

Chimerical

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Episode 24: Exposé

“Don’t hurt him!” Tsanavi pleads.

Ra’kanishu grunts as he is forced violently to the ground by several armed villagers. Though he does not resist his neighbors, the word has already spread of his Lycanthropy and they take no chances. Lying quietly on the ground, they pull his arms behind his back and he still does not resist. Nish stares at the horizon with a sullen expression as the loud clanking of shackles is heard. The cold metal weighs down his wrists as a town guard locks the devices. The villagers hold his upper arms and pull him from the ground as Tsanavi watches disheartened in the background, standing beside Jo’dehki and Nish’s family.

“We’ll put you down, dog of Hircine!” One villager growls.

“Let’s see what the elders want to do with him!” Another remarks.

“We’re lucky he didn’t kill all of us.” Says a third.

“This one would never have done such a thing.” Nish murmurs.

They lead the Imperial, who had grown up beside them, toward the clan mother’s house. Ko’adhasa stands at the top of her steps as they approach her manor, the central structure of the village. She had known early on that Nish was a werewolf and had trained him to control his power, but now that his secret is public knowledge her heart breaks at the thought of having to judge him. She wipes a single tear from her eye with the fur of her index finger before stepping inside her home. Several village elders follow close behind.

Glancing over his shoulder, Nish looks back at his wife, family and best friend as they watch in horror. Looking ahead, his heart sinks as the once pleasant looking structure becomes more menacing with each step; it looms over him like a towering monstrosity. The chains jingle eerily as he is forced up the stairs and toward the massive double doors carved from pure ebony and outlined with gold. His heart races as he ponders whether this is his last day alive. Was there anything he could have done differently to make his life and the lives of those he knew better? Is there anything he regrets? Had he lived his life to the fullest?

He stumbles and slams into the edge of the door as one of the villagers tries to shove him inside. He winces in pain and looks back at the middle-aged Khajiit.

“Don’t be so rough!” A young adult villager says.

“Quiet, M’raym! Don’t tell Batesh how to treat Hircine’s dog!” The man yells back.

“This one remembers you, Batesh. Ra’kanishu used to play with your son Kazasava when we were cubs.” Nish says.

“M’raym remembers that. You once saved him from being beaten by Kazkhar and his friends.” The younger Khajiit comments.

Batesh’s expression changes. He wrestles with the dichotomy of hating and fearing what Nish is, while still caring for a man who once befriended his son and whom he had seen for many years. M’raym pats Nish on the back and gently holds his forearm, leading him past the doorway and into Ko’adhasa’s house. Batesh walks slowly behind, his mind wracked with shame and guilt. Ko’adhasa sits at a large desk where many would come to speak with the clan mother on civil matters. Flanking her are four village elders. Though they hold no actual power, they act as counselors to the clan mother.

The four elders of the village are Vasdar, who is seventy, S’rassa, a somewhat younger man in his mid-sixties, Dro’zakar, the youngest male at fifty-two-years-old, and Abaimba, a relatively recent replacement for an elder who has since died. Abaimba is the youngest, in her late forties; the Ohmes-Raht is as ruthless and arrogant as her son, Kazkhar, and with twice the ambition. M’raym and Batesh present Nish to the clan mother and her council of elders as the main hall of Ko’adhasa’s house is flooded by villagers.

Nazahn and Hiska-dar push their way to the front while Jo'dehki stays near the rear of the group to guard Jadhi, Tsanavi and S'tari, worrying that the crowd may also direct their hatred and fear towards them.

"He is a werewolf!" A villager barks.

"We should burn him!" Another growls.

"Death to Hircine's dog!" One exclaims rather cheerfully.

"Quiet please!" Ko'adhasa yells above the crowd, raising her hands high.

The angry mob obeys their leader and a deathly stillness fills the packed home; only the sounds of the villagers breathing are heard. Nish begins to sweat as Ko'adhasa looks to him. He can see that she is torn between the decision, but she is quickly composing herself. He knows that she will never oust herself by revealing her knowledge of his curse. S'tari grips Nazahn's hand tightly, their hearts pounding. Jadhi does the same, gripping Jo'dehki's hand and locking their fingers together.

"Ra'kanishu is a werewolf! He is a danger to us all, and we ask that you sanction his execution!" Kazkhar yells from the middle of the crowd.

"Are these accusations true, Ra'kanishu?" Ko'adhasa asks.

"Kazkhar has already told you! He has seen it with his own eyes!" The young man angrily shouts.

“This one was not asking you!” Ko’adhasa growls at him.

Put back in his place, Kazkhar falls silent and lowers his head respectfully. Even one so arrogant and pompous could not defy the clan mother. Ko’adhasa turns to Ra’kanishu and looks intently at him, expecting his response. She knows the answer, and though Nish could easily reveal this fact before the villagers, he would never betray her. He gulps and takes a breath, his body shivering with worry.

