

AESOP'S FABLES: SEASON ONE

Written By

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EPISODE I

BLACK SCREEN.

We hear the sounds of muted screams and heavy panting, raging sea reverberating in the background. Then, a distinct *splash!*

FADE IN.

EXT. TROPICAL BEACH - DAY

An intense storm assaults the coastline, waves crashing, palm trees bending under gale-force winds, the world surreal and stenciled as if taken from a book of fairy tales.

Just offshore is a MAN (40s) floundering in the turbulent ocean, fighting to keep his bleeding head afloat.

He chokes on seawater, robes soaked and heavy, the chaotic storm threatening to pull him under.

CUT TO:

EXT. DENSE FOREST - EARLY MORNING

The scene is calm, the weather ideal, the forest looking sketched and dreamlike. Soft wind rustles lush and colorful leaves, exotic birds chirping in the background.

The same Man lies unconscious on a soft bed of moss, eyes closed and serene, his body healed, his robes dry.

The Man's eyes burst open, sitting up and sucking air into his lungs. He looks around, frantic and disoriented.

Surrounding him are glowing shards of GOLDEN EGGSHELL. He examines them in clear disbelief, beginning to panic.

He takes a moment to calm himself, his head searing with pain. He closes his eyes and rubs his temples, trying to think but only conjuring unintelligible memories.

Just then, a THIN VINE reaches out like a swift tentacle to ensnare his foot. He kicks at the vine but it wraps around his ankle, sharp thorns digging into his skin.

The Man thrashes on the ground, trying to shake off the vine but only causing it to wrap itself tighter, trapping him.

In the distance, he hears the rustling of a LARGE ANIMAL racing toward him. He thrashes harder, assuming the worst.

INTERCUT: ANIMAL PERSPECTIVE.

Through the underbrush we see flashes of fur and sharp teeth. The animal speeds toward the Man, zig-zagging through the dense forest. Twenty yards, then fifteen, then ten...

The Man shuts his eyes, bracing for the inevitable to come.

END INTERCUT.

Bursting through the brush is a SLENDER WOMAN covered in brown fur and a tight utility vest, sheath slung around her back. In her hands is a GOLDEN EGG that she holds tight.

Frantic, she doesn't notice the Man, tripping right over him.

WOMAN

What the--oof!

She lands hard in the dirt, egg flying from her clutches. The Man gapes. Before him sits a BIPEDAL FOX with the anatomy of a woman but the pointy-eared features of a beast.

The Fox scrambles to her feet, looking for the egg but spotting the Man first, their eyes locking, her jaw dropping.

WOMAN (FOX) (CONT'D)

AAAAAAH!!!

MAN

AAAAAAH!!!

The Fox backpedals. The Man remains on the ground, ensnared by the vine now snaking up to constrict him.

MAN (CONT'D)

Please. Whatever you are. Help me!

FOX

Whatever *I* am??

The Fox spots the golden egg intact, pulsating and reverberating with quiet power on the soft ground. Bright flowers begin to grow and bloom around it.

Relieved, she scoops up the egg and guards it close. We can see it glowing, hear it vibrating in her hands.

MAN

Please!

The vine wraps around the Man's torso and squeezes.

Beat. The Fox looks at him with pity.

In the distance we hear VICIOUS DOGS barking.

The Fox's head snaps toward the sound, neck hair bristling.

More barking--closer this time--accompanied by voices:

VOICES (O.S.)

This way! They went this way!

The Fox turns back to the Man. She opens her mouth to say something but reconsiders, taking one final look at him before sprinting opposite the voices, golden egg secure.

MAN

Wait! No, please, help.

The Fox exits into the underbrush.

The Man turns toward the approaching noises in desperation.

MAN (CONT'D)

Hey! Over here!

The vine reaches his neck and further tightens, his breath beginning to leave him.

Beat. The forest quiets, Man suffocating on the ground, when TWO BIPEDAL HOUNDS IN MEDIEVAL ARMOR leap through the brush, a ferocious blend of man and beast. They gasp.

HOUND ONE

Human!

They draw broad swords and hack away the vine with expert skill, surrounding the Man with brandished weapons, who breathes sharp air into his lungs, coughing.

