

Thursday's Child



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Thursday's Child

Working dawn to dusk,
candle burning at both ends,
each minute stretched to an hour,
struggling just to get by,
trying to make ends meet,
and doing whatever it takes,
in the good old American way.

Wearing the body to shreds,
the spirit fading fast,
with nothing there to show
the toll it takes year after year,
except for another tiny line
or wrinkle on the brow.

Instead of being fair of face
or being bonnie and blithe,
this Thursday's child
has far to go,
far to go ...
far to go?

Exactly how far must I go?

Cold

My fingers ache, too stiff to bend,
the skin cracked.

I try to read but the book drops
as my hands rebel,
trying to hold a flashlight too.

I can't get anything done in this cold.

Turn on the heat, you fool.

No, no heat.

Can't afford gas to let the engine idle.

Find the old wool mittens.

They're in the tiny trunk
pressed between what still remains
of my meager stock of possessions.

Ummmmm, better, not great, but better.

Maybe I can just sleep.

Reading would only make me think,
or try to think,
when thinking is so hard to do
regardless of the cold.

Growling

Another night without peanut butter.

And I miss soup or salad and fish -
how I love salmon!

And I miss feeling full, satisfied,
the feeling of being safe and secure
that also quiets the mind.

My growling stomach nags at me
and keeps me awake
more than the pain in my back,
the cold in my joints,
and the chaos inside my head.

Tomorrow is a new day,
and a job is just around the corner.

Maybe I will find a place to live too.

The Depths of Acheron

How long is this river, this river of woe
so dark, so deep, so ragged with pain,
carrying my buoyant broken body
down its callous, raging depths?

A journey begun so long ago
in the crimson canal of life
has detoured into an earthly Hades,
where fiction and truth collide,
and mingle in fear and confusion.

The Acheron channel surges and teems
with limp forms of other hapless souls,
whipping us against its sullen shores,
torturing, punishing, and exacting
its reward of blood and tears -
my blood and my tears.

I ache for one brief second
of inner peace and release,
for just one single instant of clarity
in a descending whirlpool of insanity.

I beg for rest on silvery sands,
to bask in heaven's glow,
to escape this infernal abyss
of torment and odious glare.

In My Dreams I Can Dance

Almost paralyzed
and the pain cuts like a knife.

Every twinge melts into
an agonizing fight
between me and my body
the skin will always win.

And my bones too weary to bear
make me a prisoner
of my bed.

But in my dreams, in my dreams
in my dreams I can dance.

Like a feather or a cloud,
I'm light on my feet
and I can dance.

Insomnia

Wheels and circles
and all things round
 spinning and going nowhere fast;
the busy brain can't stop thinking,
 even when the clock chimes three,
and the rest of the world
 is flirting with the moon.

Whirring, whizzing, and wearing down
just as the big red ball
 lights up the eastern sky,
and at last all things inside my head
 grind to a screeching halt.

If God Is Not Here

If God is really in me
He must be fast asleep
for I don't feel His presence
or that of any saint
on these starless nights
nestled in the trees,
hidden from the world.

I only hear the restless wind
shaking me awake
just as I begin to doze.

If God is not here
to listen to my prayers,
I don't know how much longer
I can keep up the good fight
before it's time to leave
this earthly plain.

Or maybe I am already dead,
and this tear-filled world
is my own very personal hell,
too remote, too far from paradise
for God to hear my call.

Prayer

It's me again.

I'm lying all alone here
 cramped in my steel cage,
 so hungry and so cold.

The sky is dark,
 it's full of clouds,
 and I believe that soon
 I'm gonna rain.

Did you forget me?

Or do you ignore us sinners
 and only mystify the saints?

I'm an ugly storm about to burst;
 I need you to quell my thunder.

Please let the sun shine
 just once more.

I'm drowning.

I'm sinking like a stone.

Where Are You?

Where are you, God,
when the white hot poker stabs at me,
and a traffic jam is raging in my head,
and a cellular population explosion
is growing out of control?

Where are you, God
when I trust in you to be there
to make a little miracle -
which surely I do sorely need -
that would free me
from this wretched existence?

Where are you, God
when the moon is new and the sky is black
and I reach for the knife or finger the pills
with eyes swollen tightly shut
so that I can only wonder
what it would be like
to finally let it all go straight to hell?

Answer me, damn it!

