

THE PROSE POEM: AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Volume 8 | 1999

A Stockbroker Dreams A Story, Charles H. Webb

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Charles H. Webb

A STOCKBROKER DREAMS A STORY,

and tells it to three friends.

The world looks better to them instantly. Giggling like kindergartners, each skips away "to change my life."

"This must be a *peak experience*," the broker thinks. "The 90% of the brain people don't use, just worked for me!"

He sits to write his story down, but can't remember all of it. There were Clydesdales and albinos, he's sure, and action verbs—*escalate* and *vault* and *terrorize* and *decompose*—as well as nouns like *brethren*, *cistern*, *Boraxo*, *grandmother*, *cement mixer*. And the phrase Telegram for Mr. Nosehair—how did that fit in?

He calls his three friends. One has made a million in the stock market that hour. One has just married a beautiful heiress "with the kindest heart in the world." One has fulfilled his lifelong dream to be a "narchaeologist."

Each recalls a few words—*callipygian*, *hump*, *pseudo-encephalitis*, *string-saver*, *philodendrons in spring breeze*. These just confuse him more.

The story shifts, distorting as he gropes for it, like a cellophane bag floating in the sea.

He plays a relaxation tape, "Machu Pichu," hoping to fall back into the dream. Instead he dreams he's trying to dig sapphires out of concrete with a plastic spoon.

He wakes from that dream to find his story more faded than before. This is what happened to Coleridge, writing "Kubla Khan." Some farmer knocked, demanding payment for a cheese, and cut the poem off at the hip.

"Damn it," he howls, kicks a chair, and wakes up in his bed.

"What's wrong?" his wife mumbles. "You kicked me... .."

He tells about his dreams, including as much of the story as he can. After breakfast, he starts to write everything down. But it's like trying to grasp smoke.

His wife remembers he said *catalepsy*, *cataracts*, *catamaran*, and either *annihilate*, or *prevaricate*—"something with *ate* in it."

Starting at his empty page, he grinds his teeth, and feels himself waking from another dream.

"Oh no," he thinks. "Not the dream within a dream within a dream. Not waking and waking and waking...."

His story—the masterpiece that could redeem his life—keeps dwindling: a snowball in the sun . . . a birthmark under skin creme . . . traces of a pimple, smaller every day . . . a planet knocked from orbit, moving off in a black sky . . .