

Chimerical

By Mantrid Brizon

Episode 22: Origins

Several days have passed since Ra'kanishu revealed his secret to Jo'dehki, and the time has come for the Imperial and Tsanavi, his Suthay lover, to pledge themselves to each other. Ko'adhasa oversees the pledge, being the only trained priestess and the village's clan mother. Standing between Jadhi and Hiska-dar, Jo'dehki watches as the pair marry before the village in customary fashion. Glancing around the modest crowd, he notices Kazkhar with his goons as they stand beside his mother, Abaimba. Their collective grimace shows their true feelings; why do they dislike Nish so? What could such a friendly and upstanding man have done to offend the over-privileged Khajiit?

As Jo'dehki ponders this thought, Jadhi glances over to him and gently nudges him with her elbow. His focus returned to the ceremony, he watches as Nish and Tsanavi exchange symbolic amulets, hold each other and kiss. The majority of the crowd cheer for the lovers and Ko'adhasa wipes a proud tear from her eye. Now bound to each other, the villagers who care, which is the bulk, stay for a feast to

commemorate the event. Moving to an area near the center of the village where several tables have been pre-arranged, Nish and his family serve their guests. Jo'dehki pulls out a chair for Jadhi, who grins wide as she eagerly sits at the table.

Taking his place beside her, he can't help but grin. They have grown ever close and Jo'dehki finds himself drawn to her like a moth to a flame. Trying to act casual, he glances around at the swarm of happy villagers. He has seen many joyous feasts during his travels in taverns and inns across Tamriel, but all were fueled by drink and coin. This event is decidedly different; a pleasant aura radiates from the betrothed and mingles amongst the guests, all of whom are still sober. As he sits beside Jadhi she leans over, resting her shoulder against his upper arm and he feels at home for the first time since he had one.

Several hours pass and the feast continues. Though it was a little past noon when Ra'kanishu and Tsanavi pledged it is now nearly four o' clock. Refilling her carved wooden tankard with honey lager, Jo'dehki's lips curl at the sight of a progressively intoxicated Jadhi. Leaning against him, she holds the tankard at a slight angle and extends a finger, pointing it toward Nish. She opens her mouth and takes a breath but pauses as she seems to wrestle with her train of thought.

"Are you alright?" Jo'dehki asks with a subdued laugh.

“Don’t the... They look s-so happy together?” She says, slurring her words. “This one would love to have what they have.”

“Don’t you?”

“What?!” She turns in her chair to face him. “Do you think Jadhi would gush over them if she felt that kind of love? Yes, she would, because it’s adorable, but that’s not the point!” She exclaims, waving her hand and spilling much of her drink. “This one would rip a Senche cub’s heart from its chest and eat it in front of its mother if it would summon such a man.”

“Jo’dehki didn’t know that about you.” He chuckles.

“There are so many things you don’t know. By Jone and Jode... This one would love to share them with you.” She says, narrowing her eyes and resting a hand on his chest.

“Perhaps when you are sober.” He replies.

“This one is sober enough!” She gently tugs at his tunic.

“That’s okay. Jo’dehki can wait.” He insists, resting a hand over her and patting it gently.

“You are so sweet. Jadhi loves yo-... Loves that about you!”

Jadhi turns her eyes away and feels her face flush beneath her fur as she quickly corrects the Freudian slip. Jo’dehki remains silent and she worries that she has ruined her opportunity. Slowly glancing upward, she sees that he isn’t even paying attention, his gaze fixed upon something else entirely.

“Th-that was not meant how it sounded!” She adds.

Taking his hand from hers, Jo’dehki rises from his seat as he watches a figure approaching from the distance.

“Hey! ... Are you listening to me?!” Jadhi growls.

“Fjorn?!” Jo’dehki asks himself.

“This one is talking to you!”

Leaving his seat and Jadhi behind, Jo’dehki moves around the table, passing Nish and his bride. The look of recognition on the Cathay-Raht’s face draws the Imperial’s attention and he turns his eyes in the same direction. Walking through the village and approaching the feast is a lone man in very familiar clothing and armor.

“Guys! You shouldn’t have!” Fjorn exclaims as he removes his Nordic iron helmet.

Though most of the guests pay him little or no attention, Nish and Jo’dehki quickly approach. Tsanavi, Jadhi and the rest of Nish’s family follow close behind. Jadhi bumps into Jo’dehki’s back and nearly topples over, but he is quick to catch her. He helps her maintain balance without ever taking his eyes off of the Nord.

“What are you doing here? This one recalls you saying that you would never set foot in Elseweyr?” Nish asks.