Sometimes I Wish

Sometimes I wish that I could forget
the angry knot of hunger,
those cold night sweats,
curled up like a pretzel
in the driver's bucket seat,
with frost on the windows,
and salty tears on Naugahyde,
counting spare change to buy bread.

Sometimes I wish that I could erase
the loneliness of pain,
the confusion and the chaos
of waxing and waning illusions,
of isolation and paralyzing dreams,
and the guilt and shame
of unspoken deeds,
my blackest of secret sins.

Sometimes I wish that when you start over
the slate is wiped clean and white,
not hiding things so ugly
lurking on the other side,
just waiting to be revealed
to send you back to damnation,
or to something even worse,
from which there is no return.

Naked In The Wind

Should I be so lucky
to seal my fate at last,
to put my heart to rest
and find the blessed peace
so deep within my soul,
then, and only then,
can I stand naked in the wind,
in the Prophet's way.

With all my little ducks
lined up neatly in a row,
I will be ready at last,
ready to melt into the sun,
to hear the final bells
that fall upon deaf ears,
until all the chiming clocks in the world
cannot disturb my sleep.

Little Grey Stones

Steadfast sentries on
an emerald counterpane,
the little grey stones
whisper a mournful elegy:

I was here; now I am gone.

Only my little grey stone remains
to mark my place in history.

Think of me now and then.

Linger awhile and
adorn my bed
with Queen Anne's Lace

Say a prayer for me
beside my little grey stone.

My Secret

My secret.

An unholy act fueled by desperation.

Hidden like a letter of unrequited love,
smothered in the walls
of a dusty, airless attic,
waiting for a fire
to end its agony.

I cannot release it;
not enough pennies
to pay for my thoughts
or for my sins.

My secret.

It nibbles away at my withering flesh,
like a shuddering wet rat
in a squalid, fetid cellar,
gnawing at its foot
to free it from the trap.

My secret.

Always there, dogging me,
just close enough to feel
its icy, bitter shadow
on the sunniest of days.

Confession

The stone font beckons me,
the cool holy water rippling
as I raise a finger to my forehead
and make the fateful sign.

It is not too late to turn, to flee,
to hide from the crowded cubicle.

The faint smell of stale incense
and my head begins to spin,
remembering, remembering.

Will confessing make me forget?
Tick, tick, tick ...

Bless me father for I have sinned ...
Tick, tick, tick ...

Oh my God I am heartily sorry ...
Tick, tick, tick ...

Hail Mary, full of grace
stands illuminated by the smoky candles
as I bend on penitent knees
caressing the pearly beads.

Saved from Satan's fiery furnace,
only to suffer in purgatory?

Or will the Virgin's tears wash me clean
and lift the weight,
making me as light as the feathers
on a newborn angel's wing?

Please forgive me, Lord,
for I cannot forgive myself.

Bugged

Unholy creatures scamper
around the cranium cavern
screaming at me so loud,
so incredibly LOUD.

And a scratchy whisper tickles at me,
non-stop,
warning me to
"get out now, get out before it's too late."

Cobwebs in my eyes
so I don't see the ornery bugs
that buzz in my ears
and lay eggs in my brain.

What went before was the mutant enemy,
thrashing my skin and raking my hair
with its yellow-stained fangs.

Now it's only worms left - the maggots -
churning masses I eat
when I dream of cockroaches
that flutter from the cracks

in the water-stained plaster
and crawl into every obscure little orifice
where they rest
and reproduce themselves
and add to the intensity
of the spiking pain in my head.

Something under the bed is chewing
all night,
gnawing on some long-dead,
hard, brown carcass.

If it grates its teeth any louder
I will seek it out
and feed it to the shiny black widow
who lives behind the toilet
and eats the unsuspecting.

Some day her wicked venom will course
through my cursed veins and
I will become
the creatures that inhabit my world.

Ricotta & Fugue

It was eleven and now it's two
and there's a bowl of ricotta pasta
in my lap, half-eaten,
though I never tasted a thing.

Who eats the ricotta pasta,
and parks the car in places I can't find it,
and reads the pages
of a book I've never seen before?

I ask this over and over;
no answer springs to mind.

And so I eat the remains of the ricotta pasta
- even though I don't like ricotta pasta -
one more time.

Hard Drive

My brain.

A biological hard drive.