Enter an UPRIGHT MONKEY fashioned in unassuming robes adorned with a red sash. He surveys the scene with human-like mannerisms, pensive, addressing the hounds:

MONKEY

Put away your swords.

They sheath their weapons, obedient.

MONKEY (CONT'D)

(to the Man)

Come on, stand up.

The Man stands, cautious. The Monkey dusts him off, curious.

MONKEY (CONT'D)

Where did you come from?

The Man thinks but shakes his head, coming up empty.

MONKEY (CONT'D)

Do you have a name?

MAN

I...can't remember.

MONKEY

What *do* you remember?

Beat. The Man wracks his brain. A carousel of random images flash in his mind, his head pounding.

MAN

An angel...imprisoned. And a Fox...

His voice trails, overcome with absurdity.

The Monkey places a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

MONKEY

Why don't you come with us.

The Monkey motions to the hounds, who escort the Man away.

Beat. Alone, the Monkey kneels to pick up a piece of golden eggshell--unnoticed by the hounds--still pulsating with a small daisy growing beneath.

He examines the shard with care, face troubled, scanning the forest before pocketing the shell and following the hounds.

Under cover of foliage, the Fox lingers to watch him go.

She exits.

CUT TO BLACK.

EPISODE II

FADE IN.

EXT. DESERT OUTCROP - DAY

At the base of a desert mountain is an outcropping of jagged rocks devoid of vegetation, tall cliffs shrouding the arid land in darkness.

Clamoring over the rocks are GROTESQUE SCORPIONS, horrific blends of human and arachnid, working together to build a GIANT BIRDCAGE made of ethereal material.

The SCORPION LEADER--hulking and barbaric with a thick scar across his chest--barks direction:

SCORPION LEADER

Faster!

The scorpions pick up their pace. From the shadows of a boulder we see the YELLOW EYES OF A LARGE BEAST observing them. The beast brays a loud, hideous noise.

The scorpion leader snaps his head around, drawing his blade. The others stop what they're doing, brandishing weapons and facing the noise with menace.

Just then, a HUMANOID WOLF--wiry with coarse fur under black armor--leaps from a hiding place behind the distracted arachnids, weapon in hand, racing to attack from the rear.

Off to his side appears a MAJESTIC, BIPEDAL LION with golden-locks, gleaming armor protecting his muscled-body. Large and agile, he moves with the Wolf in a coordinated pincer strike.

SCORPION LEADER (CONT'D)

Ambush!

The scorpions turn, chaotic, but it's already too late.

The Lion pounces first, slashing his steel and twirling like a nimble dancer, Wolf joining the fray, ferocious. Together, they make quick work of their formidable opponents.

Soon, only the lead scorpion remains, bleeding on the ground.

The Lion approaches, stands over him, breathing easy.

SCORPION LEADER (CONT'D)

You don't deserve it.

The scorpion coughs, grabbing a HIDDEN DAGGER and using his waning strength to slash feebly at the Lion, cutting his arm.

The Lion shrugs off the shallow wound, plunging his sword into the scorpion and putting him out of his misery.

WOLF

Everything alright?

LION

It's nothing.

Beat. The Lion and Wolf clean their weapons and kneel to honor the dead, stoic, when they're interrupted by another loud bray from behind the boulder.

Emerging from the shadows is a BIPEDAL DONKEY with floppy ears, human-like body dressed in frayed brown clothes.

DONKEY
(conceited)
I really scared 'em, didn't I?

The Lion looks up in annoyance.

LION
I might've been frightened myself,
had I not known you were an ass.

The Donkey is downtrodden at the rebuke.

The Wolf sniffs the air.

WOLF
We should go. Foul creatures call
this place home.

The Lion nods. The Wolf and Donkey exit, Lion pausing for a beat, his gaze transfixed on the birdcage with concern.

CUT TO:

EXT. WALLED-CITY (MOVING) - LATE AFTERNOON

Beyond the forest are grasslands as far as the eye can see, GOLDEN ROAD winding toward the gate of an OPULENT CITY high upon a hill, stone buildings protected by a castle-like wall.

Plodding along the roadway is the Lion, arm wrapped in a bandage. With him is the fearsome Wolf, Donkey carrying their packs. They approach the City weary from their journey.

