

Teachers aren't supposed to cry. But when Shad gave me that last dark dare of a look and said he was heading for Chicago to live it up before he split for Canada, I knew it was Kleenex time.

I shouldn't have expected him to do otherwise. He was the leader of the "Hell No, I Won't Go" faction of my 60's classroom. His name was Luther Shadbush. His skin was saddle color. His Indian blood showed most in his eyes. Six feet tall and lanky, he was 18 going on 35.

I had cracked down on him from the first day when his boots tracked in barnyard smells and he began to argue in double negatives. I remember thinking it would be a long year.

There was the placard skirmish: "It's supposed to be a free country," he yelled when I stopped him and the half dozen marchers in the hall as they waved their posters protesting the Vietnam War.

"The only thing you're free to do in this school room is study your assignments. Leave your opinions outside."

There were loud grumbles and snarling undertones but they finally backed down.

*the word*  
Then Shad led a conspiracy of pointed questions about my views on the war, always trying to engage me. "If it isn't relevant to the lesson, we won't waste time with it. You want to discuss foreign policy, do it in political science or history."

*Then so he took other tack:*  
"Cowboys don't need 'proper English'. We got our own language." He pointed to the text book. "I might ask some dude in a stripey suit 'Whom are you addressing?' but if I said that to anybody I know I'd get heaved outa the bunkhouse." He always played to the element that wanted diversion and always got a big laugh. He even baited me with race bias: "Would you marry a halfbreed?"

"I already have. He's half German, half French--traditional enemies for generations." *2 answerd.*

And again: "Ranch hands don't need math. Long as I round up as many head as we started with, I aint got no use for hypotenuses and X's and Y's." *mentioned*

"Someday you may own the ranch," I said. "In order to make a profit you need to know more than simple counting. The problems on page 112 are all geared to the cattle business. That'll be your homework this weekend."

He came back late one afternoon while I was grading papers. I didn't hear him come in. When I looked up he was staring at me.

"I wanta graduate. Are you gonna help me?"

"Of course. That's my job. It's also my committment. To you--to all my students." It was a small school in a small western town. I taught both senior English and math, Shad's worst subjects. *Teacher here some*

"Yeah, well, I mean really help me. I can't hack it like it is. I gotta have some back-up. Like I start doin' my homework and can't finish cause I get hungup on sump'n I shoulda learned before but I didn't."

It was true. He shouldn't have been passed last year. That teacher freely admitted she moved him on because she couldn't handle him.

"Are you willing to stay after school?" I couldn't help smiling a little.

"Yeah, I-- I mean, yes, ma'am."

"To what do we owe this sudden desire for a diploma?"

"I've ALWAYS wanted a diploma. Why d'you think I ~~came back this year~~ bigger'n' uglier than anybody else? But I doubted I'd ever get it. Now I think maybe I can." *stayed around*

"We'll start tomorrow at 3:30. Don't be late."

I stared after his broad back and ridiculously small hips. I had spoken of "commitment"--part of the "teacherese" I had been speaking automatically for the last 18 months. Commitment comes from the heart and mine wasn't in my work. Oh, I was doing my job efficiently, putting in piles of over-



## AUDITORIUM

Wrapped in its deepness,  
the living sea astounds me. I hear the sounds of being,  
dark inside myself, and darting low and light  
around me. Water amplifies it all for ears, for eyes,  
it resonates through life in shells, in shoals,  
in floral-feathered animals abounding.  
They whisper arcanums of their kind. And mine.

Treble-pitched kelp beds are crowned  
with rippled sun, undulating straps and strands  
wound into the medley with blistered silver whole notes.  
I move from warmth to places  
where my lamp has found warm colors in blue cold.

New rhythm pounds with mine, sibilance  
changes to a minor key. The sounds are older here,  
and louder. They rumble out of mounds of polyps,  
millenia of designs once bent on feeding, reproducing,  
content to echo plocks, plips, shumps of now.

Bright mills have ground dead coral into sand,  
generations of parrot fish gnawing the reef.  
A moray eel, frowned-on, maligned in solitude,  
snaps his hunger on a finny meal. A carapace  
browned with parasitic plush, skitters through  
the song; two flounders hollow out the bottom range.

The alto brine is filled with appetites hiding  
in holes; downed by day, they wait to hound the night.  
And as it nears, the noise grows rounder, fuller  
like the ringing salty course inside me.  
I must go, respond to tides and currents  
and the tempo of my obbligate drowned  
in rising volume. Tomorrow my small voice  
and bubbled wake will practice harmony again  
with earth's most ancient sounds below.



time, almost driven to perform my best. Few computers could have matched me. The students were merely part of the mechanism. I didn't even like Shad. Why should I add a foul-mouthed cow-punk to my load? He probably wouldn't make it anyway.