Programs and files competing for space,
errors in the media abound.

But I can't run defrag or scandisk
to make the glitches go away.

So I try to think and reason and act
with as much clarity as I can,
until the day -
and I know it is coming -
when an error message stops me cold
and I cannot ever reboot.

Out of Control

The clouds hurry by
on their way to unknown places,
victims of the wind,
breaking apart and fading away,
like me when I rush through life
with no direction
and lose myself in the process,
searching for the compass I lost
when I was still a child,
fragmenting, scattering out
to the four corners of the earth.

I go west with the sun and return in the east;
no progress made there.

And heading north I freeze
and turn in my tracks,
racing south
like a palmetto bug on speed.

I am the chicken that lives without its head,
legs running, wings flapping,
and totally out of control.

Memories

I do not want to remember,
but memories will not let me forget.

Life's retrospective plays
again and again,
over and over in my head,
and I want to make it stop.

But I cannot turn it off.

Why doesn't someone make
an on/off switch
for the part of the head
where all the bad things are stored?

Or how about a remote control
so I can go from reruns
to current first-run shows?

I do not like all this remembering.

I only want to escape and forget -
forget everything.

Dreamscape

Claustrophobic visions
and disjointed astral travels
dot my nightly dreamscape,
where chance meetings with my creator
blend with glitzy rock n' roll stars
and sleazy politicians
into a confusing episode
where a lost cat shares her wisdom
and nuzzles my neck once more.

Someone calls my name and rings a bell
freeing me from a universe
where green humid skies buzz
over pock-marked muddy fields.

And in my waking hours,
the unreality teases me
as I search for the answers
when I don't even know the questions.

Amber

Like an unsuspecting insect
captured in the amber,
its thready limbs paralyzed,
she lays frozen in time.

Looking out through staring dead eyes
unable to speak or hear
or feel anything
except the emptiness
of her golden prison,
she endures,
trapped in eternal silence.

Passing Away

Eyes once blue, now steel-grey
stare into a void.

Time marches on;
it marched right over her,
and beat her down flat.

But she is too lost to care.

She doesn't see me
or anyone else.

Surrounded by loved ones
but still alone
when it comes right down to it.

Two fingers twitch and her eyelids flicker.

A tiny sigh escapes lips
that have not spoken
for three long days.

Her tired head sinks deeply
into a pillow of nothingness.

The Dust-Catchers

My house is a model of function,
of simple and solid decor,
unfilled with the clutter
of knick-knacks and curios
or antique bibelots.

Those heirlooms-in-the-making
should line the nests
atop the family tree,
and my little orchard lies
forever fallow.

When I am gone,
no one will come
to wipe the dust away,
and so I keep but a few quaint bits
of ceramic and metal and wood –
just enough to fill a niche,
and act as a constant reminder
that this tree cannot bear fruit.

I Do Not Bleed

I do not bleed.

My veins, once warm coursing rivers
throbbing with the rhythm
of life and love
and hope born
of each new tomorrow,
have hardened, frozen solid,
with each empty promise
and unfulfilled dream,
with every dark secret,
each spiteful, angry word,
and the whispers of a sorry spirit.

No, I do not bleed.

I cannot bleed.

My heart is like the ice in a freezer,
as hollow as a frozen crypt,
echoing with mute screams of terror
and Stygian cries of anguish.

I cannot bleed.

I will not bleed.

My agony is safe and sacred
 beneath the avalanche of snow
 that chills me to the marrow
 and numbs me to the soul.

Talk to Me of Grief

Talk to me of Grief,
of the wrenching
and the screaming agony
that wracks my body
like the attack of a vicious beast,
ripping at my tissues from the inside,
clawing and chewing its way out
from my deepest inner core.

Talk to me of such horror,
and I will tell you of my battles
against this preying ghoul
that locks its jaws in place
around my heart,
its filthy talons gripping
at the ribs in my chest
forcing me to gasp for air,
for freedom from its clutches.

Grief and I share a savage embrace
that smothers me,
that eats away at me,

eroding and corroding me,
while Grief just grins and lingers
like a hungry feral cat,
enjoying the hors d'oeuvres
of endless teasing and toying
before finally ripping its hapless prey
to shreds.

I have fought Grief with the fire of my anger,
and I have tried to drown it
in a river of salty toxic tears.

