

Sneak Peek
Of

‘The First’

By

A.K. Barr

The stars and crescent moon glowed in the night. Mt. Imarcu was a large island; in its center was Malice's compound. Outside, near the rocky sea, was a spot where many *factions* enforced their torture and punishment on others. They wanted everyone to witness what would happen if they stepped out of line—death. Villagers watched as guards dragged me to the center, where a massive fire burned in the chilly night.

I shivered—part from the cold, and part from sudden, unexpected fear—I would be lying if I said I was not a tad afraid, not of dying, but of what comes after. Is it painful? Is it darkness? Or just nothing? Taking a deep breath, I forced myself to ignore the ache in my chest and awaited my fate.

I stood there, listening to the demon explain what my crime was—my crime, HA! I had stopped a demon from beating a woman to death in front of her child. My crime was stepping out of line and laying hands on a demon.

“Anyone who disobeys us will receive punishment under the law, as we have told you many times before. Our Lord Malice has

come tonight to hand down this girl's sentence personally."

The blood in my veins ran cold. Malice! For the first time that day, I shook violently, and my heart twisted—not out of fear, but utter anger.

Malice was the Dark Lord who had ruthlessly tortured and murdered my mother right in front of me many years ago. Standing tall, I gulped back the bile that threatened to surface as Malice strolled into the center. His cold, dark eyes scanned the crowd. The air in the clearing shifted, spreading fear. Even the sky turned from clear to stormy.

No one spoke. Malice's demeanor spoke volumes. The only sound in the clearing was the drops of rain beginning to fall. Malice bore the mark of a snake along the side of his neck that I had never seen before. He met my gaze, and another shiver went down my spine.

Malice grinned wickedly. "Tonight, we must execute four women who disobeyed the laws I have set up to make this world more... durable. I give you food, clothes, and shelter. In return, you are only asked to work off your debt and follow the laws I have put into place to

keep everyone on the same page.” Again, no one dared to speak.

“Don’t blame me for your inability to listen and follow the rules. You brought this on yourselves. If I do not punish you, we would have a society where things would get out of hand and chaotic, a world you do not want to live in.”

The wind picked up, blowing through my hair. The waves crashed fiercely as thunder and lightning streaked across the sky. Malice finished his speech; cheers erupted from his demonic followers.

Without warning, two strong, oversized hands lifted me from the ground. My pulse increased by the second as they dragged me across the terrain. Malice placed a stiff hand around my neck; my right eye twitched uncontrollably. I summoned as much saliva as I could in my dry mouth and spat on his smug face. Satisfaction coursed within me as fury blazed in his dark eyes. Malice’s fist met my face, and pain struck me for a third time that night. Except I didn’t care—rage, disgust, and malice washed over me. Without worrying about the consequences, I scratched his

haughty face with all I had. Blood appeared on his cheek, and gasps rippled through the night.

We stared at one another, and a glimmer of rage and lightning flashed across his face. Seething, Malice tossed me to the *earth*, and all the air left my lungs. Covered in dirt and blood, my body throbbed. I endured the aching pain, but did not move. Trying to focus on breathing, I kept my eyes closed until hands gripped my body once more, yanking me towards the water as thunder boomed.

Malice leaned in and whispered into my right ear. “Too bad, you’ll never know why I killed your mother.”

My eyes widened as I met his wicked gaze, and I tensed up. My heart stopped, and the blood drained from my face. “If you see your mother again, you can ask her why.”

Shocked by his words, I did not notice the ball of fire he hurled at me until I felt the flames on my body. The force of the blow tossed me into the *air*, and I screamed as the *fire* consumed my body. *Lightning* struck mid-flight, hitting the ring my mother gave me, and my right hand. The ring beamed

brightly *under the cover of darkness*. I shut my eyes from the fierce glow, and darkness filled my mind as I crashed into the depths of the *sea*.

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