It was part of my duty, I told myself firmly. And so, doggedly, ready for anything, I set my jaws to graduate Luther Shadbush with a legitimate education.

Afternoon suns slanted low across my chair rungs and Shad's grasshopper limbs angling out from his too-small desk. I didn't see much progress. His anger often made sharp jogs in his straight thinking. When I couldn't parry him, mine got in the way too.

Then there was the gun. His shirt tail caught up on the spiral of his note book and I glimpsed the butt of a pistol stuck in his belt. I had always been wary of him. That's why I only coached him days when there was basketball practice ~~or the Forensic Club was meeting nearby~~, or something else was going on. For some reason band practice had been called off that day. We were alone except for the principal who was on the first floor, far side of the building.

We'd already had a head-butting in class. I hadn't expected him to come back. I gave the class an essay assignment. The subject was patriotism.

"Aw, Miss<sup>us</sup> Colbert, I can't write no essay on patriotism. I don't even know what it means."

Several girls volunteered their elevated thoughts. The discussion got interesting.

Then Shad challenged the idealism of equality and justice and the Indian part of his eyes dared me to deny his facts.

"Don't ask me to shovel that stuff, Miss<sup>us</sup> Colbert. I can't write about no promised land and how I wish I had more lives to give to my country!" He stomped out and I let him go. Now he was back. Armed.

I kept writing, trying to decide what to do.

"That don't look like school work," he gestured to my lavender stationary.

"Doesn't look like," I corrected. "As a matter of fact, it isn't."

"Pretty paper. I bet it even smells good. Can I sniff it?"

"May I. And no, it's a personal letter."

"Who to? Some dude in a stripey suit?" "To my husband."

"Where's he at?"

"You'll never graduate until you get rid of the 'at'. Why don't you begin with an opening paragraph for the essay assignment?" I waved him toward a desk.

"I told you I can't write that essay."

"Can't you think of anything about America that you care about?"

"Sure. I got a big urge to tear up some of them Chicago discos and drink beer at the beach, and--"

"You know that's not what I mean."

"All I know is this country's never done a damn thing for me."

"It's trying to give you a decent education right now but you'd rather nurse that fat chip on your shoulder than take advantage of it."

He was still standing over me, watching me fold my letter into the envelope.

"Awful quiet around hear today. <sup>he said finally</sup> I thought they were gonna have band practice." He fidgeted a moment more. "I guess I won't stay. Got some business to do." Suddenly he reached for my letter which was already stamped. "I pass the post office. I'll mail it for you."

"It's an important letter, Shad. You--"

"You can trust me. I won't lose it." Now he was looking at the address.

"Hey, is this-- Where'd you say he was?"

"I didn't. He's somewhere south of Saigon."

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597



4. John A. Lubbe Memorial Award

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P. S. of Pennsylvania

AMERICAN CHRONICLE, THE PIN OAK TREE

Morning at the upstairs window:

A ragged inkspill on diluted winter sun  
sudden-splashes the vellum sky with exclamations  
of leftover night. The roosting accents all depart.  
Zigzag in slow motion  
a dark quill returns to twisted lines of calligraphy.  
Knotty fingers writing my horizon, aspiring to heaven,  
lurch upward to await the twilight embrace  
of winged coauthors who won.

Evening at the downstairs window:

Reunited on the whole moon's page,  
birds and boughs compose  
eloquent verses of silence  
rising above  
the voices in my kitchen spelling hurry and hunger.



## A Teacher Remembers

He was ~~the~~<sup>one</sup> of the "hell no, I won't go" ~~group~~<sup>part of</sup> in my classroom, the boy with Choctaw eyes and saddle-colored skin who refused to write the assigned essay on patriotism, said the word was meaningless. I thought I ~~failed~~<sup>had</sup> him, heard he ~~to~~ reach "split for Canada." His name was Luther Shadbrush. He wrote me when he shipped out for Vietnam: "I don't want you to think I got herded off like a stupid sheep with no attachments. Don't go grading this."