“Funny story! ... What’s going on here, anyway? Some kind of Khajiit holiday?” Fjorn asks.

“Something like that.” Jo’dehki remarks.

“Our son has pledged before Jone and Jode; this is a wedding feast.” S’tari explains.

Fjorn tucks his helmet underneath an arm and walks in a crescent around his former companions. He extends a hand to her and bows his head.

“A pleasure to meet you. I have heard only good things. I’m Fjorn.” He introduces himself.

“Yes, Ra has spoken highly of you.” S’tari replies, shaking his hand.

“So, this is her, eh?” Fjorn glances to Tsanavi, who stands beside Nish. “As often as he thought of you when we were traveling, I thought Nish would have married you the day he came home!” He laughs.

“Yeah... So about why you’re here, in Elseweyr...” Nish says sternly.

Fjorn’s smile fades and he glances to his feet. Sighing, he reaches into a large leather pouch on his belt. After taking a moment to rummage through the few belongings within, as if to purposefully make the scene more dramatic, Fjorn withdraws his hand and produces a sealed letter.

“What’s that?” Jo’dehki asks.

“We should probably talk in private...” Fjorn says sternly.

Leaving their guests behind, Nish, his family and Jo’dehki take Fjorn to the home that Nish shares with his bride. Fjorn takes a seat, placing the letter on the dinner table and sliding it towards Nish. The wax seal is unusual; lavender in color and with a stamp unlike anything that any of them have seen before. Considering how many places that Nish has been too, he is surprised that he doesn’t recognize the seal.

“After joining the Fighter’s Guild, I took a few odd jobs to get my name out there, climb the ranks, and just have a little fun killing things.” Fjorn begins.

“Surprise, surprise.” Nish murmurs.

“Right? So, I traveled to Anvil to help my guild brothers and sisters slay a troll that found its way into the nearby fields. After the deed was done, I went to a tavern to celebrate and overheard an old man talking with the barkeep. He told a story of how he had been trying to find a man who had gone missing as a child; he had spent over twenty years searching for the son of his dead master.” Fjorn explains.

“He sounds like a fool.” Jo’dehki comments.

“That’s what I thought, but this old man loved his master and considered it his life’s work to find the child. I

thought little of the story until he went into detail. As I sat beside him and listened, I was surprised by how alike his story was to yours...”

S'tari, Nazahn and Tsanavi collectively grip or hold Nish, simultaneously curious and afraid of what Fjorn has to say.

“Apparently, the old man was traveling with a convoy when he and his master were attacked by raiders in Elseweyr. He lost the baby that was in his care when he took an arrow in the back. Self-preservation took over and he fled, escaping while the raiders killed everyone else. It was only after reaching a town and resting for a time that another survivor, a handmaiden, also arrived and explained that she had hidden the child before escaping. By the time he was well enough to search for the boy, he was long gone and no trace was left. Succumbing to guilt, he roamed Tamriel trying to find the baby, living off of a meager servant’s wages and acting as steward to the manor and lands.” Fjorn continues.

“Commendable.” Nazahn remarks.

“Fascinating... So, when does the talking dragon swoop down and tell the servant that the lost child is destined to save all of Tamriel?” Nish facetiously asks.

“I thought that too, until I spoke with him... The location of the attack, the year it happened, the child’s adult age, eye and hair color... It all matches.” Fjorn replies.

Though Nish seems more amused than anything, S'tari and Nazahn begin to worry. They did indeed find Nish as an infant, wrapped in a blanket and crying. The cries emanated from a hollow log just to the side of the road, which was littered with the corpses of men of various races, though primarily Imperial. Slain by raiders, it was clear that someone hid the baby during the chaos of battle and the child somehow went unnoticed. Worried that someone would come looking for the child, Nazahn tried to talk S'tari out of keeping the boy; his will was no match and S'tari brought the baby with them, naming him Kanishu on the spot. Though it took some time, Nazahn grew to love the Imperial as his own, and neither parent or sibling wishes to imagine their lives without him.

“Do you know how many children were orphaned by raiders? It's called ‘Reaper's March’ for a reason.” Nish scoffs.

“Mhm... And the birthmark?” Fjorn retorts.

“... What?”

“How many Imperial men your age were orphaned in Elsewyer over twenty years ago *and* have a small red arrowhead on their left side, just underneath their arm?” Fjorn asks.

