

Season 1, Episode 1 – Lord Berin Land

It'd happened on impulse. The man had been a well-dressed boor, getting into her space and thinking she should hang on his every whim; she'd seen too many people like him in Syngorn and since to be lulled into complacency by easy signs of wealth. He'd insulted her upon rejection, tried to intimidate her into compliance, folded into cowardice immediately when she'd pressed the knife against him. He'd run away so quickly he'd left his hat and coin purse behind, and she'd taken the coins.

And why not?

He'd made her day worse with his presence, and a man like him would barely notice a few missing coins whereas those coins would make all the difference for her brother and her. It was the price he paid for his life and her time.

She'd forgotten that the very wealthy could behave like the dragons she hated; maybe that was why she instinctively despised people like him. She'd forgotten, and she would pay for it.



She noticed the shadow following her quickly into the next day.

Her brother was good at sneaking around and she'd gotten used to keeping an eye out for his pranks; whoever was following her was not so good as her brother, but he was close. She spent an hour looking through the markets, checking the bounty boards, looking for work and keeping an eye out for either her brother or her stalker. Of her brother there was nothing. Of her stalker... silver eyes and a scar from eye to chin. He trailed her, keeping a polite distance, waiting for his moment.

Clever enough not to work alone, his two cronies were obvious hirelings, obviously expendable – the sort of people a person like him hired to be a distraction. She wouldn't kill them; she and her twin had taken jobs like that out of desperation.

She picked her moment down an alley for one, laying the boy down behind a dumpster. Knocking him unconscious was as easy as breathing, and she wondered if she'd ever been so frail. She made sure he wouldn't fall into the muck of Westruun's less important streets. The other fell shortly after, and she dragged him onto a crate.

“You're not killing them.”

The voice was a soft whisper. She turned, surprised anyone had seen her, long used to being unnoticed. The woman at the alley's end was a half-elf like her, but well-dressed, pampered. Her simple blouse and skirts were grey trimmed with gold, and those colors put her instantly on edge.

“I wouldn't want him to catch cold,” she said. The other half-elf nodded, expression sad. “Do we know each other?”

“No, but I know someone that wants to know you,” the strange woman said. She took no step closer. “My name is Elly.”

“Elly,” she repeated.

“Well... not really, but it's what he could easily pronounce.” A small smile, still sad, reminded her of all the times she and her twin had worn similar expressions, forced to feign happiness in a world

that despised them. "What do you answer to?"

It was a small question, but not one she wanted to answer.

"If you'll excuse me," she said, moving to the other end of the alley, not taking her eyes off Elly.

"My name is Lyre."

This voice was right beside her ear, so she twisted her hips and drove the point of her elbow to where the voice had come from. There was the satisfying crunk of cartilage breaking, the pointed tingle of muscle forced into sudden action. She turned into her strike, knee rising to find the silver-eyed shadow's groin. The man doubled over and she pushed him down, feeling her lips curl into a lop-sided smirk. Her heart was racing but she pretended at a calm she did not feel as she let the bow drop from her shoulder and nocked an arrow.

"The pleasure was all yours," she said, staring down at him as he held what was left of his manhood. Her eyes went to Elly but her vision was blurry from adrenaline and she was having trouble focusing. She backed up a step, her breathing shallow as her steady arm faltered. She took a breath, risked closing her eyes as she shook her head to clear it, opened her eyes and saw the glint of a needle in her side.

"Fuck," she said, and passed out.



She was moving before she was fully conscious.

Instinct drove her; she'd been placed sitting, back to a wall, and she was moving and reaching for a bow that wasn't there. The chain pulled taught before she'd gone more than four feet, the steel collar slamming against the front of her throat. Eyes watering and choking, she slammed back against the wall and reaching for her missing knife.

"Little better than an animal." Her eyes narrowed as she recognized the voice; Lord Berin, that piece of shit. She wiped the salt from her eyes enough that she could see him talking to Elly. "Like you, back before I brought you to heel."

"Yes, darling," Elly said, head bowed. His hand, she noted, was on her ass.

"Did you find out her name?" Berin asked. The other half-elf shook her head no and he sighed, getting closer to her. She hadn't quite caught her breath when he slapped her with one hand and grabbed her throat with the other, pushing her back against the wall until dancing phantom bears fled across her vision. "Do you even have a name, girl?"

"Of course I have a name, idiot," she growled, reaching for the knife that wasn't there again. He skipped back away as she tried to kick him, moving out of what space the chain chaffing her neck allowed. He laughed at her, letting her struggle as he pulled Elly closer to him. The other half-elf's hand bunched into fists but she did nothing as he groped her, enjoying watching his captive strain herself into exhaustion.

"Do you know why I like half-elves?" he asked, and she couldn't have cared less. His piercing blue eyes caught her, held her. "It's because your elven parent doesn't care about you and your human parent is always eager for coin to be rid of a strange little bastard. Or they die and no one is left to care."

She screamed at him then, every cool glance and half-acceptance from Syngorn searing through her memory. She turned and yanked on the chain binding her to the wall, kicked her feet, used all her weight and leverage but the chain held. Finally, drenched in sweat and breathing painful, she stopped and sagged, eyeing him warily.

“Come now,” he said, and he sounded so reasonable. He had moved away from her to the far end of the room, was playing with her dagger. Her eyes fell on her longbow – if she could get her hands on that- “Tell me how you prefer to be called. It's such a small thing.”

She glared and said nothing.

Elly was sitting at his feet now, eyes wide and full of tears, but the other half-elf said nothing as he shrugged his pet off and approached her, reached for her. She tried to bat him away but she was exhausted and there was nowhere to go.

He shoved her against the wall and put his hand between her shoulderblades, pushing her chest against the wall so hard that breathing was difficult. She felt his other hand cupping her ass, running down the curve of it, groping her inner thighs.

“I'll kill you,” she seethed, and his grip tightened until she gasped.

“I've heard that almost a dozen times from little pets just like you,” he said, his breath out on the point of her ear, on her nape. “And yet...”

She screamed and tried to push off the wall but he held her there until, panting, she sagged and whimpered.

“Your name, pet,” he demanded.

She said nothing.

“Elly, be a dear and get the paddle,” he commanded. “You know the one. It's the same one I used on you.”

She heard rather than saw the other half-elf leave the room. She said nothing as Berin continued to grope her, said nothing as Elly returned and dropped to her knees, holding the paddle up like an offering. Berin took it with his groping hand and she felt it press against her ass.

“You can stop this at any time.”

SLAM

She had been stabbed in the past. Perforated with arrows. Splashed with acid, set on fire, even hit with lightning. She'd born that pain like the ache her father had inflicted on her, but this was different – held in place, helpless, screaming, this was more intimate. The paddle kept finding her ass as Berin found his rhythm, smashing into her again and again, driving the air from her lungs, forcing her to writhe, her throat like sandpaper from screaming.

“You can stop this at any time,” he repeated.”

SLAM

“Vex!” she screamed, between one paddle strike and the next. “Vex'ahilia!”

He hit her once more, let her sag against the wall, sobbing.

“Vex. Vex'ahilia.” He spoke her name like it was insult. “Very good. Now, when you hear me call you pet, you'll know that I could be calling you by your name instead and I am choosing not to.



The first night Vex was missing, Vax spoke with a book dealer.
The book dealer did not survive.