~~It finally sunk in --~~ I'm sort of like a needle on a lodgepole pine. I guess I'm sort of ~~have a~~ I know the limbs are full of blight and the trunk's got borers but it's still the straightest, tallest tree in the forest. And it's my tree. Guess I can't help wanting to hold on to it. I don't see ~~nothing~~<sup>anything</sup> better anywhere else, don't see other kinds propping up falling trees without taking the lame tree's land in the process. The lodgepole pine don't operate that way. Maybe if enough needles hang tight and do what we're supposed to do even if we don't like it, our tree will get well and put out some new branches. ~~Stronger~~<sup>Better</sup> and better ones. I guess that's hope. So that's what I aim to do. Maybe that's loyalty. And if I die doing it, ~~somebody~~ ought to know I'm not leaving bitter and I'm glad ~~to be~~ <sup>blue</sup> part of this old tree. I guess that's pride. And maybe all of it together is that word you wanted us to write about last year in school. Remember? "

for errors, but I don't want you to think I got herded off like a stupid sheep with no attachments. ~~It finally sunk in~~ Stuff you said made sense. ~~Guess~~ I'm sort of like a needle on a lodgepole pine

After grad 2 heard he'd split



(C) 1984  
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17 lines

*He glowed at me during  
all thru grad ceremony he glowed at*

# BASIC RELATIVITY: THE FELINE FACTOR

Glenna Holloway

The fourth dimension

is better understood now

living with a life form

that claims the realm of clocks

and calendars as its own.

The lesson wanders home

circuitous orbits of shadow and shine,

skyward tail aquiver with equations

ending in a distinctive warp

its wearer owes to lunar times

advanced in arcane ritual.

Between lives out there

my lap is a warm space station

sometimes not fully approved.

Slowly, I learn minute increments

of day and night while waiting

for the sidewise approach of forgiveness.

Our eyes locked. "How long since you seen him?"

"A year and a half."

He ran his big hand down his cheek. "I'm--I'm sorry, Miss<sup>us</sup> Colbert." He turned to go. "Uh- by the way, if you hear some racket from down ~~by~~ <sup>at</sup> the south field, don't worry about it. There's a rattlesnake nest ~~there~~ <sup>down</sup> near where I leave my horse. I'm gonna clean 'em out."

"Is that what the gun is for?"

"Wha-- How'd you--" His hand slapped the butt thru his shirt.

"Do you believe in God, Shad?"

"Uh- yes'm. I guess that's <sup>just</sup> one thing I do believe in. Why?"

"Then give me your word in the name of Almighty God that you'll never under any circumstances bring a gun to school again." <sup>and a be</sup>

"Are you sayin' my word is good enough--or ~~are you~~ gonna frisk ~~me~~ <sup>me</sup> from now on?"

"Your promise before God is sufficient. I won't mention it again."

I gave him a heavy alternate assignment to the essay which he completed without complaining. Afterward he seemed to apply himself more and I became ~~less resentful of him.~~ <sup>Thomas</sup>

When the patriotic ~~essays~~ <sup>Thomas</sup> were all read, the stars and stripes were flying high. I commended the work and mouthed the ~~proper~~ <sup>expected</sup> homilies in summation while my inside voice still shouted, "No, I don't want my husband fighting in some stinking jungle for people who wouldn't know how to practice democracy if they won it." Shad kept quiet and let the whole thing be. And so did I.



As families stroll on paths beside the lake.  
They toss their words (this year like shuttle-cocks  
Not furtively as men long disciplined  
But like young patients now relieved of ache,  
As revolution ends in paradox.



Afterward he applied him<sup>self</sup>/diligently. Gradually I became less resentful of him. And gradually I came to terms with my own ambiguities. By the end of the year he had earned his graduation.

At commencement I made one last effort to change his mind. It was no longer a canned recitation of prescribed dogma. And when he left, my tears were for ~~him~~ <sup>a boy</sup> who was making a wrong move I felt he'd always regret.

Seven months later I got this letter from him. He was about to ship out for Vietnam. 91

I'll try not to embarrass you~~self~~ with any bad English or misspelled words, but I have to let you know that I didn't let myself get herded off like a dumb sheep with no stake in anything and no attachments. I may not be any smarter but my head's more together thanks to your brand of glue. It finally sank in that I'm part of this land. Going farther back than most. Guess I'm like a needle on a lodgepole pine. I know the limbs have a blight and the trunk's got borers 93

*Last year in school,*

*243 at remember 311*

*framed still*  
Your letter hangs on my classroom wall.

I'll always

~~again~~  
*again*

~~I~~ remember, Shad. I remember as I hold my husband's good hand and read your name on the shiny new monument, remember the medals you won before you finally fell. All the way to the forest floor. One more needle to nurture the roots of the lodgepole pine.

*58  
243  
301*



Seven mos. later I got this letter from him.  
He was about to ship out for Vietnam.