

## Immaculate

### Chapter One

Her lamp flickered against the black as she crept soundlessly down the corridor. She heard the old woman cough and quickened her pace.

“It won’t be much longer now,” she thought “I wonder what will happen to us when she is gone?”

“Mairi, “ a shrill voice whispered, “Hurry she is fading fast!”

Mairi sprinted the last few steps into her Grand’s room. She surveyed the tableau in front of her.

“So frail and weak but she commands this entire household... how?”

“Mairi, the pitcher, now”, her mother insisted.

Mairi hoisted the pitcher and carried the moist earthenware vessel to the bed. The old woman who lay there was fighting for breath. Mairi surveyed her feeble form while her mother prepared the tonic. Papery skin stretched over wide eyes. Eyes that were once renowned for their clarity and beauty had become vacant and rheumy.

Her figure was once short and wide-boned, what Mairi’s mother called “peasant-petite”. Her robust flesh had melted away so that her bones jutted through alabaster skin. Mairi’s Grand, who had once been the picture of Mediterranean health, now looked like an underfed calf.

The old woman coughed and sputtered as she drank the tonic. She could barely swallow the medicine but she still ruled the family’s entire fate.

“Go, let me speak with your mother”, she croaked to Mairi.

Mairi stepped from the room and shut the door quietly behind her, however she stayed pressed to the wall, trying to listen.

“Listen to me Amana, your daughter is in great danger. She possesses great beauty but is very naïve. She has your faith but I am afraid that it will not be enough to protect her when I am gone.”

“Grand, you are imagining things. There is no one in this village that would harm Mairi, everyone here loves her.”

“Amana the threat is real, you must listen to me. I will not have my son’s house and my granddaughter’s reputation sullied because you believe that God will watch over her. You must protect her from this threat!”

“Mairi,” a voice called behind her “You silly girl, are you listening at doors? I should tell your mother of your poor manners.”

She turned to see her Uncle Bartimaeus, the very threat that she was certain her grandmother warned against.

“I was just listening to make sure that Grand didn’t start coughing again, “ Mairi lied.

“The lie is plain on your face child, what were they discussing that held your interest so? Whatever it may be you must go now, it is very late and you have already said your goodbyes. You have no business in the affairs of death”

“Yes Uncle” Mairi consented. She turned to go.

“Mairi?”

“Yes Uncle?”

“Sweet dreams”

Mairi shuddered and crept down the hall. She climbed into her bed and drew the covers over her body. Despite the heat of the evening and the bedcovers, Mairi felt cold from her head to her toes.