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When I Taught My Last Class

Joe LaCroix

A student raised her hand and asked,

“Professor, why are square roots important?
When I visit my favorite place in the woods
and lie down at the foot of a tall pine –
its surface roots swell up, strong and round,
stretching out like arms that comfort me.”

“Pay attention,” I said. “This is on the test.”

The student raised her hand again.

“Professor, how are the laws of sine and cosine helpful?
When I walk through the marshland near the harbor,
I see the beach plum flowers reaching for sunshine –
the incoming tide busy with its chore, refreshing everything.
These signs assure me of the goodness of life –
A special happiness for living, as I do, as I must do.”

“Pay attention,” I said. “This is on the test.”

The student raised her hand once more.
“I need to leave your class,” she said, and then left.

“Wait!” I said.
“Take me with you. Show me the roots
that can embrace; Show me the signs
that gift you with happiness.

Teach me to pay attention,
to the many ways old trees grow new branches.”