“Y-yes, clan mother. Ra’kanishu has been cursed by Hircine, the hunter.” He admits.

The crowd gasps and incomprehensible chatter fills the room. S’tari begins to sob, realizing that her adopted son may soon be dead.

“Silence!” Ko’adhasa yells, attempting to subdue the chattering villagers. “Tell me, Ra’kanishu... How long have you had Hircine’s curse?”

“Roughly eight years, since he was sixteen.” Nish answers.

The crowd explodes, yelling and shouting. They cannot believe that they had harbored a werewolf for so long without ever knowing it. Ko’adhasa raises her hands once again, screaming at them.

“If you do not allow us to proceed, we will force all of you out!”

The room grows still and the villagers stare silently back at her.

“Why did you not pray to Jone and Jode for healing after you were afflicted?” Ko’adhasa asks.

“This one was near death after being attacked. He survived only with the blessing of the Divines. By the time he was well enough to even speak, Ra’kanishu had since succumbed to the curse and could no longer ask for healing.” The Imperial explains.

The elders lean in and whisper to her. Everyone is certain from their mere expressions that they are advising her to put Nish to death. The clan mother clasps her hands together, coiling all of her fingers over each hand, except for her index fingers. She rests her sharp claws underneath her bottom lip as she takes a moment to contemplate the situation. Nish knows that she has every right to order his execution, and if she were to give the order the villagers would pounce upon him and carry it out within minutes.

“You admit to being cursed by Hircine and deceiving your neighbors for many years. The Divine’s know you should be destroyed, but this one will allow you to state your case before her and the elders.”

No one can believe their ears. Grumbles and growls are heard amongst the frustrated and frightened townsfolk who are eager to see Nish's life extinguished. Others seem more intrigued, curious as to what he has to say.

“Ra'kanishu thanks you for this privilege and apologizes for his deception. Had this one been well enough to pray for healing, he would have done so. He does not wish to suffer Hircine's curse, but through many years of training, he assures all that he is in complete control of his power. Hircine's voice does not hold any sway, and Ra'kanishu no longer hears it! He does not hunger for flesh, and never transforms against his will! The only reason this one used the power of the curse was because his beloved Tsanavi and many other innocent Khajiit were in danger. Had this one worn his sword and brought potions to bolster his magic, he would have used those instead. Ra'kanishu would never harm an innocent!”

Nazahn squeezes his wife's hand assuringly, though Ko'adhasa and her council of elders appear unmoved. After only a few seconds of silence the room erupts. Nish's family watch in shock as the crowd quickly becomes divided between persecutors and defenders; the defenders all being younger, more open-minded Khajiit, many of whom were captured by Daro'veera's gang and locked in the cages in her lair, while the persecutors are older and more traditional.

“How do we know he is not lying for Hircine?!” A village woman exclaims.

“This one doesn’t remember Ra ever lying before!” One yells defensively.

“The dog cannot be trusted!” Says another.

“Ra has been a werewolf for years and has never harmed anyone who lives here!”

“Perhaps he *is* in control? He unlocked the cage and released us while *still* a werewolf!” Another shouts.

Angered by their interruptions, Ko’adhasa waves to several designated guards who often patrol the town. With a subtle hand gesture, they draw their Khajiiti swords and maces, and raise their shields. Moving forward, they begin pushing the entire crowd outside of the clan mother’s home, leaving only Nish’s family and Jo’dehki behind.

“Ra’kanishu should never have returned.” He mutters to himself.

Glancing toward Tsanavi, his heart breaks at the pain that he is causing her. He wonders if she would have eventually moved on and been happy without him. She will certainly struggle to attain that now, especially if he is executed. The guilt weighs upon his heart and mind like a blacksmith’s anvil. Ko’adhasa again consults the elders as official guards stand on either side of the shackled Imperial. After a moment, she motions to Nish.

“Step forward.”

The chains clank as he nervously approaches the table, flanked by equally nervous guards.

“The council has advised this one that regardless of the willpower you have shown in controlling the curse, you are still susceptible to Hircine’s voice. Ko’adhasa would like to believe you will never lose your strength, but she cannot be certain and is inclined to agree with the elders.” The clan mother begins.

S’tari and Jadhi both cry out, while the others stand dumbfounded and fearing the worst. Tsanavi drops to her knees, silently weeping as the tears stream down her face and around the sides of her snout.

“However!” Ko’adhasa exclaims, gaining their attention. “This one does *not* believe that you would ever intentionally harm anyone here. You only revealed yourself because you were protecting others, knowing full-well they may seek your death in return. Your selflessness is remarkable, and as a result you will *not* be executed.”

“What?!” Abaimba exclaims, turning to the clan mother.

“Are you certain this is what you want to do?” Vasdar politely asks.

“It is.” Ko’adhasa nods.

