

For Lewis Carroll, Hans Christian Andersen & Me

By Christopher Stolle

Pining for singers and debutante Lolitas:
Stories told about fragile yet strong heroines
 who could enjoy us and love us if they knew us.
Hiding our personas within twisted portraits
 in which we hang ourselves with piano wire.
Little diversions divide us from Venn circles
 to try to ease our pain, our glory, our confusion.
Surrounding ourselves in our unkempt illnesses—
 wrapped up like shiny gifts no one wants to open.
All around us question motives, desires, and sanity,
 but they don't know how jealousy swells within.
Bursting with creativity but missing life's simple pleasures—
 someone to help; someone to share; someone to love.
We linger in shadows but bring brightness to others in words—
 unable to shake off demons that suck our marrow.
Dreaming about picturesque scenes and frolicking children
 but being pulled back by obscure and sacred oaths.
Who says we can't have our cake and carefully eat it too
 when we know others in our situations who have?
Slipping on success; being kicked by failure; and dying alone.

Deemed Medically Frail

For Anton Stolle (November 24, 1856 – December 23, 1954)

By Christopher Stolle

As I walked in an older
dire district downtown—
near a river's East Fork
and where my communal
baptismal font conflagrates:

He spoke to me about inclines
but never specified whether
they went uptown or downwind.
You could feel yourself shift,
but you didn't sense direction.
"You'll feel a pull," he'd say,
"but you can't resist Newton."

He spoke to me about shadows
creeping into your gentle gait
but never sidestepping your path.
You could see them hovering,
but you can't pull their strings.
"You'll never control them," he'd say,
"but you can spoil them with light."

He spoke to me about For Sale signs
littering every other house in town
and how ghosts are good memories.
You could tell that people had left,
but you didn't see replacements.
"You'll never turn this around," he'd say,
"but you can still find a way out."

He spoke to me about railroad tracks
and train whistles and hopping hobos
and how fast sound travels in silence.
You could feel ground rumble under you,
but nothing ever came to pick you up.

Writing Raw

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“You’ll travel a long road,” he’d say,
“but you’ll only go backward from here.”

He spoke to me about ancient bridges
and his name etched in blue-gray metal
and whether there’d be another war.
You could look across horizons,
but you couldn’t imagine changes.
“You’ll believe new truths,” he’d say,
“but you’ll have to lose your faith.”

Tragedies and Railroad Tracks

For Jimmy and Paul

By Christopher Stolle

They tell me her parents
buried Marie
with her grandmother's sons.
They died young too,
but they had
lived.

Across sacred Brick Church land
rest Marie's great-great-grandparents.
Panhandle Grain No. 41
killed
Adam and Rachel as they
crossed train tracks
in their tried-and-true buggy.

Less than a decade after
Marie's silent birth,
a tractor would pin her grandfather
underneath.
He cradles his sons
and his unmet granddaughter,
singing a lullaby
about being
grateful.

Christopher Stolle bio: Christopher Stolle's poetry has appeared in more than 100 magazines in several countries, including Labyrinth (Indiana University Honors Program), The Plaza (Japan), El-Shaddai (Singapore), Poetechniciens (England), Ultimate Ceasefire (Australia), the Tipton Poetry Journal, Flying Island, and Recursive Angel, and in three anthologies (In Our Own Words: A Generation Defining Itself [volumes 1 and 4; 1997 and 2002] and Reckless Writing [2012]). Poet's Market entries noted him as a contributor to various magazines (1997–2000), and he has also published two nonfiction books with Coaches Choice: 101 Leadership Lessons From Baseball's Greatest Managers (2013) and 101 Leadership Lessons From Basketball's Greatest Coaches (2015). He works as a book editor and lives in Richmond, Indiana—the cradle of recorded jazz.