I have evaded the villainous Grief,
ignoring its threats against my soul.

But in the end it is always there,
waiting to grab my shattered psyche,
and squeeze
what little life force still manages
to hold me together.

Notes In The Margin

Afterthoughts and explanations
like a humid cloud
wet with the emotion
that I cannot speak aloud.

A word, or two.

A flash of insight
into my human condition.

A manuscript of silent words.

Notes in the margin
seeking clarity,
seeking the reason why,
pointing to the answers
that were there all along.

The Awakening

A foggy, restless sleep
reaches the inevitable,
the fitting end at last.

Awakened in epiphany,
surrounded and astounded
by a Rip Van Winkle world.

Never felt the planet spin,
while sleeping, coma-like,
with eyes no more than tired marbles
watching the game from the sidelines.

Ears not deaf,
merely afraid to listen,
covered by monkey hands.

Clear to the horizon.

Nothing escapes me now.

I am awake.

I am ... alive!

Cancer Rising

Smiling, happy, concerned, caring.

That is what you see.

My astrological ascendant
speaks volumes for me
when I cannot speak for myself.

But until I know you very well,
until I can see into your soul
and know that you are really there,
it is all I am prepared to give.

My glass surface only.

In time, I may offer up a glimpse
of my inner self.

And you can decide what is real
and if you like what you see.

WYSIWYG

I am a model.

I am a homeless woman.

I am what I am at the moment.

Chameleons change by the hour.

I could be a famous artist -
and I would look the part.

Picture me in my black garb,
handmade scarf, dangling earrings,
even funky purple shoes.

They are only my fashionable skin
covering up reality.

(Looks don't really count anyway,
do they?)

It's all about camouflage,
body makeup for the one
who tries so hard to be
all things to all people.

Expect and perceive as you will.
I never disappoint.

April Fool

What a circus is this life of mine
a fun house, then a Ferris wheel,
sometimes a roller coaster
twisting, turning, and lurching along,
one surprise after the other.

I'm the acrobat, the juggler,
and sometimes the fearless lion tamer,
brave and courageous
facing who knows what behind
door number three.

But most of the time
I'm just the April fool,
hapless, not heroic,
bumbling and stumbling along,
unwitting and unknowing.

You see, the joke's on me -
I'm just a simple, silly clown
who thinks, "I am somebody,"
when in the end
I'm only me.

Beyond Genes

People always said I looked like
whichever parent stood beside me,
and, of course, that's true.

I am their perfect blend –
on the surface, in the genes.

But if you want to know me –
and I want you to know me –
you must look deeper,
deeper until you see that I am nothing like
the seed from which I sprang.

I am angry, even vicious
when justice is withheld.

I am fearful and frustrated
when life does not unfold
exactly as I expect it to.

And when I love – and I do love –
there are times when I can be
so embarassingly fickle.

But mostly I am fiercely loyal,
giving love unconditionally.

I am hardworking, rarely lazy,
cherishing each moment
that I walk upon the earth.

I do not listen to religious dogma.

I sing my own song
and blaze my own trail.

No one tells me how to think
or what I should believe,
and I don't try to be
what anyone else
thinks that I should be.

For in the end I answer
to only two strong voices:
my very own
and that of my god.

The Sword

Only my pen is mightier
 than the double-edged sword
 by which I live,
 by which I will die.

And die alone.

For the sword cuts both ways
 and the choice for freedom
 comes at a price.

Think and do as I please;
 sleep alone at night.

And when I am gone,
 no issue in my stead.

Only the faded, yellowing pages -
 the jumble of words aligned in a row;
 the labyrinth of shapes,
 the ochres and the madders -
 lingering, fading, fading,
 a quiet reminder of my choice
 and the sharpness of the blade.

I Cannot Touch A Cloud

I cannot touch a cloud
or tiptoe across the white-hot sun;
I will never walk on water,
or serenade the man-in-the-moon.

But I can tread the angry waves
of a melancholy ocean,
and plod at a garden snail's pace
down the murky, muddy roads
of my ephemeral existence.

And buried under frigid shadows
masquerading as the night,
I can dream - such glorious dreams -
of angels and diamonds,
and the child that should have been
... mine.

And in the unadorned turmoil
of my waking, wistful self,
I revel in the sweetest joy,
at reflections in a raindrop,
and the whisper of a twinkle
from the dimmest elfin star.

