

Excerpt – Joe's Story

In the attic I sit in the old armchair by the window.

Footsteps on the stairs wake me but I don't move. There's Tiffany. Standing in front of the old dresser. She doesn't see me. Opening Maudie's jewellery box she takes out the bracelets. Maudie's bracelets. Puts them on her chubby wrists and smiles as she twirls around – shaking her hands – making the silver jingle the way Maudie did – loving the sound. She looks almost pretty when she smiles. She goes to the armoire. Pulls out a lace shawl that Maudie made. Years it took and it is perfect. Tiffany hauls a chair to the dresser and stands on it to see herself full length in the mirror. Dances with herself in Maudie's bracelets. Maudie's shawl. Humming as she moves – almost graceful. Stretches her arms out as far as they will go and the shawl drapes softly. She is a butterfly.

I move to stand, and frighten her from her perch on the chair. She lands with a thud on the floor. Just a fat child in a mess of lace and silver. A look of terror on her lumpy little face.

It's okay Tiffany. I didn't mean to startle you. Are you hurt? I need to comfort her but I don't think I've spoken more than two words to her since I gave up and left them all alone – but for that Raven who broke my heart with her hunger. And look where that has got me. Poor crumpled thing crawls out of Maudie's finery and is gone.

I go back to the chair by the window and sit. Raven is still in the garden. She freezes suddenly. Looks wildly around for a moment then slowly, calmly raises her head. I think she is looking at me – though how can she see to the third floor – through the tiny

window – into my eyes? I can barely make out her features but the darkness that takes over her smile? That I can see. That I can feel. As soon as it begins it ends and she is back to playing with the pup. I can almost hear her laughter. And I wonder if I imagined the last minute of my life or if it was real. But Maudie knows and she strokes my face where I've begun to cry. Careful, Joe, my darling Joe. Careful.