In the distance, CLOAKED FIGURES move slowly along the road, the afternoon's long shadows hiding their identities.

Suddenly alert, the Lion and Wolf finger their weapons as they approach the unknown travelers, four in all.

LION
Ho, friends.

The smallest of the group, back stooped, turns toward the Lion--it's the Monkey, face wrinkled. With him are the hounds and the Man, shrouded under a hood.

The Lion and Wolf relax.

LION (CONT'D)
You should be more careful.

The Monkey bows his head.

MONKEY
Forgive me, my liege, but you see--

Just then, the Man's face comes into view, his eyes wide.

The Lion stops. The Wolf and Donkey stare.

MONKEY (CONT'D)
Someone's robbed the Citadel.

LION
Him?

The Lion bares his teeth.

The Man cowers.

MONKEY
It appears he's lost his memory.

WOLF
Convenient.

MONKEY
He claims to have seen a Fox...and,
an angelic figure imprisoned.

Concern flashes across the Lion's face.

LION
(to the Monkey)
Is there anything else?

Beat. The Monkey shakes his head.

LION (CONT'D)
Take him to my chambers through the
south gate, and let no one see you.

The Monkey confirms. The Lion and his compatriots depart for the City's front gate, the Wolf speaking in low tones:

WOLF
Is that what I think it was?

The Lion nods, calculating, noting the setting sun.

LION

Tonight, meet me at the Citadel.

Just then, trumpets; voices atop the wall:

VOICES (O.S.)

They've returned! Open the gate!

Banner flags unfurl. Cheers from inside the City.

The Lion dons a mask of joy, hiding his unease.

Lingering behind, the Monkey watches a hero's welcome ensue.

CUT TO:

EXT. SLUMS (MOVING) - NIGHT

On the outskirts of the City are its favelas, wooden shanties stacked against a steep hill ascending into blackness. Many of the pane-less windows are dark, their inhabitants asleep.

Enter the Fox, alert, snaking through the shadows with the golden egg clutched tight to hide its warm glow.

She stops outside a nondescript shack with a closed door.

INT. SHACK - CONTINUOUS

The Fox enters, relaxing visibly.

Through the window spills silver moonlight illuminating a cozy den, SICKLY FOX CUB curled up asleep in the corner.

Quiet, the Fox approaches the sick cub, golden egg in-hand, waking him with a soft touch. He coughs, disoriented.

She coos, scooping him up, the egg's glow brightening.

CUT TO BLACK.

EPISODE III

FADE IN.

EXT. / INT. CITADEL - NIGHT

Rising from the center of the City is a GLASS-LIKE TOWER made of polished stone smoother than the surrounding buildings, its architecture standing out against a medieval backdrop.

At the tower's entrance are two large double-doors gleaming in the moonlight, facade etched with religious iconography.

Inside, the reverent space is dark and cavernous, TRANSLUCENT ALTAR illuminated by soft candles that flicker in the black.

It's quiet, placid, when suddenly the doors groan open, Lion standing in the doorway, Wolf by his side.

They pause, surveying the scene before entering.

WOLF

Hello?

The Wolf's voice echoes, the place empty. He shoots the Lion a worried glance, who keeps a brave face.

Together, they make their way to the Altar, boots clip-clopping on the ground, passing by smooth walls hung with ANCIENT RELIEFS depicting animal history on the island:

First, humans subjugating feral beasts, falling out of favor with the gods; an angelic figure receiving a divine gift from the sky, granting it to other animals and banishing Man.

They reach the Altar, SYRINGE-LIKE OBJECTS placed on top with care. The Wolf inhales sharply. Strewn around the hallowed table are white feathers covered in blood.

The Wolf looks toward the Lion for guidance, who can't take his eyes off the scene, hot anger bubbling to the surface.

CUT TO:

INT. FOX'S SHACK - NIGHT

The soft glow of fire emanates from the shanty's modest kitchen, Fox stoking its flames. Next to the hearth are lifting tongs and her sickly cub, clutching the egg tight.

The Fox moves about the kitchen preparing a similar SYRINGE-LIKE OBJECT when she hears commotion outside. She stops, hair bristling with concern.

A knock at the door, modest, Monkey's voice coming through:

MONKEY

Fox? Forgive me for calling so late; I'm here on behalf of The Sanctum.

