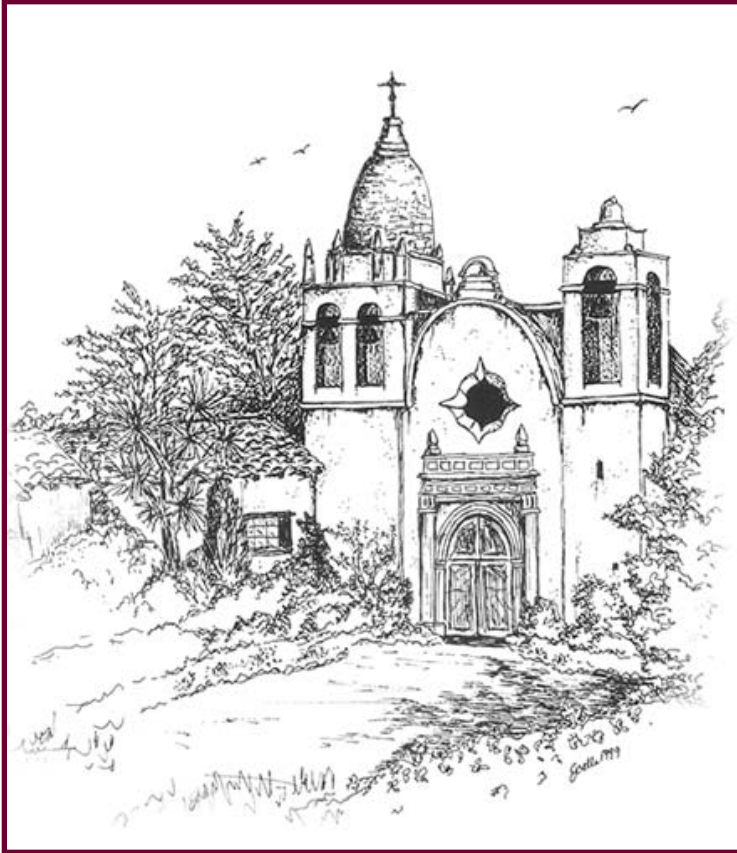


A Tapestry of Eden

A Poetic Memoir of Monterey County



Joelle Steele

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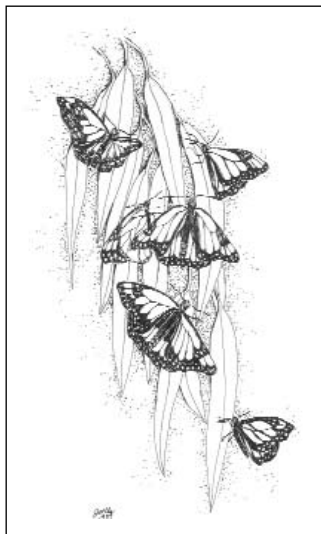
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To my Mother



The Tapestry of Eden

Here is a land of many faces
of many colors and hearts,
whose ancestors built adobes
and fished a burgeoning bay,
and prepared to go to war.

And those who come today
seek knowledge, or a glimpse,
a taste of this singular paradise.

All of these people – and more –
woven lovingly together
in the fabric of the land,
a tapestry of pine-lined shores
and redwood forest primeval,
with show-capped hills and open fields
that form an earthen bed
for acre upon acre of golden poppies,
sleeping only a breath away
from fresh-plowed furrows
and heaving vineyards
basking in the sun.

Surely this is Eden,
and we welcome all who come
to stand in the dazzling light
of our splendid garden home.

Old Coast Highway

Millions of years
and hundreds of miles ago
they rose with a spasm
from deep in the earth.

They stand today,
the rocky, wind-slain, twisted cliffs
hugged by cerulean waters,
and lovingly sheltered
by shady redwood forest.

At Bixby Creek lies a detour
down an older, rugged route,
dark in its isolation,
and inbred with the mystery
of those who settled before,
their ruins at every curve.

