.



There isn't the necessity of a lover
only of employment, and your own Sixth Sense.

The map is ripe with libraries and
the autonomous truths of other people;
on every corner you feel them
There's no interference. They're all yours to know
if you will it.

It's a big decision, Penetration
a responsibility we all might shoulder,
not just men -

(old-fashioned bullshit, that supposed
limit of the flesh -)

and even further, some impregnate the other
by simply tearing and growing them by
introduction of a new person,
while some impregnate the other
tearing and growing them with the re-introduction
of their own self, suddenly unrecognizable.

it is Right for every generation
to re-imagine genesis -
to disassemble inheritance, with empathy,
to place its unserviceable parts
upon the shelf.





Then there's the problem of the Space
in Between

and what it means.
I moved from the East Coast
to the West Coast -

Boston to Oakland -

By Bus. It was a slow, stinky journey
led by an accordion-chair of ticket stubs.
It included: children whose parents couldn't afford
to feed them anything but French fries and candy
the whole three days, and who never complained.
A handicapped psychotic with a half-shaved head,
in a wheelchair, who the drivers knew and
resented. She lives on Greyhound buses and at every
stop they have to carry her off and then back onto
the bus, while she berates them in a loud,
shrill, cracked squeak of a voice.

There was a carnie who came from a long line
of Carnies, on his way to Washington State
to collect a giraffe he'd bought from a
shut-down circus. He planned to drive
back to Florida -

From this corner of the country to that -
with giraffe trailer in tow.

There was a young Indian guy telling
hilarious dead baby jokes

and the Black guy in the Back Seat:

"I rode a horse one time, that horse, I got on it,
It just took off through the brush, I couldn't
slow it down. Then it started biting my leg
while it was running!" ...

"I was a CNA one time, and I went to a
Doctor's and nurse's party. Everybody was
standing around a table, dressed real conservative,
Some of them got a couple beers in they hand.

clim the only black guy there
cl was dressed in all white, leisure suit, clean
cl sat down in a chair, and the chair rolled down
the hill. cl got to the bottom of the hill, clim all
Bloody, cl stood up and cl was like

'clim alright' - Chair still stuck to my ass.
They're all at the top of the hill cracking up laughing.
After that everybody got loose.
cl woulda been mad, but they was cracking up
so much, cl had to laugh with them".

The night The Bus broke down in Nevada
we all walked out under the stars
Cigarettes glowed in the dark
cl stood beside a girl cl'd just met -
a tattoo artist in Sacramento -
and the desert there was white
between the clumps of brush
in the headlights of the silent, engine-dead bus;
White, slick sand
like the surface of some
Other planet.





Leave the wardrobe in the east coast bedroom empty, save for your mother's coats and wraps all the sinister gifts of matriarchy and other people's ambitions.

on Essex Street in Berkeley it's nearly midnight scalding hot water runs into a wood basin from a blunt, projecting pipe.

The first rule, if you come here, is Silence.

Here your naked body is among the naked bodies of strangers, some immersed, some standing, to cool off, out in the yard beneath the buzz of Airplanes headed who knows where.

An enormous girl, her folds lolling with impressive grace in a hammock.

The naked, mortal bodies of your friends are there as well.

This is free. I hear an old hippie owns it, shares it. It's corny, maybe, to say, but it's nothing less than heroic generosity (because it's rare?)

To give people a place to be together, while alone, exposed, but safe -

To share with other dying animals your hot water, your obscure but friendly garden paths.



I'm too old now to not find peace
I will find it - somewhere - may be at the Bottom
of the sea.

Courting you in youth was like courting
a predictable shipwreck.
I might be calling you a siren
I might be suggesting (to bolster myself)
that you've changed.

Have you changed?

I feel my power to resist has grown -
grown so I say "no" now, when my men ask
whether they should chain me
to the Mast.



Wildlife has come down from the hills.
Last week, two security guards
caught a 4-foot gopher snake
in a parking garage in Oakland Chinatown.

They trapped him under a garbage can, then,
they said, they smoked cigarettes for the rest
of the day.

They each told the reporter from the Oakland Tribune
that the other guy was a hero.

also, a small army of fawns and their mamas
have come to dwell in city parks.

Down from the hills
where bobcats, mountain lions,
Coyotes and Bears are, they say, proliferating,
yet somehow not threatening the residents
of those glinting mansions up there,
the ones I think of as little mirrors to throw
the sunset back down to us.

Hello, Rich people who live
in little sunset-throwing mirrors.

Hello Bobcats, Mountain lions, Bears.

Hello fawns, hello gopher snake who
will go anywhere there's gophers
(or live chickens in the backyard of a
Chinese restaurant).

Hello predators.

Hello,

Shelter-seekers.



Pienserosa recline
on the reaching arms of
Ponterosa pine
front yard of your house in oakland
dusk.

Pienserosa see, past the flats
Bridge in the Bay
Harbor of Missions
merchant ships
encampment of spaniards
where Asia arrived -
Pacific.

Pienserosa recline
into the embrace
of
Ponterosa pine
front yard of your house in Oakland
dusk.



On an overcast Morning
The even, repeated call of a freight train
nearing the Oakland yards wakes me.
Chill air from the open window by my bed
Smells, Just for an instant,
like dirty New York City snow -

Snow that's slipped off an awning
and fallen, an un-noticed offering, at the feet
of a small, brown-faced man guarding scentless
cherry red and white-white Bodega Carnations.

Maybe he clips the stems and without
averting his busy eyes full of ungrasped dreams,
he tosses bits of green, unwanted ends, out
through plastic flaps.

That rare, blank gray morning
when California smells like nothing

I smell boot-trodden snow in gutters.

I see buckets of ugly Christmas flowers
in a Manhattan Bodega.

I'm haunted by the hard hands of my stranger
who quickly clips their stems

and dresses them in paper.