The Fox scrambles, keeping quiet.

Grabbing the egg from her ailing child and shushing his protest, she races to a loose floorboard, prying it up to reveal a LARGE HOLE dug into soft earth beneath.

She places the golden egg into the hole with care, burying it with compacted dirt before replacing the board, trying in vain to keep her beating heart calm.

Another knock at the door, louder this time, the cub crying.

The Fox composes herself before opening the front entrance, Monkey in the doorway, face warm and inviting, flanked by the two imposing hounds in helmets and armor, weapons drawn.

The Monkey bows, respectful, but says nothing, expecting an invitation inside. The Fox obliges, silent.

The Monkey enters, relaxed, hounds surrounding the Fox with menace. The cub ceases crying, tension thick in the air.

The Monkey paces thoughtfully around the room, eyes scanning the modest home, floorboards creaking under his weight.

MONKEY (CONT'D)

Your husband built this? I respect those who can swing a hammer. Sadly, I'm built only for oratory.

The Monkey lifts a DEFORMED HAND from behind the folds of his robe. The Fox ignores the sight, face tightening at the mention of her husband but keeping quiet with cautious eyes.

FOX

So what'd The Sanctum want then?

MONKEY

Ah yes, and here I am keeping you and your poor child awake. There's been an incident at the Citadel. Nothing to be concerned about...

He spots from the corner of his eye thin grass sprouting underneath loose floorboard, gaze narrowing on the Fox.

MONKEY (CONT'D)

Only, something has gone missing,
and we've been asked that no stone
remain unturned. You understand.
You wouldn't know anything about
this, would you?

FOX

No idea what you're talkin' about.
Now, if you don't mind.

She motions to the door.

MONKEY

(beat)
Of course.

The Monkey moves to exit, stops.

MONKEY (CONT'D)

However, I would be remiss if I did
not point out before I left that
valuable information provided to
the Sanctum often has a way
of...forgiving certain
transgressions.

FOX

Shame there's nothin' to forgive.

MONKEY

Well then, we'll be on our way.

The Monkey takes a step to leave, purposefully stomping on
the loose floorboard, which pops out of place, beautiful
flowers beginning to grow underneath.

The Monkey glares at the Fox, her cub beginning to wail.

CUT TO:

INT. CITADEL - LATER

Near the Altar stands the Lion, face cast in long shadows,
his wound cleaned and covered in ointment. Before him is the
Man, wrists and ankles locked in manacles.

The Lion motions to the white feathers, demonstrative.

LION

What did you do with her?

MAN

I told you, sir, I dunno what
you're talkin' about.

LION

Don't know, or don't remember?

The Lion bears his teeth at the Man, who cowers, unknown
images racing through his head.

MAN

I...don't...

The Lion scowls, grabbing the Man's chains and dragging him
over to the reliefs, pointing.

LION

Then let me help jog your memory:
In the beginning, gods created the
world and all living things, but
only Man was made in their
likeness, bestowing upon them this
island as their home.

FLASHBACK: EXT. ANCIENT ISLAND - DAY

The island's grassland is pristine and devoid of man-made
structures, NAKED HUMANS and FERREL ANIMALS living together
in fellowship, glass-like tower in the background.

LION (V.O.)

All were meant to live in harmony,
but before long, Man began to see
himself as more-than: More than a
beast, and yes, more than our
divine creators, forsaking the gods
and enslaving animals for their
bidding.

Cut to images of CLOTHED HUMANS building structures around
the tower, separating themselves from nature, lashing plows
to OXEN, corralling WILD HORSES and hunting GAME ANIMALS.

LION (V.O.)

Their rampant disregard angered the
gods, who chose one among us and
gave her the gift of vitality--to
live everlasting with powers beyond
this world, in return for the
devout worship forgotten by Man.

Cut to a GOLDEN EGG descending from the heavens, casting
bright light on an ANGELIC FIGURE rising to meet it.

LION (V.O.)

Our Chosen One shared her gift with animals worthy--my ancestors first in line--and together, used this newfound power to break their chains and cast Man off the island into the other-world.