Then again the coast appears,
a challenging sliver of highway
where sometime travelers
seem all too eager
to put their fates to the test.

Flying In

A blinding shock of early sun
gleams off the silver wing
as our great bird
makes her final descent.

She tiptoes past the foggy banks,
and contemplates the verdant fairways,
mocking the rocking-rolling fish boats
while glancing the white-laced sand.

The journey quickens as she whispers
over the oak-dotted hills carpeted
with playful poppies
and laughing lupines,
and secrets a gentle kiss
on the sweet-scented piney canopy,
as she glides to her tarmac roost.

Coastal Weather Report

At sunrise it will be foggy
and drizzling all over town.

By ten the clouds will have parted
and leaves will blow in swirls.

At noon the sky will be brilliant blue
and sun will reflect off the bay.

But in two short hours a chill will grow
with possible scattered showers.

By four p.m. the storm will pass
and birds will again fill the skies.

And at sunset we will have come full circle
as a cotton layer seduces the pines.

Fisherman's Wharf

Morning miasma lifts to reveal
weary trodden planks
 covering barnacle-encrusted pylons
that merge into a labyrinth
 of ramps and stairs and floats.

Their damp nooks and crannies are filled
with vacant, decomposing bird nests,
 and soggy seines and brittle ropes
dripping with dawn's final vapors,
 lying in wait
to trap a wayward feather
 in their salt-sticky spidery webs.

Working boats with faded peeling paint
and brown hulls rusting
 leave for the open sea
in the remnants of morning mist,
 treading the glassy waters
against a calm silence
 broken only by the gasping,
belching groans of their engines
 echoed in the wharf's timbered
 underbelly and answered
 by a duet from barking sea lions.

Topside on the outer edges
pelicans roost and preen
in the first warm rays of sun,
and at the local fishmonger's
fresh squid doze on a bed of ice,
their stinky scent
seducing the shopping gourmet.

Shells and trinkets
and junk of every description
fill souvenir shops to the brim,
and harbor cruises and bay excursions
depart and soon return
with boatfuls of tourists and locals,
equally ocean-sprayed.

The sun sinks slowly in the west,
and stars paint the sky's face
with diamonds
as every table begins to droop
with the weight
of succulent seafood platters.

And soon the pier will go to bed
under a woolly blanket of fog.

To See The Whales

Mountains of waves,
sea swells go on forever,
and the deck awash with salty spray,
and we're awash with salty spray,
but we're anxious to see the whales!

The sky is dull and cloudy,
and birds struggle valiantly
against biting cold winter winds.

The ocean is churning
with kelp and with seals,
but we just want to see whales!

It's coming up on midday
and our stomachs are turning,
some from the rocking and
some from a longing for lunch,
but we don't care, we came to see whales!

Whale! Whale at ten o'clock!

And every head turns to see
two – no five! – spouts off the port bow
and our captain steers us south.

Binoculars at the ready.

Cameras poised to shoot.

The giant gray behemoth breaches the surface,
flukes barnacled soaring skyward
before rolling back into the sea.

The others in turn undulate with the waves
in all their cetacean glory.

We linger a while until they pass
then back to the wharf we go
with memories, and pictures too,
of the moment when we saw whales.

Across The Bridge

Deep in the valley
across the bridge,
bats overhead at dusk,
and night stars dangling
at the ends of your fingertips.

Ghostly owl-talk whispers
from dusty rafters
that creak in the warm night wind.

By day the sweet smells
of flowers and horses
float down the gurgling channel
past ripening vineyards,
grapes hot and eager
to evolve into dark, dry merlot.

While in the yellowing grass
wild turkeys graze
beside the strutting quail,
and red-headed woodpeckers
flock to drink from a bucket
by the sagging oaken fence.

And when the leafy poplars sparkle
in the fading summer day,
deer and raccoons gather
by the rocky river bank
to quench their summer thirst.

