

Chimerical

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Episode 15: Mercy, Part Two

According to Abari, many of the people who died lived in Dune. They were all returning home after an expedition to explore Ayleid ruins in Cyrodiil, and the few who did not live in Dune resided in nearby villages. Nish and Jo'dehki take the time to search the bodies for valuables, collecting any coins, jewelry and weapons. They sort the valuables by victim, placing them in chests or sacks and labeling them with the names that Abari can recall. A single remaining cart, drawn by one horse, is used to hold the items. Abari hopes to return the personal affects to the victim's families.

What little the bandits had is placed in a single chest that Nish and Jo'dehki claim for themselves. Once the cart is loaded, they pile the remaining bodies together near another damaged cart. Nish uses his destruction magic to set the large makeshift pyre ablaze, cremating all of the bodies at once. Jotzaka is the only one who receives a proper burial, but that was more for Abari's peace of mind

than anything else. With the pyre crackling and popping, the three travelers depart.

Though she was not seriously injured during the assault, receiving only superficial wounds, Abari rides in the cart. Nish and Jo'dehki walk beside it, leading the horse along the road to Rawl'Kha. Abari looks back, watching the orange glow of the fire as it grows smaller and more faint with each step. Soon all she can see is the smoke from the pyre. Jo'dehki watches the attractive and dainty Ohmes-Raht. In between admiring her form, he pities her for the suffering and pain that she has had to endure. He wonders if he should speak to the woman, but is too nervous to form any words of significance.

"Rik suta raba jer khivalahka?" Nish suddenly asks her.

"What?" Abari turns back to him.

"Apologies. This one forgot that you don't speak Ta'agra."

"Is that what that was?" Abari asks.

"Yes. You've never heard it before?" Nish raises an eyebrow.

"I grew up in Greenshade, but spent a lot of time in Cyrodiil. The few Khajiit I met weren't my breed, and never spoke Ta'agra. I've never heard it before meeting you." She explains.

"Then how do you live in Dune?" Jo'dehki asks.

“Well, technically I don’t. My parents do. I was heading back to stay with them for a while. Eventually, I’ll go back to Cyrodiil.”

“Which brings us back to my first question. How long have you traveled?” Nish asks.

“Well... Hmm... About a month, if you don’t include all of the time spent camping in or around the Ayleid ruins. If you want to count that too, then ten years.” She replies.

“Ten years?! Forgive this one for saying, but you don’t look old enough to have been exploring for so long.” Jo’dehki comments.

“I’m twenty-two, and I’ve been exploring ruins since I was nearly twelve years old.” Abari retorts, sounding almost offended.

“Forgive Jo’dehki. He meant no offense. He was just surprised because of how attractive and youthful you look.”

Abari silently chuckles, cracking a faint smile. As they walk along the road, the sun begins to set. Nish and Jo’dehki both worry, for they know how dangerous the road becomes at night. When darkness settles upon the land, bandits have considerably more places to hide, and many carnivorous animals, with little fear of sentient beings, hunt for food. Evening begins to wane before they finally see the lights of Rawl’Kha in the distance. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief as the intricately constructed buildings come into view.

They enter the city and head directly for the nearest inn. Using an exposed but unused foundation, they tie up the

horse and disable the cart. When Nish and Jo'dehki worry about the safety of the valuables, Abari simply labels the cart as the belongings of murder victims that are being returned to their relatives, and claims that stealing from the cart will curse the thief.

"Are you sure that will be enough?" Nish asks.

"That would probably not stop Jo'dehki." The Cathay-Raht adds.

"Trust me. Nothing scares the simple minded more than an unseen, unspecified punishment from Oblivion." Abari replies.

"Beautiful *and* clever." Jo'dehki remarks as Abari walks past him.

Though she looks at Jo'dehki and smiles, she says nothing back to him. They enter the inn and promptly rent two rooms, one for Abari and the other for the two friends. Nish and Jo'dehki pay for the rooms with the coins salvaged from the bandits, which they had already divvied amongst themselves. They order dinner and sit at an unused table near a corner. As they walk through the hall, Abari attracts the eyes of nearly every male within, including the old innkeeper. He promptly brings them dinner, serving Abari first and including a sweetroll for no extra charge.