Cut to a beautiful, HUMANOID BIRD with white wings sprouting from her back as she leads HUMAN-LIKE LIONS, BEARS, and other FEROCIOUS ANIMALS, chasing humans toward awaiting ships.

END FLASHBACK: INT. CITADEL - CONTINUOUS

The Lion finishes his tale, Man listening intently:

LION

This divine gift is the source of our power. And now she is gone, vanished, along with the vitality she provides. You can see how this would be a problem? One I'd do anything to resolve.

The Man gulps, nods.

LION (CONT'D)

Then, think, for your sake.

The Man wracks his brain, brow creased with anxiety. More images flash through his mind's eye, random.

MAN

A storm, sir. Ships with bad men. A guardian angel protect'd me, brought me here. But she's gone.

LION

So then where is she??

The Lion roars, anger besting him, grabbing the Man by the shoulders. The Man grabs back out of reflex, manacled hand landing on the Lion's wound, which heals like magic.

LION (CONT'D)

How did you do that?

Just then, the door to the chamber opens, Monkey entering with the Fox in shackles.

CUT TO BLACK.

EPISODE IV

FADE IN.

FLASHBACK: EXT. CITADEL - JUST BEFORE DAWN

The City is quiet, the Citadel standing proud in the pre-dawn night, silver moonlight reflecting off its smooth surface.

TWO ARMORED, BIPEDAL HOUNDS with the Sanctum's crest patrol the perimeter, guarding the sacred place.

From the shadows, the Fox watches with bated breath, dressed in a form-fitting utility vest and a sheath across her back.

The hounds stop at the Citadel's entrance, impressive double-doors groaning open as if on cue. They enter, pious, doors closing slowly behind them.

In a flash the Fox darts from the shadows, silent on padded feet, slipping through the opening before it shuts.

INT. CITADEL - CONTINUOUS

The cavernous space is dark, its candles extinguished, soft moonlight peeking through narrow, pane-less windows above.

Doors closed, the Fox watches as the hounds make their rounds with backs turned, reaching into a vest pocket and producing a SMALL JAR filled with BUZZING MOSQUITOS.

She opens the jar, whispering to the swarm as they fly away, humming in a dense cloud and attacking the hounds.

The hounds cry out--mosquitos biting their exposed flesh--and race from the room, trying in vain to swat away the swarm.

Alone, the Fox zig-zags her way across the floor in a predetermined pattern as if alluding traps, passing the Altar to the far wall where a MODEST DOOR sits etched in the stone.

The Fox stops, pulling a CRYSTAL KEY from another vest pocket and thrusting it into the lock, turning with a click.

Beat. She holds her breath before opening the door.

Inside is a small space with rows of CLEAR, VAT-LIKE CONTAINERS filled with translucent liquid. Suspended in one of the vats is a GOLDEN EGG, the remaining containers empty.

Slowly, Fox unsheathes LIFTING TONGS from across her back, using them to remove the lone egg with extreme caution.

Beat. She waits, expecting retribution but receiving none, letting out her breath in a long sigh of relief. She returns the tongs to their sheath and clutches the glowing egg close.

Suddenly, an arrow flies from the black, lodging itself into the open door, hounds barking in the distance.

HOUND(O.S.)

You! Stop!

Alarmed, the Fox sprints towards the entrance--still shut--following the same the zig-zag pattern in reverse. Behind her, more arrows fly, shouts in the darkness.

Ahead, the Citadel doors begin to open gradually, hounds gaining on her. Without slowing, the Fox times her exit, bursting through a small gap just as the hounds re-enter.

EXT. CITADEL - CONTINUOUS

The Fox runs, angling towards the City wall and the dense forest beyond, hounds exiting the Citadel as she darts away.

END FLASHBACK: INT. PRISON - MORNING

Deep below the City are its dank dungeons, neat rows of stone cells without windows, iron bars corroding from lack of use.

Imprisoned in the only occupied cell is the Fox, sitting on the leftover wisps of straw that used to coat the floor.

Her ears perk up as a metal door groans open in the distance, fighting against its rusty hinges.

Enter the Monkey, approaching the Fox with a calm demeanor.

He pulls a wooden stool close to the bars, sits.

MONKEY

So, how did you do it?

The Fox is silent, distrust in her eyes.