After The Rain

The gentle gurgling creek
becomes a gushing muddy rivulet
overflowing its shallow banks,
sending oaks and cypress trees
into sorry tailspins.

The world becomes a weedy garden.
Sunny oxalis, the seasonal color,
springs up everywhere,
filling each vacant patch of earth.

The pines and eucalyptus
emerge fresh-scented
and ozone insinuates the air,
air so clean and pure
it verily shocks the lungs.

Otters keep up their usual routine –
what's a little more water?

And mule deer graze on the newly-sprung grasses
while overhead billowy clouds linger on,
their dark grey bellies swollen
with the newest outburst
begging to be born.

The Row

Red and gold bicycle carriages
parade past mammoth rusting tanks,
silent sentries standing guard
beside the atrophied iron rails
embedded in concrete and granite.

Abandoned to salt and sea,
destined only to ruin and decay,
they echo the bygone era
when the hum of canneries
walked hand-in-hand
with the smell of sardines
on the crisp coastal breeze.

In these lesser years
Andean pipes spill their notes
that waft along with the chocolatey aromas
and shrimpy scents
through art galleries and antique shops
where phantom fishermen
wander the cluttered aisles
searching for a peace of yesterday
buried for all time.

Through The Glass

An aquatic sampler
of crabs and sea stars,
 urchins and moon jellies,
and so much bigger things,
 like sharks and otters
and barking seals,
 there for all to see
 behind the walls of glass.

A rare gift of glance
into secret microcosms
 framed by fluted leathery fronds
and barnacle-encrusted rocks,
 where a sardine chorus glimmers,
and a shy octopus lies aquiver,
 while a host of rays
 goes skimming along
 in a man-made tidal pool,
not far from the antique flotsam and jetsam
 that belonged to a man named Doc.

And hovering overhead in the gallery,
too huge to live behind glass,
 whale and dolphin in replica,
images of mammalian leviathans,
 swimming in a sea of air.

Carmel By-The-Sea

A peculiar charming maze
of intricate lanes and alleys,
of secluded, sequestered courtyards,
lined with greying redwood fences
and cracking stuccoed walls,
ablaze with petals magenta
and blinding blossoms of gold,
where leafy, shaded bowers
frame antique sainted niches.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds flit
above the sun-baked adobe bricks
and tired chalky flagstones
lying soothed by the ocean draft
that wends its way down
obscure narrow aisles and passages,
meandering through each secret garden
and tile-fountained patio
that slumbers in quiet enchantment,
unseen by those who pass
so near their sheltering presence
yet never know,
unless by happy circumstance
or rambling curiosity,
they stumble upon
a quaint and ivied byway
while lost on the way
to somewhere else.

Cries From The Gallery

Sometimes from pain
the artist delivers them forth,
those unshaped masses
waiting to be molded
into a graceful equine dance;
or the creamy oils,
the vibrant alizarin,
bleeding on a palette,
waiting to fulfill its destiny
as a passionate budding rose.

The sculptures, the paintings,
are alive and singing out;
the artist has given birth to them,
and now those hungry children
are crying to be noticed,
to be seen, to be heard.

You can almost hear them screaming

LOOK AT ME!

Mission San Carlos Borromeo

Over two-hundred years
and thousands of tattooed indians later,
resurrected from its ruins, time and again,
the jewel in Serra's mission chain
rests in its mount
overlooking the marshy mouth
of Rio Carmelo.

Flickering votives cast an amber glow
and weave their smokey haze
with the scent of dying incense,
the only sound a faint sputter
as a holy flame flickers and dies.

How many have trod these umber tiles smooth
making the passage from font to table,
cheeks teared with joy and rapture,
or drowning in darkest lamenting dolor,
looked on by the brooding dark eyes
of perishing icons who bear silent witness
to the heavenly presence
of these ancient souls.

