

Joe Cottonwood

Blame it on the Belly.

Prettiest on the beach. Mottled,
mounded like a tortoise shell
flecked with sand.

Blame it on the eyes,
busiest on the beach watching
girl and boy shaping a castle
but with sadness behind the busy,
melancholy mother
in sunshine on a towel.

Blame it on one monster log of driftwood
popping from the churn into my ribcage
then smacking my jaw as I stood transfixed
by baby-growing belly, by melancholy eyes,
rogue tree trunk knocking the wind from me
plus two teeth.

Blame it on the downy daughter
so limber, so lithe, first to reach me
who unwisely applied mouth-to-mouth
which I repaid with seawater vomit
causing her to spit and yell *Shit*.

Blame it on adrenaline,
blame raw pain as I staggered
to the pickup to somehow drive solo
to Dominican Emergency with broken rib
without thanking sun-freckled daughter,
saint of soft lip and chocolate eye,
without hello, without goodbye.

Joe Cottonwood is a carpenter by day, poet by night. His most recent book is *Foggy Dog: Poems of the Pacific Coast* .