

Joe Cottonwood

At the Owl Cafe, Cloverdale

Betsy the waitress seems so young.
Her small mouth forms an O
when she talks, a circular smile
like a knothole with teeth,
narrow eyes because she's had it tough
but a brightness like the unset sun.
Coffee and spicy apple pie Betsy serves
to the highway patrolman while
everybody in that cafe watches
through the big window
a hitchhiking couple with a dog,
the girl in pigtails and denim overalls
looking innocent and fresh and upfront,
the boy in ponytail, a beard like Spanish moss,
the dog acting goofy like a giant puppy.
A camper truck stops, and they pile in back
to the unknown.

The highway patrolman orders more coffee
and says, "They never learn, do they?"
Betsy smiles, touches his hand,
wishing to find out.

Joe Cottonwood has worked as a carpenter, plumber, and electrician for most of his life. Nights, he writes. His most recent book is *99 Jobs: Blood, Sweat, and Houses*.
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