The basilica towers and choir gallery
ring with bells and chapel voices
singing to the heart of the padre
resting in peace beneath his stone
in abiding tribute to his Creator.

Big Sur Ride

Walking at a cautious pace
we duck and dodge the branches
and their dangling lacy moss,
until the well-trod narrow path
opens onto a meadow
that stretches to the sea.

My gentle-hearted Fairlight
swiftly carries me
through the wheaty grasses
that whip my naked legs,
all the way to the rocky bluff.

The horses know the way
to the sandy beach below
where we gambol in the waves
until the twilight comes,
and the chestnut steed and dappled mare
nibble at the weeds,
while we sit and rest and watch the sun
go down in a titian blaze.

Highway 68

A snaky black ribbon ambles along,
bound by grassy slopes gleaming
like so many acres of emeralds,
dotted with creaking antique windmills
and a weaving chain
of aged wood and wire
that corrals the seas of grazing cows
shuddering beneath the wintery sun,
waiting for spring to deliver up
her brilliant budding meadows
that flourish all too briefly
only to fade and die
into the golden summer pastures
that make a rattlesnake's bed.

Cradle of History

A new day dawns to warm again
the aging, fading walls
surrounding poignant spaces
furnished with the memories
of those who went before.

The empty rooms speak eloquently
of this magic cradle of history,
of padres, indians, and haciendas,
Mexicans, Spaniards, and pirates,
sardines, Portuguese, and Chinatown,
and calamari cookouts on Spaghetti Hill.

Behind glass cases, worn leather covers
protect volumes of words
by Scotsmen and sailors,
adventurers and others,
who passed this way and stayed a day,
so many years ago.

And from their frames of gilt or wood
ancestral faces gaze
at all the strangers visiting,
and remind us like a distant echo
that the past will always live
in what we leave behind.

Christmas At The Adobes

On a crisp December evening
in viejo Monterey
tiny flickering candles
mark the adobe paths.

Deep-set wavy windows
glow in the amber hues
that warm the tiny rooms
dressed in Christmas cheer,
with scarlet ribbons,
and popcorn strings,
and pine cones on the hearth,
and homemade goodies
on abuela's finest plates
atop her embroidered cloth.

The little houses welcome all
with cider, nog, and song,
and hacienda hospitality
of seasons and time
come and gone,
when vibrant caballeros
rode their spirited mares
down Calle Principal,
singing Spanish rhapsodies
to shy young señoritas
with scarlet-petaled flowers
laced through their ebony hair.

A Watery Convention

On a chilly moonlit morning,
most all the world's abed
while a watery convention
dawns at the ocean's edge.

An assemblage of winged society's finest
rub shoulders at the cat-tailed lagoon.

Cranberry coot-eyes
glow in the glimpse of daylight,
verdigris feet suck muck and mire,
and great brown pelicans,
like prehistoric pterodactyls,
glide in the somber wisdom of ages
against the violaceous sky,
casting dim ghosts across the wavy surface.

A myriad of goosey gaggles
perform their morning ablutions,
singing honky-tonk in harmony
with the quacklings' peculiar tunes
and the gulls laughing out loud.

And lingering on the sidelines
far from this avian crowd,
struts a lone, majestic blue heron
surveying his reedy domain.

The Grand Old Dames

Quaint and curious
or stately and sedate,
no matter what color
or how much gingerbread,
these grand old dames are homes,
collectors of hundred-year-old secrets.

But gossipy old painted ladies they are not.

Victorian etiquette allows them
to show only their elegant facades
of lacy curtains behind carved glass panes
and batten board walls,
roofs topped by curlicued cupolas
and clever chimney pots.

All else is hints and glimmers,
peeks into glorious pasts,
of unsolved mystery
on the pages of history.

Butterfly Days

Follow the Monarch butterflies
to old Pacific Grove
when fall turns leaves to gold
and the evergreens are filled
with autumn-colored wings.

