

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/2

Rob Carney

Best Healing Witch in Louisiana

Processional

"At least that's how I figure it," is what she'd say
at the end of every story. "That orange one across the street

is full of sass. It needed its ass kicked.

And my Mackie's the cat to do it, too. He's the man."

Mackie, short for Mackinaw,
her favorite kind of lake trout

since sometimes they grow to be enormous,
bigger than lies, bigger than a kindergartner.

"He probably saved you a car wash," she tells me,
"kept your tires from getting sprayed on.

At least that's how I figure it," and then she'd nod.
Or she'd lean in and elbow me,

say, "It's time you got her dress off, Handsome.
Women don't want it so courtly. I'm not wrong."

Madame Kafelnikov.

That woman was some kind of neighbor.

I used to sit on the porch with her,
believing and believing,

and the only thing that seemed unreal
was the time, the clock outrunning the evening.

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/2

Arrival

But I'm jumping ahead. And she'd have hated that,
said, "Don't you get there before I've gotten there."

A story is never for the teller, you know.
At least that's how I figure it."

She's the reason I got my apartment; she gave the landlord
her approval, said, "Lighten up, Babineaux,

forget the deposit,
a fool could see he's a good kid."

My story was the reason she liked me.
About walking home from school.

I needed to pee but was too shy to knock on someone's door,
even on the door I knew:

Stacy Purgatorio, Meeker Elementary,
three seats over and one row back in class.

I couldn't make it in time, ran home
embarrassed and furious.

She said, "Your mama just over-taught politeness, that's all.
Of course you can use the bathroom. Come on in."

Burial

She healed things without even trying to,
and put spells on bedrooms to keep out mosquitos,

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/2

and could cure a cold
by slapping you in the face.

I don't know why it worked; it just did.
All kinds of minor miracles.

One time the bulb burned out in the lamp,
and all she did was talk to it— Are you feeling okay?

Should I move you by the window?
things like that— as if the lamp were a person.

I was sitting right there in the dark
when it turned back on.

Another time she found a bird in her kitchen—not stiff,
but dead by Mackie's water dish.

She lit three candles, opened the door, and it flew
as soon as a breeze swept its feathers.

Maybe that's why I figured
she would never die; if the time came,

she'd heal herself.
But no....

I heard later it was quite a funeral:
geese and egrets and pelicans,

hundreds,
flying over and landing on the cemetery pond.

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/2

Recessional

When I moved away to Utah, she sent me a note:

"That's probably a crazy place.

But you're there now, so be about finding
instead of looking back.

I figure you know what I mean."
After that she never wrote again.

I haven't forgotten, though.
And when I'm sick, I mix up her medicine:

cheap red wine with a shot of Jaeger,
and Geno Delafosse on the stereo. "Like a slap," she'd say,

"without the aftershock.
Now come on over here, I'll pour you another,"

my old neighbor, Madame Kafelnikov,
Wielder of Charms, the Exorcist of Ordinary....

I know there's a heaven for her.
Even if it's only in my memory.

I imagine she'd tell me
she figures it that way too.