"You have a few admirers." Nish chuckles.

"I've long since grown used to it." Abari sighs.

"That does not please you?" Jo'dehki asks in surprise.

“It’s cute at first, but anything in excess becomes quite wearisome, even men’s affection.” She replies.

Abari had been considered a prize since her early teens, often targeted by infatuated boys and jealous girls. Men, mer, and other Khajiit all seem interested in her; men and mer because she is not as inherently feline-looking, and Khajiit for similar reasons, with the added bonus of being able to breed with her. Abari regales Jo’dehki of several anecdotal stories from her past, while the Cathay-Raht listens intently. Abari suddenly grows silent.

“Are you alright?” Jo’dehki asks.

“Huh? Oh... Yes, I... I was just thinking.” She replies.

Not wanting to upset her, or lose the opportunity, Jo’dehki changes the subject and asks Abari about her personal background. As Abari speaks, she reveals considerable details, albeit with carefully omitted names and vague locations. Abari is a scholar who specializes in history, specifically the Ayleids. She grew up in Greenshade when her rather poor family sent her away to receive an education from a scholarly aunt and uncle. She had left Dune before she was old enough to retain any memories of it.

By her early teens, she had spent quite a bit of time in Cyrodiil, enough to have a second group of friends and suitors there. She is an only child to Cathay parents, and greatly enjoys plays. Not wanting to dominate the

conversation, as she often does, Ābari then asks Jo'dehki questions about himself. Equally vague, Jo'dehki claims to be a humble traveler, rescued by Nish and a no longer present companion, in a manner not dissimilar to her own. The enamored Khajiit can't help but flirt with Ābari continuously as he talks, something she both expected and prepared for. She politely avoids rejecting him, expertly parrying every sweet word.

As Jo'dehki and Ābari talk Nish remains silent. He eats his food slowly, often pausing for long periods of time. He wanders back and forth in his mind, between his extended encounter with Rabara and thinking about Tsanavi. He is torn between feeling guilty for sleeping with Rabara, and dwelling on his past love. Will she be pleased to see him? Is she married now? Will she even be in S'ren-ja? Though he did find Rabara both attractive and interesting, he can't help but feel as though he committed adultery on Tsanavi, even though they were never married and he hasn't seen her in years. He struggles to comprehend and control his own thoughts. Muffled voices call out to him.

"Nish? ... Hello? Nish!" Jo'dehki smacks him on the arm.

"Huh? What?" Nish looks between his companions.

"She asked you a question." Jo'dehki growls.

"What was the question?"

"Weren't you listening?" Ābari asks.

"Uh... ... No. Sorry." Nish answers.

"Thinking?" She asks.

“Yeah.”

“About what?”

Nish looks up at her for a moment, but doesn't speak. An uneasy tension grows between the Imperial and the Ohmes-Raht girl as he takes another bite, rather rudely disregarding the question.

“So, uh... Tell me about yourself? What makes Ra'kanishu tick?” She asks again.

“Ra'kanishu is quite uninteresting.” He murmurs.

“I doubt that. You *must* have something to say. I mean, your friend here isn't uninteresting, and you've traveled together.” She begins.

Jo'dehki's heart flutters at her words.

“Nope. Nothing of consequence.” He replies.

“Oh, come on... What about your travels or your family? A funny story or two? You could talk about how you know Ta'agra so well, or this absent friend you traveled with. Maybe a past lover?” She presses.

Nish drinks the last of his lager from his tankard and sets the wooden mug down onto the table. He stares pensively at Abari.

“Ra’kanishu is quite tired... See you two in the morning.” He grumbles as he rises from the table.

He takes one of the keys, showing Jo’dehki the etched symbol so he knows which room to enter. Nish then leaves the dining hall, heading for the room while Abari sits dumbfounded, contemplating her error.

