

Clouds' Tears

by Beth Middleton

The long moan of the big wooden door interrupted the silence of the room I was entering. I paused for a moment, waiting for my eyes to adjust to the sudden change in surroundings. A bright beam of light radiated through the window across the room, and I could barely make out a dark silhouette of an old woman hunched over in a rocking chair. A stale stench of rose talcum powder, and camphor, and antiseptic, and dying flowers permeated the air.

The clicking of my high heels against the wooden floor sounded off like the popping of gun-powder caps as I approached. Stopping behind her, I heard the leaden, rhythmic "creak, creak" of her rocking chair and her slow, gasping breaths keeping time with the rocker's "creak, creak, creak." I noticed the matted, tangled, silver curls which covered her head in sparse patches. Her pathetic hands dangled on the arms of the chair, all shrivelled and weathered, with the dark brown speckles splattered on her grayish skin. Her hands were fixed and immobile, except for an occasional arthritic twitch. One hand was clasping the stem of an old withered daisy that she had taken out of the now dried floral arrangement sitting on the antique table.

I looked at the old woman and forced a smile, but she never saw it. She had not withdrawn her eyes for a second from their set gaze at the darkening clouds outside the window. I saw a large round drop of water slowly creep down the side of her face, from her eye to her cheek, until it fell off and hit the floor. She looked unusually calm and peaceful, and one slight sigh interrupted her gasping breaths. Then, the old woman strained to look at me as she placed the dried up daisy she had been clutching in her wrinkled hand into my palm. As the dead flower fell into my palm, it crumbled into dusty particles.

It had turned very dark outside. The drizzle collected in small beads that streamed across the glass as the wind blew them into a million thin rivers. And as the drops became bigger, I remembered that Granny had always called them clouds' tears.

