

Premonition

by Christine Callahan

Uncle Tommy kept his room sparse. He lacked ambition to acquire goods. He spent his time wisely, smoking in bed, watching television, sleeping or playing the ponies. On this fine October morning, he slept hard, wheezing and coughing. He awoke to his devil-may-care nature. He rarely pestered himself about being on time for his kitchen job. He gave no mind to the borrowed money he lost on *Lighting Rabbit* in the 4th race. Abruptly, self-scrutiny seized hold. "What a load of shit! 10 to 1, 10 to 1, a sure thing - my ass! That's the last time I listen to Railroad Jack about anything!" Realizing he missed the ballgame, he fumbled for the knob on his father's transistor radio. The bed was so broad; he needed to wriggle this way and that. Flopping to the left, he grasped the dials. The bed didn't creep him out, even though his own father had died on it. Uncle Tommy wasn't easily spooked. He wasn't afraid of dead people's things the way most folks are. Now this bed was his. He considered it a gift. A gift his father may not have freely given him when alive. Plus it was vacant. His sister, Elaine agreed he could stay in Grandpa's room. Until he got on his feet, that is, whenever that will be.

Aunt Elaine took possession of the house. She never went into Grandpa's room after both Mama Tess and Grandpa were buried. The room got buried too. Boxes of old clothes blocked the doorway. Furniture became barricaded by knickknacks, cartons of shoes, broken lamps, and heaps of old mail. Submerged. Clogged. Dark. It took a fierce tropical storm to pry open the windows. When it finally ripped open, a fresh dampness released the musty air and wandering souls.

"Tommy, Tommy, are you up?" A shriek came from the kitchen. "You're gonna be late for that bus, and if you think I'm to drive you-I ain't!" Elaine took a slow drag on her cigarette. Held it over the cupped palm of her other hand. The long ash fell. She knew something was wrong just by the sound of the whizzing static in between the stations. Elaine was keen on knowing things. Premonitions. She sometimes knew who was on the phone; just by the way it rang. She described it as a queer feeling, a chilly wind blowing through her and then she would know. The first time it happened was on account of the bird. Her mama Tess had won it at the church bazaar and tried to teach it to talk. It wasn't no parrot though, but everyone went along because of its exotic yellow vibrant feathers and twitchy ways. So with mama Tess always trying to give it speaking lessons,

we all just thought it must have been a parrot and all of us start repeating words. It never did talk but it did do some fancy squawking when you came into the room, which could encouraged you to repeat "Pretty lady, Pretty Lady". Sometimes you'd just want it to say, something, just for mama's sake. Anyway on that day of Elaine's first premonition, it was just around the time she could cross the street on her own. Elaine was riding her shiny chrome bicycle around the block. It had a bright blue foam banana seat, sparking silver gears and a shrill sounding bell. She turned the corner and saw some neighborhood kids all lined up for the ice cream truck. She stopped directly in front of the big, white refrigerator truck. She studied the peeling decals closely try to decide. Then it hit her, the queer wind. How could she just go on buying ice cream when her mama's sweet bird was dying? Before she had time to think how or why she could know this, she tore on down the street ring the bell saying "pretty lady, pretty lady". When she flung the door wide open, she saw it was true. The bird was dead. Mama sat crying in the kitchen mumbling that she was really on the cusp of speaking and ain't a shame.