“What was that?” She asks Jo’dehki.

“This one does not know. He has not been acting like himself these past few days; his mood often shifts from pleased to angry or depressed.” He replies.

“I see... Well if he didn’t want to talk, he could have been a bit nicer about it.” She remarks.

“He is not a bad man. Quite the opposite in fact. Perhaps he has a lot on his mind?”

“Like what?” Abari presses.

Jo’dehki, ever the chatterbox, obliges the curious young woman. He quickly reveals all that he knows of Nish’s personal background, starting with their first encounter. He continues, revealing Nish’s adoptive Khajiiti family, his history with Daro’veera and her betrayal, and their quest to return to S’ren-ja, where Nish’s family lives. Abari sits captivated, listening to the loose-lipped Cathay-Raht, now even more intrigued. The Imperial’s background is vastly different from any she had heard before.

“If Ra’kanishu had that much to say, why would he leave so abruptly?” She asks.

“This one does not know. Perhaps it was your last question?” Jo’dehki suggests.

“What do you mean?”

“Nish lived in S’ren-ja his entire life. After leaving, he realized feelings for a woman who was there, whom he hadn’t seen in years. Perhaps it weighs heavy on him?” He answers.

Abari suddenly feels terribly guilty, turning back to look at the staircase. She continues her conversation with Jo’dehki, but in the back of her mind, she feels the urge to apologize to the Imperial, and possibly dig even deeper. As they converse, she abruptly excuses herself, leaving Jo’dehki behind in the tavern. She assures him that she will be back shortly. Abari walks through the hall, the eyes of every male following her as she climbs the stairs to the rooms. She finds the door to the room that Nish and Jo’dehki are to share, having glimpsed the symbol on the key.

She gently raps her knuckles against the wooden door, but does not receive an answer. She reaches out a hand and takes hold of the handle. She presses the lever and the latch moves; the door is unlocked. Swinging the door open, Abari enters unannounced. Nish stands by the nightstand, his side facing her. He is shirtless and tying his breeches closed as he changes into a second set of clothes. His original set are partially stuffed into the open hole at the top of his backpack, the flap unbuckled and folded back.

She stops and looks on in surprise. Her eyes glide over him, noting his toned arms and muscular torso. He does not seem to notice her off to his side. She cannot help herself and purrs loudly. Hearing her, he turns his head quickly, obviously surprised by her interruption. She lowers her head in embarrassment, averting her eyes from him. As he turns to retrieve his second tunic she glances back up for a final look, but as he slips on his top she briefly sees the scar from Daro'veera's dagger on his back. It sits off to the left of his spine, just below his shoulder blade. She suddenly feels worse.

"How did you get in here? Did Jo'dehki give you the key?" He asks her.

"Uh... No. I just tried the door and it was unlocked." She replies.

Nish walks up to her and examines the door. She steps aside as he kneels down and looks over the latch. He was certain he had locked the door. He sighs in frustration when he realizes that the lock is broken.

"I'm sorry for walking in on you like that. I didn't know you were still awake." Abari begins.

"It's alright..." He murmurs.

"I wanted to see you for a moment, and apologize for what I said at dinner. I didn't mean to offend you." She continues.

“What do you mean?” He asks.

“Well, I was talking with Jo’dehki.”

“Figures...” Nish mutters. “How much did he tell you?”

“He explained everything he knew to me.” She answers.

“Of course he did...” He sighs.

“I’m sorry... I shouldn’t pry. I just...”

“You don’t need to apologize; you were just curious, and you didn’t know anything about this one’s background. Jo’dehki is the one who should be apologizing.”

He sits on the edge of a bed and looks at the floor. His melancholy expression almost demands her sympathy. Abari slowly approaches, shutting the door behind her. She does not realize that Jo’dehki stands in the hallway, watching from the top of the staircase. She sits beside him, her hands resting on her knees. She stares at the Imperial, who never looks up from the smooth wooden boards beneath his feet.

“If you need to talk to someone, I’m sitting right here.” She says softly.

