

# Backstory of Lizrika Oriquinal

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Lizrika Oriquinal was born into the clan of Oriquinal, defenders of Oakpool, a sacred forest surrounded by the ocean waves. Her elven father, a fierce warrior by the name of Thervan, was part of an ancient lineage that had protected the woods since time immemorial, helped by its strategic position in an isolated peninsula, but also by secret magics – the true treasure of the land.

These magics, as well as the holy trees they emanated from, were coveted by the Order of the Oak, a sect of mystics, sorcerers and wizards who tried for generations to invade her land. But letting them in would mean the destruction of Oakpool, and so the clan kept its enemies at bay, and surrounded the forest with invisible barriers and hidden spells, that no soul could enter uninvited.

But Lizrika was not an elf, not like the others. Her mother, Eva, was a human hunter and adventurer, who met Thervan in one of her many trips. The couple was a loving one, and it was not long before Liz was born under the safety of the woods, but it simply could not last – Eva was not meant to set roots, and her hunter diet clashed with the vegetarian traditions of the clan. One day, when Liz was only 2, the will to run and hunt called Eva's name, and she vanished into the wider world again.

Despite her mixed blood and absent mother, Liz had a happy and peaceful childhood amongst the clansmen. From a very young age, she showed extreme interest and talent in archery, and she was shown the ways of survival in the wild.

When she turned 12, however, strange visions started haunting her. She dreamt being someone else, someone without shape, sometimes when she was fully awake. And a voice, mysterious and frightening, called her to her destiny – or so the voice said: she would be the one to join Oakpool with the wider world. The sweet promise of the hunt, just like her mother – but why did it feel so wrong?

As a full season passed, these visions grew stronger, and she became more and more confused. It felt as if the trees, the land, and even the water were new and strange, as if she had never set foot in the forest before. Until one day, while she was playing with the rabbits of the forest, the voice spoke again, stronger and more terrible than ever before. She felt a cold chill in her bones, as if her body was not her own. The voice commanded her: take your bow and arrow, and shoot the oldest oak. Shoot it at the second branch from the East and connect it with the outside world. She did not understand these words, but it did not matter: she found herself aiming at the tree, her arms moving with all the years of training – but was it her doing it? Suddenly she felt full of hatred, not a part of the forest anymore, as if her own kin had turned their backs on her, as if she had been kept out from her rightful place. A strange and terrible power coursed through her as she released the bolt, stronger than ever before.

She closed her eyes just for a moment, as the arrow passed right through its target, and when she opened them again something had changed. The old oak, so healthy just a second ago, turned brown and crumbled as if a thousand years had just passed by. As soon as the last branch hit the ground, a stone wall rose from the ground. Starting from the East border of Oakpool, it quickly took over the whole boundary of the forest, closing it in its embrace. The Order of the Oak had been waiting for this moment, and they rushed in, taken by a frenzy. Massive numbers of sorcerers and wizards flooded in, filling the air with murderous spells and slaughtering her kind without mercy. Everything was fire and blood. Everything was confusion. Panic. Despair.

When Liz woke up, it took her a second to realize what had happened. She desperately wished it had all been a dream, but no – she had passed out in the middle of the fight. She was lying down now in the nearby mountains, protected by the surviving members of the clan. She could see

it in their somber faces before she heard it in their words: Oakpool was no more. The Order had destroyed the forest, made it their land, and in the years to come they would have a new name for it: Stonepool, the mighty.

The elves had not given up their hope. Even with the memory of their dead, they would carry on, find a new forest, and recover into a strong tribe again. But Liz could not follow them, not with the terrible secret in her heart that it had been one of their own who had, after so many years, broken the protective spells. She knew, or hoped, that she had been possessed. How could she have wanted this? But the guilt was heavy in her heart, and she felt a stain in her soul that could not be washed away. As soon as she recovered, she wrote a letter for her father and quietly slipped away in the darkness of the night. She wished he would understand her reasons, but she would not be there by the time he read the tale.

Liz didn't know how long she walked. Armed with the longbow in her hands and the knowledge in her mind, she could survive as long as she wished in the wilds. It was safe away from it all – away from the sorcerers in the cities with their evil arts, away from the elves who might blame her for her sin. She wanted to make things right again, but how could she? It was only her, lost and alone, against the world, and Oakpool was dead. Sometimes she would hear that terrible voice again. Sometimes in her dreams, clear and terrible, and sometimes awake, like a whisper in the wind. It always left that chill in her bones, like eyes watching her in the night. Was it sorcerers again? She lost count of how many times she woke up in the middle of the night, convinced the Order had found her, only to be met by silence and the moon.

It was on one of these occasions – when the voice seemed particularly strong in the howling wind – that she found herself running to shelter towards a nearby forest. But there was something different this time – so many animals running around! As soon as she crossed the tree line, the wind died and a strange feeling came to her, the safety she had never felt since she left her home. She ran, no longer afraid, enjoying the bend of every tree and the chase with every fox and deer, until something made her stop. It was a silence that meant no more running around. Was she being ambushed? Where were all the animals gone? It was then she saw the huge wolves surrounding her. A whole pack, staring at her, teeth ready to bite. She took her bow in the softest motion she could conjure, slow and calm like a leaf, as the biggest

member of the pack came ever closer. She had no chance to take them all out, but she would not go down without a fight. She was ready to strike her opponent between the eyes when she noticed something – a change in attitude. Slowly, the wolf circled her, smelled her, hid its big teeth into a much more serene expression. Was it recognition in its eyes? The wolf's stare no longer meant danger, but curiosity. It took all her willpower to slowly drop her bow and sit down with the wolf. Completely defenseless, she instead softly raised her hand towards the beast's head and touched it, like she had done so many times in Oakpool. An infinitely long second later, the wolf sat down and enjoyed the pat. That moment she knew: she was home again.

Liz lived many years of her youth amongst the wolfs, hunting as one of them, honing her archery skills to perfection. She didn't trust any outsiders to the forest, always with an arrow ready to protect her pack. She had lost a home once, betrayed by her very hand. She would not lose one again. With the guilt heavy on her neck, she did her best to become a guardian to the forest like her father's lineage had been before. No evil would enter this land, no evil would leave unpunished. And no dark magic would possess her again – she was always alert, always in control.

Lonely as it may sound, it was not always just her and the animals. Interesting creatures crossed the forest, sometimes even made a home out of it. She met elves a few times, but nobody she recognized. Although she always stayed friendly to those outsiders who meant no harm, she could not trust anyone – and she dared not mention the Oriquinal clan, so nobody would recognize her and her secret. All in all it was a fulfilling life for her, but sometimes the longing was overpowering at night: she wondered where her family was, what adventures had they been through in all these years. But she couldn't just come back and ask, after all that happened. At least not yet.

A thought slowly crystallized in Liz's mind: evil was not just a problem for the forests. Evil existed everywhere, and it needed to be rooted out. If it was her destiny to be part of the wider world, like the voice said, maybe it was time to find it and stop it. The morning before she turned 70, she knew the time had come. She packed her few belongings, said a final goodbye to her pack, and walked. It was time to venture into the unknown to vanquish the evil in the world and atone for her sins. Maybe this way, one

day she could clear her name and go back to her kind.

