

Chimerical

Episode 6: Servus Simulare

Early the next morning, Fjorn awakens to find Nish and Jo'dehki sitting beside the fire. Nish seems to be examining Golden-Hands' wrist shackles, while Jo'dehki cooks a stew of his dried provisions. Fjorn sits up from his bedroll and rubs his eyes. He looks around the campsite, as Nish holds up a small slab of dried white fish, taking a bite of the preserved meat. The Nord seems to check his belongings.

"Don't bother. She never came back." Nish remarks.

"How can you be so sure?" Fjorn asks.

"We did not sleep very well." Jo'dehki answers.

"It's a shame too... She was pretty." Nish grins.

"To you, maybe." Fjorn quips.

"I'm a product of my environment. When you grow up in Reaper's March, seeing only Khajiit and occasionally Bosmer until your twenties, your proclivities develop in kind." Nish retorts.

They take their time, eating simple breakfasts and cleaning their campsite. Before they leave, Nish places the shackles into his pack. By mid-day, they return to the road and begin the moderate hike to Molag Mar. They walk in relative silence, following the winding road to the east.

After nearly two hours of walking, they approach the city. They cross the bridge, eager to sit and share a drink; Nish needs fresh supplies, as Golden-Hands had stolen most of his. They turn a corner when Jo'dehki stops in his tracks, having rounded it first. The men stop just behind him, looking on. Fjorn chuckles, while Nish sighs. He shakes his head and places a palm over his face.

"Please don't. I'll just leave!" Golden-Hands pleads with two city guards.

"Did you really think no one would see those shackles on your ankles? You're either an escaped prisoner, or a runaway slave. In either case, you're coming with us." A guard growls.

"Serves her right." Fjorn snickers.

Nish looks over at the Nord in shock. He slowly shakes his head, silently reprimanding his companion. He takes off his pack and sets it down on the ground. He takes out Golden-Hands' wrist shackles, clutching them tightly.

"Watch my pack!" Nish demands as he walks away.

"This one wonders where you are going." Jo'dehki speaks up.

"To do the right thing." Nish replies, looking back at them.

The Imperial approaches the guards, taking a deep breath as he prepares himself. He puffs up his chest,

gripping the shackles tightly as he quickly develops a dominating persona.

“Golden-Hands!” Nish yells loudly.

She turns to look at him, as do the two guards. Nish holds up the shackles as he glares at the frightened Khajiit female.

“What is the meaning of this?!” He growls at her.

Fjorn and Jo’dehki watch from just around the distant corner. Nish approaches the guards, angrily rattling the shackles.

“Did you forget the shackles on your ankles, or were you in such a hurry to leave?” He continues.

“Does this Khajiit belong to you, sir?” A guard asks him.

“Yes, she does. She escaped just this morning, while I slept. She’s my *personal* slave.” Nish answers.

“We found her roaming the grounds and saw the shackles. You’re lucky she didn’t kill you in your sleep with that knife. I wouldn’t put anything above these beasts.” The guard warns.

Nish clenches his teeth, squeezing the shackles tightly as the guards insult her.

“Indeed... Perhaps it’s because of my fair treatment that she didn’t kill me with my own blade? I suppose I trusted her too much... Regardless, that is going to change!” He turns to Golden-Hands. “I do believe I have an unused collar at home, just for you... You should have known better than to run away.” He says rather softly.

She looks up at him, his back turned to the guards as he stands between them. He gives her a quick wink, and she lowers her head.

“I’m sorry, master. Please forgive me... I just-”

“Be silent...” He interrupts in a stern voice. “I do apologize for her sudden appearance and behavior. If she has stolen anything, I will gladly pay for it.” He says to the guards.

“No, she didn’t steal anything. We must have found her before she could get the chance.” A guard answers.

“What is your name, sir? For the report?” The other asks.

“My name?”

“Yes sir.” The guard nods.

“It’s... Iracus. Iracus Corium!” Nish replies.

“And your slave’s name is Golden-Hands?”

“Yes, it is.” Nish nods.

“Interesting. Why do you call her that, if I may ask?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know.” Nish grins.

The guards share a laugh as Nish clamps the shackles back onto her wrists, trying not to hurt her. He takes her by the hand and leads her away from the guards. She can feel the dampness of his palms as he trembles slightly from nervousness.

“Don’t worry about the shackles. I’ll take all four of them off for you when we get away from the city.” Nish whispers to her.

“Why are you doing this? Why help me?” She asks.

“It’s hard to explain, and we’re short on time. Guard reports are a matter of public record, and I used your real name... I doubt it will be long before your actual masters come for you.” Nish replies.

They swing around the corner, where Fjorn and Jo’dehki wait for them. Jo’dehki leans against a wall, his tail swaying. Fjorn stands there, his arms crossed as he glares apprehensively at her.

“Don’t worry about them. You’ll be safe with us for now, until we part ways.” Nish assures her.

She merely nods. She doesn’t have the words to express her gratitude.