He turns his eyes to look at her, but his head faces forward. Abari reaches out, carefully taking his hand in hers and stroking his skin gently. He feels her soft fur in his hand; it’s quite comforting. Though he tries to remain silent, his pent-up thoughts and emotions claw at his skull; they desperately want to escape.

“Alright...” He says in a near whisper.

Abari does her best to not look too excited as the Imperial takes a breath, preparing to speak.

“Ra’kanishu often doesn’t feel in control of his own thoughts. Often, he is torn between his heart and his mind, and cannot decide which to listen too. When we came through Arenthia, we saved two city guards whose prisoners tried to escape. The guard captain, a beautiful Cathay woman desired Ra’kanishu, and him her. After her surviving prisoner was returned to a cell, we excused ourselves for a little... Quality time.” He begins.

“Oh... I-I see...” She quietly stammers, her face flushing beneath her fur.

“The encounter lasted a night, and at the time, it did not bother this one in the least. Not even when we left her house the next morning was it weighing on this one’s mind... But when my friend joined me on the road, this one couldn’t help but think of another that he had known a long time ago; a female he was once very close too. Suddenly, his experience with the guard captain felt like adultery, and he was very ashamed of himself. Ra’kanishu finds it hard to understand his actions these days.” He continues.

Abari nods, listening intently as the Imperial speaks. He takes a deep breath, the air trembling as he exhales.

“It was never like that before; it was never a problem until Daro’veera. You saw this one’s scar... She literally stabbed this one in the back with his own dagger and left him for dead, but not before calling him foolish and taunting him as he bled out on the ground. Now he often second guesses himself when people are in trouble. He slept with the guard captain on impulse, something he would have never done before.”

“You didn’t second guess helping me.” Abari interjects.

“To be honest, it was the Bosmer who was trying to rape you; it drove this one to act right away. Ra’kanishu detests rape. When the prisoners tried to escape, he didn’t immediately help the guards until the captain’s life was in danger. Ra’kanishu would never have hesitated so long before.” He explains.

“But you still acted. You may be scarred, but you aren’t a different person. You hesitated, but you still did something. You saw the Bosmer trying to rape me, and came to my aid right away.” She smiles warmly.

“Perhaps you are right. Ra’kanishu still feels different though. He gave in to his impulses without thought. After nearly dying, all this one *could* think about was the girl from his past, and his family back home. All he wants to do is go home and see her and his family again, but now he is terrified. What if she has moved on, or doesn’t remember him? What if she isn’t there at all? What if his family has no room for him anymore? Every step closer to S’ren-ja makes him feel more afraid and nervous, and he doesn’t feel like he can control it.” Nish finishes.

She holds his hand tighter, cupping it with her remaining hand. He turns back to her, looking into her gold colored eyes.

“After what happened to you, it’s perfectly understandable that you would be worried about going home. It’s been so long, that things very well might be different, but you shouldn’t dwell on the things that aren’t in your power to control. It’s just unnecessary stress.” She says.

“Would you believe that Jo’dehki gave this one very similar advice already?” Nish chuckles.

“It’s good advice.”

“It is... Funny how often good advice is the most difficult to use. And then there’s the issue of helping others; this one often feels foolish for risking himself for people he does not know. Maybe being good and a fool are one in the same?” He poses.

“Helping me and those guards in Arentia, even after what Daro’veera did to you, proves that you have a good soul. Good souls are very rare. They should not be constrained, or evil will always win.” She chirps.

Nish looks back to the girl and grins, silently chuckling.

“You are very wise, and kind for saying so. Thank you.”

“Anytime. I appreciate your confidence.” She replies.

“This one is going to try and get some sleep. You have a good night, alright?” He says.

Abari rises from the bed as Nish lies down. Abari walks toward the door and grabs the handle. She pauses and turns back to the Imperial, who stretches out and rests his hands behind his head.

“Oh... Nice body by the way.” She winks.

“Thanks, now get out.” He chuckles.

