

Joe Cottonwood

A Kitten, a Child, a Great Horned Owl

As Oreo naps in a sunny patch
the great horned owl drops
like a cruise missile to snatch
with explosion of wings.
Howling rising higher to heaven
somehow with feline super strength
Oreo lurches. Breaks loose.
Falls like a flying kitten.
Snatches a branch in a redwood tree
high as an eight-story building.

Your child comes home and what do you tell her?
Swallow hard and point to a furball clinging wide-eyed
beyond ladder height, beyond possible help.
Set food at the base of the tree. All through evening
echo the child's *Here kitty kitty* into dark forest.
Tuck her tears into bed and pillow,
promise you'll watch.

Dawn you awaken to a scratching at bedroom screen.
Lucky daddy. Awaken daughter, tell her, show her.
Suggest that nature is never benign
but sometimes forgiving.

And might this child after quiet reflection
choose to forgive the owl? Might she love owls,
their silent flight, their grace?
Might she respect nature, not fear it?

Behold the purring Oreo, full grown.
See scars of talon holes on her shoulders.
Reach a gentle hand to a peaceful loving cat
who evermore sleeps under benches, never on top.

Joe Cottonwood is happy to be called an old hippie. His latest book of poetry is *Random Saints — poems of kindness for an unkind age*. He's a semi-retired home repair contractor and a lifelong writer sheltering with his high school sweetheart and dodging wildfire in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California.