Nish's family breathes a sigh of relief and Jo'dehki helps Tsanavi from the floor.

"Then what will become of my son?!" S'tari asks.

"Ra'kanishu will be banished from S'ren-ja, with orders to be killed on sight should he return." Ko'adhasa replies.

"That's it?!" Abaimba yells again.

"Hold your tongue, little girl!" Ko'adhasa growls. "As Ra'kanishu has a wife and family, he will be granted a stay to put their affairs in order. He will not be required to leave until the morning of the day after tomorrow." She says to Nish and his family.

They all begin to relax as the guards immediately unlock his shackles. Rising from her seat, Abaimba slams her hands down onto the table, startling the clan mother.

"You are putting us all at risk! Don't be a fool!" She scolds Ko'adhasa.

"Ra'kanishu is no longer bound, and yet he is not killing us. For so many years he did nothing to us, so perhaps we are safe until he leaves? ... Oh, and if you enjoy your position, do not question my judgement again." Ko'adhasa politely replies.

As soon as the guards remove the shackles, Tsanavi leaps upon Nish's back, holding him tightly. Neither can believe that his life has been spared. Ko'adhasa brushes past Abaimba, her blood boiling after being scolded by her

superior. With the guards following the clan mother, she leaves the home to tell the crowd of her decision.

“Tsanavi is so glad you will live. We should sell our home right away and move somewhere else. Rawl’Kha is close enough, and your family could visit. Or would you rather live in Dune?” The dainty Suthay asks excitedly.

“Dune is nice, but some areas are dangerous and this one would worry for you.” Nish replies.

Nish’s family and friends gather around him, thankful that he will live. Abaimba glares as she approaches the Imperial and his Khajiit family. In the background, Ko’adhasa can be heard addressing the crowd of villagers.

“Attention everyone! This one has made a decision!” The clan mother’s muffled voice says.

“Well, we have time to figure it out.” Tsanavi remarks.

“Wherever you go, we can move as well.” Nazahn quickly adds.

“Ra’kanishu will *not* be executed.” Ko’adhasa continues; the crowd erupts.

“Do you think this is over, Imperial?” Abaimba asks in a low growl.

“Pardon?” Nish raises an eyebrow.

“He will be banished from S’ren-ja, a punishment that begins the morning after next.” The clan mother’s muffled voice explains, followed by more noise from the crowd.

“You earned your life, but not for long. If Abaimba was in your shoes, she would pack up and leave tonight.” The elder warns.

“Is that a threat?” Jo’dehki growls, his hand resting on the handle of his dagger.

“Wait, my friend! Perhaps she is right...” Nish immediately interjects.

Grinning sinisterly, Abaimba mockingly waves at the family before departing. As the large ebony doors swing open, the crowd seems to be yelling amongst themselves. Returning inside, Ko’adhasa instructs a squad of guards to watch over Nish, in the event that any townsfolk decide her decision was not sufficiently harsh. With four armed and armored soldiers, and the only two Cathay-Raht in the village protecting him, they head outside and wade through the crowd, some angry and some elated. Moving past them, they return to Nish and Tsanavi’s house, where they immediately begin packing valuables and prized belongings.

Stepping into her own house, Abaimba walks up to a table and flips it over in a rage. She screams at the top of her lungs and stomps a foot as she remembers Ko’adhasa’s scolding. Kazkhar steps inside, leaving his minions at the door.

“What should we do mother?” He asks her.

“What do you think?! We take action! No one will best us! Make sure there is nowhere left for that Imperial to go, besides Oblivion!” She commands.

“And how do we do that?!” He thinks aloud.

She furls her brow and narrows her eyes. Making a subtle gesture for him to leave, Kazkhar is confused. Suddenly, his mother smacks him across the face as hard as she can.

“Use your head for once, you worm! Some self-righteous do-gooder would love nothing more than a valid excuse to put someone’s head on a spike. Make sure it’s Ra’s! They can do all of the work for us! By the Divines, why does this one even waste her time explaining things to you?! You have the intellect of an infant guar!”

“Sorry, mother. Kazkhar will not fail you!” He sheepishly exclaims.

“You better not, now get out of my sight and make yourself useful for a change!” She growls.

“Yes, mother!” He nods.

Turning, he darts outside where his friends await him.

“So, what’s the plan?” One asks.

“Should we take care of him ourselves?!” Another wonders.

Kazkhar quickly smacks his dimwitted minion across the face as hard as he can.

“Ow!” The minion exclaims.

“Use your head! Four town guards and his family are protecting him!” Kazkhar growls.

“Oh, right... Then what do we do?”

“We make sure that every self-righteous idiot has a new target for their rage. Let’s get to Dune and spread the word... Sometimes this one wonders why he wastes his time with you idiots. You’re like infant guar.” Kazkhar shakes his head.

“Sorry, boss.” Another remarks, looking down at his feet.

“We better go. We have work to do.”