Nish's eyes grow wide, as do the others. Fjorn had seen the mark several times during their travels as they mended ripped and cut tunics or bathed in streams in the wilderness. S'tari, Nazahn, Jadhi, Hiska-dar and Tsanavi have also seen the mark many times. Even Jo'dehki had seen the mark before, when Nish lie injured in bed after

Daro'veera betrayed him. Nish brings his hands together, his fingers wrapping over the back of each as he rests his chin on his second knuckles. Exhaling slowly, he turns his eyes to the letter that sits atop the table.

“So, if this old man spent over twenty years looking, how did that letter survive?” Nish asks.

“It’s not an original. Every year the old man re-wrote the letter, sealing it with lavender wax with the same seal that his master would use. It contains the child’s given name, family lineage, and details about the land and home that he will inherit.” Fjorn answers. “Once I realized it was you he was looking for, it took me twice as long to convince him that I wasn’t lying about knowing you than to hear his story.”

“Amazing how you just so happen to be in a tavern and sitting beside this old man as he pours his story out to a barkeep.” Nish says.

“The Divines work in mysterious ways.” Fjorn chuckles.

“And you did this out of the kindness of your heart?” Jo’dehki asks with a raised brow.

“Of course not! Once he was certain I wasn’t trying to swindle him, it took 10,000 drakes to get me to come here. That will buy me a new set of armor, better weapons, and leave me with plenty to fall back on if the Fighter’s Guild doesn’t work out.” Fjorn replies.

“Typical Fjorn...” Nish mutters, subtly shaking his head.

“And the old man didn’t want to come and see for himself after so many years of searching?” Hiska-dar asks.

“He is nearly seventy and walks with a cane. He has been stewarding the land for several years, which I assume is in or near Anvil.”

An eerie silence fills the room as Nish stares at the letter that sits before him. As if worried that she may lose her husband, Tsanavi squeezes his body in her arms and nuzzles his upper arm with her snout. He turns to her and smiles, wrapping an arm around her and resting it atop her shoulder. Leaning forward, he plants a kiss upon her lips, her whiskers happily twitching. Fjorn struggles to contain his true feelings of disgust, feigning a little grin. He quickly rises to his feet.

“Well, congratulations. I hope you plan on making an honest man out of him.” Fjorn says jokingly to Tsanavi.

With his mission completed, he walks toward the door. As his hand grips the handle, he pauses and looks at the floor. He takes a deep breath and turns back to Nish, glancing over his shoulder.

“What should I tell him when I return?” Fjorn asks.

Ra’kanishu is at a loss for words. He turns his eyes back to Tsanavi, then his adopted Khajiiti family. S’tari stands beside Nazahn, their expressions that of worry and fear and not excitement. His heart breaks at the choice

presented to him. Without bothering to face the Nord, he answers.

“Tell him... If this one wants to claim his inheritance, he’ll return for it.”

“Alright.” Fjorn nods.

He opens the door and steps outside, closing it behind him. The silence is almost deafening as everyone in the room stares at the letter. Jo’dehki sheepishly reaches for it, coiling his fingers but leaving his index finger extended. He prepares to break the seal when S’tari grabs his wrist. She turns to her Imperial son, waiting for him to speak. When he says nothing, she takes the letter from the table and slips it in a pocket sewn into her dress. Stepping toward her adopted son, she rests a clawed hand on his shoulder.

“When you are ready to read it, S’tari will have the letter for you.” She says softly to him.

Nish subtly nods his head before rising from his seat.

“We should get back to our guests.” He says.

Returning outside, the feast continues unhindered. Jo’dehki watches for a moment as Fjorn leaves S’ren-ja, placing his helmet back on his head as he returns to the main road. They head for their seats and rejoin the

festivities, which continue for several more hours. Though they try, the positive aura is gone and the exuberant atmosphere no longer present. Fjorn's unwelcome revelation has crushed it. As the villagers slowly disperse, it is the family's task to clear the tables and clean up afterward. As night falls, Nish and his wife return to their home together.

Stripping off his clothes, the Imperial is quick to lie beside his Suthay bride. Holding her slender, unclothed frame in his arms and feeling her soft fur against his body, he gleefully snuggles with his wife. Nish seems unaffected by the letter as he kisses his lover tenderly, but Tsanavi can't help worrying about its contents and what it might do to their relationship. She spent years regretting her decision to remain in S'ren-ja when Nish left, and now that he is her husband, she has absolutely no desire to live her life without him. Though she doubts he would abandon her, anywhere that an Imperial has lands awaiting him may easily be less than kind to a Khajiit. She forces the fear from her mind.

