

## My Muse · Charles H. Webb

He's short—shorter than I—thinner, with frizzier, redder hair: Woody Allenish, but gentle, which makes it worse; he wanted Abdul Jabbar's height, Schwarzenegger's muscles, Eastwood's face. His skin is thinner than mine, too. He can't read *The Times* without screaming. A distant mayoral race,

court ruling, car-jacking, mystery virus makes him seethe. Picture the response to his own termites, insurance hikes, full audit by the IRS? He wrote a book called *Everyday Outrages*—unpublished, naturally. He works as a lounge guitarist though he loathes club owners, Top 40, and drunks.

He's nearly scored eight record deals: *The Tantalus Predicament*, he calls it, hoping for a best-seller. He married a beautiful blonde, but she wanted him to be “more mainstream”—i.e., rich. After two years of monochromatic bickering, they divorced. A year later, she's sharing a one-bedroom

in Topanga with an apprentice psychic surgeon. “The main theme of modern life is the humiliation of the protagonist,” he likes to say. Actually likes to. Left on my own, I could never invent a man who, to stand out from the crowd, replaced his legs with a calliope blaring “Darktown Strutters Ball.”

I see a lightbulb as a glass shell surrounding tungsten filaments, not a cell imprisoning a tiny Thomas Edison, so irate his body glows. Lately though, my muse has mellowed, or his level of testosterone has dipped, or maybe he's worn out from pummeling stupidities. Anyway, he's dictating

more words of praise, fewer of contempt.  
He says that people need to hope more,  
the less reason there is. He admits  
that he's been anorexic for acceptance,  
bulimic for love. If he runs off and joins  
a commune, my poems, will I still need you?