She smiles, giggling softly as she leaves the room. She looks toward the empty staircase, then toward the room adjacent. She yawns as she feels somewhat drowsy. On impulse, she walks into her room and closes the door. She locks the latch, but stops when she recalls Nish’s door. Trying the latch, it pops open. She looks around the room and finds a chair with a tall back. She takes the chair and slips it beneath the handle, jamming it against the door before she undresses and climbs into bed.

Nish’s eyes open as he lies on his side. He looks over to the burning notched candle on the nightstand; three hours have passed since Abari left him. He looks over to see an empty bed across from him. Jo’d ehki is not in the room. Having taken a brief nap, Nish sits up. He stretches his arms and chest before climbing out of the bed. He leaves the room and walks down the staircase, looking for Jo’d ehki. He finds the Cathay-Raht in the dining hall, sitting alone. Several empty tankards sit in front of him as he holds another to his lips, liquid spilling over the sides and running

down his snout and over his chin. He is obviously quite intoxicated.

“Having fun?” Nish asks as he steps up to Jo’dehki.

“Barrels...” He says with a slur.

“Alright. It’s time to get you into bed. We have to travel tomorrow.” Nish says as he grabs Jo’dehki’s arm.

“You are a good person. You know that?” Jo’dehki begins.

“Sure, and you’re drunk. Let’s go.”

“And Abari is a good person too. She deserves of a good man. She is nothing like Daro’veera, the wench that she is. You can see it in her beautiful eyes, yes? She could use a man like you in her life.” Jo’dehki drunkenly chuckles.

“What are you talking about? You speak like we’re interested in each other.” Nish says, grunting as he tries to pull Jo’dehki from his chair by his armpit.

The Nord sized Khajiit suddenly stands on his own, towering over the Imperial who stumbles back.

“There! Now we walk towards the stairs.” Nish laughs.

“Jo’dehki knows she went to see you, and she never returned. He is not a fool. Did you mate with her too? Off conquering another foreign woman with your mighty Imperial phallus?” Jo’dehki growls.

“What are you talking about?! Why would you say such a thing?” Nish raises an eyebrow.

“Even if you had mated, you are not Khajiit. You can’t ever have children together, at least not without the aid of powerful magic, or the favor of the Gods...” Jo’dehki continues.

“Alright... That’s fine... You’ve just had too much to drink. You can sleep it off upstairs.” Nish says.

He helps Jo’dehki around the chair as he guides him towards the staircase. As they move, Jo’dehki loses balance and falls against the Imperial, who struggles with the Cathay-Raht, who is over a head taller than him, and easily sixty pounds heavier.

“Do you think you could help? This one is not quite strong enough to carry your carcass on his own.” Nish quips.

“You are so naïve, Ra’kanishu. You are merely amusing to the Khajiit who know you... An Imperial fluent in Ta’agra only makes it difficult to talk about you behind your back.” Jo’dehki remarks.

“If this one knew how pleasant you became when you drank, he would have left you here with the others, to entertain them.” Nish retorts.

“Don’t mock me, Imperial. This one sees right through you. You helped that beautiful Cathay girl just to bed her!” He continues.

“You know that isn’t true. If we hadn’t done something, she’d be dead right now, and three criminals would be free to hurt innocent people. This one just happened to catch Rabara’s eye.” Nish says.

“Dirty Khajiiti women; mating with men like there is nothing wrong with it... And Daro’veera probably stabbed you in the back because you replaced her master’s shackles with your own... Now you want Abari too!” Jo’dehki angrily accuses.

Nish stops in his tracks, genuinely hurt by Jo’dehki’s sharp words. Finally tired of Jo’dehki’s drunken rambling, he gives up and drops the large Khajiit on a nearby bench, leaving him there. He removes Jo’dehki’s coin purse so no one will pilfer from it, not even needing to use his skills as a pickpocket, as Jo’dehki quickly passes out. With the coin purse in hand, the Imperial returns to the staircase, climbs the steps to the second floor, and enters the room that he was to share with his friend. He sets the coin purse down on the nightstand and promptly returns to bed; he will fetch Jo’dehki in the morning.