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Two Poems

Abstract
Two poems, "Other Lives" and "A Quivery Upper Lip."

Keywords
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Two Poems

by Charles Webb

OTHER LIVES

Not long after, in this life, I closed my guitar case for good, an A & R man from Arista—his plane to LA. delayed—drops into Seattle’s Embers for a drink. And stay, and stays . . .

Halfway through Practicum in Psychotherapy, I leap out of my beanbag chair. “We’re doing surgery with stream-rollers,” I scream, and head North, where I work as a fishing guide, court backwoods girls, but marry the Great Trout Stream . . .

A last growth-spurt takes me to 5’11”, 175—enough to make the college baseball team. I’m no Derek Jeter, no Pee Wee Reese, but I out-hustle everyone and, at shortstop, lead Houston’s Astros to their first World Series victory. . .

Of course I also have a life where my pipe-cleaner spine bends me into a side show . . . one where Linda’s boyfriend brings, besides his fists, his dad’s shotgun, and I don’t see 17 . . .
one where I torture kittens, drop out of 7th grade, 
and marry a 300-pound alcoholic lesbian.

In some lives, Julie has our child, and I work 
twelve-hour days for nothing but the pay . . .
I strangle in the birth canal . . . I come back, 
paralyzed or missing limbs, from Vietnam, 
and wars where I’m not even American . . .

more lives than atoms in the stars over 
Baltimore on the October night (or was it too 
cloudy to see?) when an egg Emily Jewell 
had carried for thirty-six years was set upon 
by shoals of sperm: millions of vanished futures, 
plus one half of me.

* * *

A QUIVERY UPPER LIP

Just as the poem starts running 
on its own—just as I’m getting the feel 
of the reins, starting to flow 
with the rhythm, and enjoy the pounding 
in my spine, earth bounding by 
under my feet, wind whipping my hair 
as the crowd howls—just as I hope 
the poem will last forever, 
it turns a corner I hadn’t seen 
coming, and hammers into the home 
stretch. I feel its knees flex, haunches 
tensing for the leap that will carry it 
into history; and I grow heavy 
with regret. The dead weight 
of all my losses slows these lines 
I can’t prolong much more, even 
if I add a pearl mist breathing 
off an Alpine lake that mirrors 
stands of lodgepole pine. Even if—
especially if—I add the love I’ve never 
ceased to miss. She knocks. I throw 
open my door, and step into the kiss 

I’ve dreamed about, and finally feel now,
in this poem which, like the kiss,
possesses a life of its own, and
a place in my life that will be
over all too soon—this
poem that has to end
(so long) right here.
Right here and
now. Good-
bye. Good-
bye. . .

Charles Harper Webb's latest book, Shadow Ball: New & Selected Poems, was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in Fall 2009. Recipient of grants from the Whiting and Guggenheim foundations, Webb directs Creative Writing at California State University, Long Beach.