After spending a night like most newlyweds, the lovers sleep holding each other. Nish succumbs rather swiftly, but Tsanavi takes much longer to fall asleep. She lies awake as her anxiety returns, incessantly pondering the letter. As she awakens the next morning, she is somewhat surprised as Nish acts as if all was well. He cooks her breakfast, kisses her goodbye and leaves to tend the fields and work around their house. For him, it is a day like any other and with the exception that now they are married. As the day wears on and evening approaches, he returns home. Tsanavi greets

him with an embrace and gathers supplies to cook their dinner while Nish washes with a damp rag, dipping it in an earthenware basin full of crystal clear water.

“Would you mind if we stopped by my parent’s home before dinner?” He suddenly asks her.

“Huh? Oh, uh... Alright.” She nervously answers.

She can’t help but wonder why Nish wants to see his family so soon. Does he want to see the letter? Her heart sinks as she imagines the endless possibilities. Taking her by the hand, Nish leads her from their home and down the stairs, walking a distance to the house where his family and Jo’dehki reside. He politely knocks on the front door, each loud tap with his knuckles making her stomach churn. He turns to look at her, his brow furled.

“Are you alright?” He asks.

“Oh... Yes, this one is fine.” She answers softly.

“Are you sure? You’re trembling like a wet kitten.”

She nods her head. The door’s mechanism clicks as Nazahn grips the handle, opening it to see who is visiting. His brow raises in surprise as he sees his Imperial son and Khajiiti wife standing before him.

“Hello, Ra! Nazahn did not expect to see you so soon.”

“This one thought it would be nice to visit for a moment.” Nish says.

Allowing them inside, Nazahn closes the door behind them. The couple make their way to the dinner table, where the rest of the family sits; they’re already eating their meals. S’tari quickly rises to her feet as the others turn to look.

“Son! If this one knew you were coming, she would have cooked for you and your wife.” She quickly apologizes.

“It’s alright.” Nish chuckles. “This is just a short visit.”

The couple take seats at the table, sitting between Jadhi and Hiska-dar.

“It is good to see you, Ra.” Jadhi begins, waving to him.

“Wave to the Ra on the left.” Nish teases.

“Jadhi did not have *that* much to drink.” She laughs.

“This one carried you to your bed because you couldn’t climb the stairs.” Jo’dehki remarks.

“Cute. So how have you all been doing? Adjusting to life without Ra?” Nish asks.

“We manage.” Nazahn replies with a grin.

“It has been a blessing, actually.” Hiska-dar jests.

“More food left for you to eat.” Nish quips.

The brothers share a laugh and gently shove the other. Nish maintains idle conversation with his family as they sit at the table, while Tsanavi is unusually quiet. S'tari can't help but notice. With her head turned to Nish, her eyes glance over to his wife. Waiting for a lull in the conversation, she prepares to speak.

"And that's why this one told you boys not to play with torches." Nazahn says to his sons.

"Though it was quite funny to watch them put it out." Hiska-dar laughs.

"This one never saw old man Vasdar move so fast." Nish chuckles.

"... So, was there any special reason you stopped by?" S'tari says to Nish.

The room falls silent as Ra'kanishu looks to his mother. Nodding his head slowly, he turns his eyes to the table.

"There is something that this one needs to do." He begins.

"Does it involve this?" She asks.

S'tari removes the unopened letter from a pocket sewn into her skirt. Nish sighs and nods once more. She hands him the letter as Tsanavi's heart jumps into her throat. He rises to his feet and approaches the fireplace, holding the letter

and examining the wax seal in the light. Jo'dehki joins Nish by the fireplace. Running a finger over the wax, he takes a moment as he seems to decide whether or not to open it. Everyone in the room watches him closely. An arm drops to side as he holds the letter near his chest, staring at it. Silently chuckling, Nish flicks his wrist and tosses it inside. The paper lands atop a crackling log as the orange and blue flames consume it, the lavender wax igniting and burning brightly.

“Why would you do that?!” Tsanavi asks in shock.

“Because it's worthless.” Nish answers casually.

Jo'dehki leans in, watching as Ra'kanishu's past is erased by the fire.

“Aren't you the least bit curious?” Hiska-dar wonders.

“No. Ra'kanishu's real family is here, and this one doesn't need anything more.”

Tsanavi grins cheek to cheek; she can't help herself as her fears disappear in the smoke of the flames. Her husband rests his hands on her shoulders, giving her a gentle squeeze. Rising from her seat, they say their goodbyes before turning to leave the house. The letter's envelope burns away, revealing a line beneath. The letter is folded backwards and Jo'dehki can clearly read the first portion before it is completely consumed. Turning to the Imperial, he now knows his title, birth name, and the land

from whence he came, but as he watches Nish leave with his wife he realizes that it doesn't matter. Ra'kanishu is his real name, and he belongs here.