MONKEY (CONT'D)

(smiling)

No matter. I'm not here for information. If I were, you would have already told me. I'm here to ask for your help.

FOX
Why would I wanna help you?

MONKEY
(mock surprise)
Your child, of course.
(off her look)
It's admirable, really. I could
give it to you, you know. Save your
cub. But first, you'd have to do
something for me.

FOX
What?

MONKEY
The Lion. I'd like you to keep an
eye on him for me.

FOX
How the --

The Monkey stops her with his hand.

MONKEY
When the time comes. If you want to
save your child, this is my offer.

The Monkey exits before the Fox can speak again.

Alone, she contemplates his words.

CUT TO:

EXT. SANCTUM - LATER

Within the Citadel sits a lush, open-air garden protected by three smooth walls, ornate entrance carved with iconography. In the center are five chairs facing each other in council.

Seated in the two chairs farthest from one another are the Wolf and Monkey, the remaining three empty. They ignore each other with hints of disdain, birds chirping in the silence.

Enter an elder, HUMANOID BOAR with a leather vest and sharp tusks protruding from his mouth. Following him is a HUMAN-LIKE TIGRESS in regal attire, beautiful and dangerous.

Beat. They all trade inquisitive glances but remaining otherwise quiet, Boar and Tigress taking their seats.

Enter the Lion and his Donkey aid. The animals rise, Lion motioning for them to sit but remains standing himself.

The Lion beckons toward the entrance.

Enter the Fox and Man, both in shackles, prodded by hounds.

The Tigress gasps, Boar struggling to keep his poker face.

LION

She's gone.

The room is silent, gaping.

LION (CONT'D)

Yesterday morning, this human was found in the forest. Upon questioning, he admitted to encountering a fox...one with a golden egg.

The Fox shoots the Man a dirty look.

The Lion nods to the Wolf, who stands.

WOLF

We immediately investigated the Citadel and found it empty. An egg was missing, yes, but so was she.

TIGRESS

An abduction?

WOLF

It's not clear.

BOAR

The Fox?

MONKEY

We searched her home and found no wrongdoing. I caution you, this human has admitted to a faulty memory, he should not be trusted.

LION

On the contrary, he is key to finding her.

TIGRESS

How?

LION

He knows things he shouldn't.
(to the Man)
Tell them what you told me.

The Man hesitates, Lion reassuring him:

LION (CONT'D)

It's ok.

MAN

I was drownin'. An angel found me,
led me 'cross the land to safety.
But...I've seen her since then, in
chains. I know those chains, made
to stop men from runnin'.

LION

I believe she is being held captive
wherever this man came from.

TIGRESS

That means more humans.

MONKEY

Humans are the only animals who
save their weak. They are a feeble
species, we should not fear them.

BOAR

But if they learn to harness the
strength of her power...

Beat. All eyes land on the Lion.

LION

Protection has been my family's
charge since the beginning of our
time. I will save her. This human
will lead me there.

WOLF

Through the Wild? It'll be
perilous; I'll go with you.

LION

(shaking his head)
Return to your lands in the North,
rally your kind. We will need them
in case of attack.

MONKEY

Might I suggest you take the Fox?

The room's eyes shift to the Monkey.

MONKEY (CONT'D)

If you believe the human speaks truth, she will have information important to your journey.

The Lion contemplates, then nods.

LION

I will take the Fox and Donkey. We leave at first light for the forest. The Sanctum will act in my stead while I am away.

TIGRESS

Hurry. If the City discovers she is gone there will be unrest.

LION

Then ensure that they don't.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY - THE NEXT MORNING

The sun's bright rays peek above the City, Lion and his hand-selected Party gathering outside its gates with weapons and rations, preparing for their dangerous journey.

Leading is the Donkey with packs, Man shackled to his bridle. Behind them is the Fox clad in her utility vest, armored Lion watching from the rear, conferring with the Boar.

With a signal the Lion urges the Donkey to march, addressing the Boar with a quiet voice before leaving:

LION

Something doesn't feel right. Keep close eye until I return.

The Boar nods, his face grim.

The Lion returns his nod and departs, glancing back at the City as it recedes from distance, worried.

From a perch high atop the wall, the Monkey watches him go.

CUT TO BLACK.