A sojourn along their journey
they rest in the woody retreat,
black-edged wings prayerfully folded,
a shimmering, twittering blanket
of clinging Lepidoptera,
half-concealing their leafy bed.

Sunlight trickles through the pines
and they flit and flutter away
off to watch orange-winged children
marching through town on parade.

Oceana

A sparkling lady, her silver ribbons
tossed upon the shore,
 in waves that cast for miles
like so many white-gloved hands
 reaching out to touch each lonely passerby.

In anger she's a raging grey fury
bashing her head on the rocks,
 a ragged and tormented soul
torn from the quiet depths
 where all life was surely born.

And she wrestles with the world,
the tides and rain,
 but always she returns to that mild, rolling place
 from which she sends her aqua lips
to kiss the pebbled shore.

Fickle she is, that restless one,
for if you dare caress
 her icy cold glass cheek,
 or twirl her slippery hair,
 she'll quickly draw away
just like a clever thief
 and never leave a trace.

No one can ever tame her;
no one should ever try,
 for they'll drown in her arms,
in her watery white-foamed charms.

Fragile Ones

Trapped in shallow rocky pools
waiting for the tide
to remember their names,
the fragile ones lie sheltered
until the great army of titans
comes to crush and cripple
and steal an empty shell or two,
sending ripples of ruin
into every hidden recess.

So delicate – perhaps too delicate –
to wage the bitter war
fought with the thousands of
curious fingers and toes
that cannot hear their silent prayers,
not for surrender, but to look,
and please do not touch!

Shore Walk

Briskly braving coastal breezes
beneath a cloudless sky of cobalt,
we huddled close to watch an otter
wrapped in his kelpy blanket
feasting on rock-crushed cuisine.

Wavy ribbons of salted foam
smashed the sandy, pebbled shore
as we danced a wibbly-wobbly dance
to keep our tiptoes dry
while hopping over driftwood logs
and side-stepping knee-deep piles
of pungent rusty seaweed.

A keening gull rides herd over
a flock of pecking pigeons,
and a chunky brown ground squirrel
dines on finger food.

And we, cold souls that we now are,
trudge along the trail shared by daring deer,
winding our way back to our cozy nest
where simmering chowder patiently waits
enclosed in a sourdough bowl,
the end, too soon, to a day in paradise.

A Lover's Dream

We walked the beach at day's end
and watched the sun go down
in a blaze of carmine and vermilion
against a watercolor sky of amethyst pastels
verging at the brink of deepest indigo,
then lit by the tiniest celestial sapphires.

A roaring fire burns within us
and in the stone hearth too,
as we rest entwined in each others arms
listening to hot jazz.

We share a dream of a cozy cottage
nestled in the pines
glimpsed by a full moon
peaking through the clouds;
a dream of chilly, foggy days
spent snug and warm inside.

Good books, sweet songs,
laughter and love fill the air,
a warm romantic fantasy
that we will make come true
... someday.

About the Author

Joelle Steele is a writer, artist, publisher, and educator who grew up in Monterey County and lived there for several years until 2005. Her works include almost 700 articles, 30+ books, 50+ short stories, 65+ contract templates, and numerous poems, lyrics, jingles, promotional pieces, Web pages, advertisements, illustrations, photographs, and fine art paintings. She frequently weaves her many interests into her works, including horticulture, genealogy, writing, art, photography, cats, and astrology.

Since 1994, Joelle has created and developed several Web sites on which she sells her work and provides a variety of informational resources. She also teaches many different classes through the extended education programs at colleges in the South Puget Sound area of Washington state where she currently lives.

eBooks by Joelle Steele . . .

- ◆ The Astrological Prediction of Earthquakes & Seismic Data Collection
- ◆ Living & Breathing: How to Make Your Characters Come Alive
- ◆ Researching & Writing Your Family History
- ◆ Unblocked: How to Expand Your Creativity by Overcoming and Preventing Creative Blocks
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