My Home Town

As quickly as I went
from one to forty-four
everything has changed
in my home town.

At the corner was the drug store -
now a ninety-nine cent store,
and quaint old bits of history
are buried for all time,
like the elegant hotel
that reigned so many years,
now gone and in its place
a dull stone prison box.

Even my old family home
is mildewed in despair.

I walk these streets part-stranger
seeking glimpses of my past
and finding only reflections
of all that used to be
in the steel and the glass
that is my home town.

The Little Pink House

The little pink house
where I was a kid so many years ago
now wears a coat of olive green
and a snowy-white stone lawn.

I remember when my bedroom
was painted pretty "Alice Blue"
and I collected postage stamps,
and rocks and shells and "stuff."

I rode my turquoise Schwinn -
at break-neck speed -
down Ord Grove Avenue,
and played at jacks and hopscotch,
transistor radio blaring
the strains of yodeling cowboys
and the newborn rock n' roll.

Candy the cat was my best friend
and I divided my lazy days
between sewing a dress for Barbie

and chasing blue-belly lizards
through the dunes and tumbleweeds.

These days I drive by the little house
and point it out to friends,
and sometimes drive by all alone,
remembering a time
when I used to live on Lassen Street
and called that house my home.

A Home

Cherry clock ticking
on the mantle shelf,
and leathered, weathered books
shun dust in their cases.

Pencil sketches, museum-framed,
cover the ecrued walls,
graphite flowers admiring
the rust and ochre petals nearby.

Daylight leaks through a tiny slit
in the corner window shutter
and creates a rainbow prism
through the antique crystal inkwell
that spills over the emerald blotter.

A gust of crisp autumn air
sneaks beneath the French doors
and rustles the lacy sheers
while sneaky camellia branches
scrape the window pane.

The cats purr (while I doze),
curled up into fluffy balls,
quiet and content
beside a crackling fire.

Blue Hope

Peeking out from the listless gloom
of monotonous gray cloud cover,
is an island of vivid blue,
promising a fleeting chance
for hope
in an otherwise lackluster moment
when the universe simply
refuses to shine.

One Hell Of A Ride

A fight to get to the sun
and a plunge into the murk,
my ride on the Big Dipper,
the roller coaster of life,
the ride through my own
very private lunatic asylum.

The dipper always half-full -
at first glance.

Look closer and see
how little is really there,
the void that is my life.

Through all the ups and downs
and downs and downs,
all I really know for sure
is that this life has truly been
one hell of a ride.

An Unbeliever Like Me

This must be a miracle,
or else I'm in a dream.

It all seems so impossible
to an unbeliever like me.

I can't help looking
for the fly in the ointment,
the bug in the program,
the trap-door at my feet.

Too good to be true
are the only words known
to an unbeliever like me.

Everything I wanted?

My wishes all come true?

I take none of this for granted
but still I have to wonder,
if it's really really real,

or if it's merely wishful thinking,
that good fortune could ever last.
Perhaps it's all a glorious plan,
this unexpected treasure.

Maybe it will defy my qualms
and drain the skeptic voice
that murmurs pessimistically
to my faithless self,
to the unbeliever I am.

Tomorrow Today

It is always tomorrow that sings to me
until today stops by and waggles
an angry finger admonishing me
for being so ill-prepared
to receive whatever it has brought my way.

Today appears without a warning;
look up and there it stands,
shaking me out of my nostalgia,
and challenging me to face the unknown
again and again, and again,
each time no different than the last.

In Harmony

I could look up at the clouds forever,
watching a whisper of a breeze blow by
taking the puffy white cotton for a ride.

Gazing through a needled canopy,
or the glisten and gleam
of cottonwood leaves,
I am part of something bigger.

I love to sit quietly and alone
inhaling a grove of eucalyptus,
or counting the oaks
that decorate an open field.

I stare out with calm
over the roiling ocean,
waves pounding the rocky shore.

The simple pleasure
of wading in a cool clear stream
makes me smile and tingle.

I feel joy on a mountain,
or a wind-swept cliff,
ecstasy at the sweeping vistas.

Let me pass from this earthly paradise
in harmony with nature,
resting in a meadow
of sweet new-mown grass,
and gazing up into a cornflower sky.

About the Author

Joelle Steele is a writer, artist, publisher, and educator. 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.

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