

Joe Cottonwood

A Dentist in America

Dr. Song never sings
but mumbles in rough English
with a wince and a dimple
he was an orphan in Korea.
He fills three teeth, prepares one crown
grumbling that my beard which he calls shrubbery
is dirty, my cavities too far back,
my tongue too big always seeking his drill.
At least I'm not boring.

I wonder what his childhood was like
in America. I bet tough as an adoptee
ending strong with a girlfriend
because he tells me he has a three-year-old daughter
who will become a dentist like him.
I'd advise him not to count on it if I could speak
with his fingers between my lips.

Dr. Song is not good with people but he's good people.
And so is his daughter who takes over the practice.
I recount how her father would complain
about my shrubbery, my inquisitive tongue.
He's rude, she laughs. But he's right.

His fillings are holding just fine.
She's pregnant, says it's a girl.

Joe Cottonwood has repaired hundreds of houses to support his writing habit in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. His latest book of poetry is *Random Saints*. joecottonwood.com