“Of course, if you truly want to escape, you should probably travel with us for a while.”

“Excuse me?” Fjorn asks, his arms dropping to his sides.

“Aren’t you upset about what I did before?” She asks.

“Why would I be? Food and water are easily replaceable, and you even brought my knife back.” Nish answers.

“But, I hurt you.” She laments.

“Fjorn, the Nord, he practices restoration and alchemy. It was as though nothing had happened only moments after you left, minus my missing dagger.” He explains.

Nish takes his pack, slipping it back over his shoulders.

“Look, I know you don’t trust me. I understand. I haven’t earned it yet. You don’t even know my name.” He begins.

“It isn’t Iracus Corium?” She asks.

“Hah. No.”

“Isn’t Iracus Corium that spice merchant we guarded on the way to Morrowind?” Fjorn asks.

“He is. My real name is Ra’Kanishu. Fjorn just calls me ‘Nish’.” He tells her.

“Are you serious?” She raises a brow in disbelief.

“Very... It’s a long story.” Nish shrugs his shoulders.

“Perhaps it can be shortened?” Jo’dehki adds.

“And this upstanding Khajiit is Jo’dehki.” Nish introduces him.

She looks between his two companions. Fjorn crosses his arms again, his lips twisted in a grimace. Jo’dehki nods, glaring apprehensively at the girl. She looks back to Ra’Kanishu, who smiles rather warmly.

“We were going to buy some food for the road, although with Jo’dehki around and not enough shackles, maybe we should just move on.” Nish suggests.

“A sound plan.” Jo’dehki nods.

The four travelers quickly leave Molag Mar, walking down the long road as it wraps around the southeastern side of Vvardenfell. Once the city is out of sight, Nish stops and removes the girl’s shackles from her wrists and ankles.

“You don’t need those anymore!” He says, happily tossing them aside.

“Thank you.” She sheepishly replies, rubbing her wrists.

“So?” He asks.

“What?”

“Are we parting ways, or did you want to come with us?” He asks her.

“Where are you going?” She asks.

He turns back to his companions, looking between them.

“Well... I’ve seen my share of Vvardenfell for one lifetime.” Fjorn comments.

“This one does not believe it wise to travel with an escaped slave, but if we must, then perhaps this island is not the best place to be, yes?” Jo’dehki adds.

“I guess we’re leaving Vvardenfell.” Nish turns back to her.

Golden-Hands takes a moment to think. She knows how hard it is to survive as a runaway slave on her own. She couldn’t make it a full day before being recaptured, although her race and the shackles on her ankles did not make it easier. She wonders if she could make it much farther on her own. She looks at her surroundings, feeling horribly out of place. She’s genuinely afraid of the wildlife that she had heard her masters and overseers talk about. Furthermore, she now feels genuinely indebted to this Imperial. She had never been treated properly by anyone besides her fellow slaves, and even then, not consistently. She slowly nods her head.

“Yes... I will go with you.” She speaks softly.

“Lovely!” He grins. “So... Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?”

“Such as?”

“Well, did you have a name other than Golden-Hands?” He asks.

“No... My master’s father bought my entire family when I was a small child. He renamed all of them, and simply called me ‘kitten’. He forbade the speaking of our language, and would beat any who spoke it, or used their original names, even by accident. When I was old enough to start working, that’s when his son chose the name. That’s who you saw me with the other day.” She answers, a distinct sadness in her voice.

“I’m sorry.” Nish says softly.

“So, what can you do?” Fjorn bluntly asks.

“I was trained as a clothier, and I was also a cook at the plantation. I often cleaned and prepared the animals my masters had slain.” She answers.

“Oh good. I like good food.” Fjorn remarks.

“What about fighting skills? These roads can be very dangerous, and we may not be able to protect you.” Jo’dehki adds.

Nish turns back to his companions, glaring at them; their insensitivity appalls the Imperial.

“I apologize for their behavior. They’re like rough stones.” Nish says to her.

“I understand their concern... I did not spend *all* my time serving my masters. I often explored the grounds, and am very good at sneaking. How else could I escape? On nights when I couldn’t sleep, I would make sure I was alone and

train with large sticks; I used them as staves and makeshift spears. I haven't slept much the past few years." She replies.

"What about magic?" Fjorn asks.

"I'm lucky to be literate. I had to teach myself in secret." She snaps.

"You two... Back down!" Nish barks. "Don't worry. I'm a Spellsword myself. If you're interested, I can train you in any skills that I have. Swords, daggers, axes, or various magics. I prefer destruction and illusion myself." He tells her in a very gentle voice.

"You know magic?" She asks, gazing at him.

"Indeed, I do. Are you interested in magic?" He smiles.

"I'd certainly like to try." She grins faintly.

"Then I'd be happy to take you under my arm... Figuratively speaking, I mean." Nish quickly corrects himself.

Fjorn rolls his eyes, while Jo'dehki seems rather amused.

"How kind of you. I'd like that." She nods.