

CELIMÉ VORTSÊH

Mother was a whore, was the first lesson, standing there under the eaves outside the back of what you'd come to know as the servants chalet. Repeating it over and over until you cried wasn't enough for your keeper, who insisted on beating you with barbed vine at an age where everything is memory. It's just the first and it sticks. Mother was a whore.

Celimé's father is none other than a member of the Jerak Ahrenrath - Kurt Hulum. Celimé's mother, Antiana Urînæchær who was always a wild child, refusing to bow to the whims of her keeper's worship of Andaras and intention to bring the imprisoned child of Earthwardens into the fold. Antiana was most fearful of the sorcerer, Ventine, who stripped her of much of her physical appearances as well as her mind. So Antiana rebelled and rocked the court of Bentara by having barely concealed affairs with any suitor interested, more to shock than anything. It led to her public expulsion from the city. From there Antiana fled Ventine, but soon fell on bad times, drifting to Sel-Kai eventually where soon she was working as a prostitute. It was here that Kurt Hulum, looking for participants in his demonic orgies, gathered a small group of prostitutes and unleashed Demons from the Pale to join in the mass rape and slaughter. Antiana was resilient enough among the sadism to escape into the streets and flee Sel-Kai. The Go-tjinn-kai responsible for her escape realized his folly after his over eagerness and began to track her as best he could away from the knowledge of Kurt. The damage was done, however, Kurt's seed was firmly in her belly and the next year Antiana spent fleeing back home to mother. After childbirth in Miir she carried Celimé to her mother, dumped the child and fled into the night. It was a day out from Jantenen that the Go-tjinn-kai caught up with her finally attempted to rid himself of her - Ventine, however intervened leaving Antiana and taking her child. kept for her unique parentage to provide Ventine more amusement in his surgery. Ventine instructed Mistress Urînæchær to raise the child and train her in the ways that they could best use her as was intended for Antiana, an assassin, and infiltrator prime. Celimé's potential soon began to show.

For the most part, those early memories are only occluded by that first memory of your keeper. Happiness wasn't something you missed entirely; there is that small grace you know it exists. Never alone, but always without a mother, life with the servants didn't appear to be grooming for eventual slavery, but a time of freedom, if only within certain confines and set boundaries.

Lusham, head of the serfs, a short young woman whose appearance would be smirched later in derogatory terms of her alien race - that she was a dwarf meant nothing to you and still doesn't. It was her that you first remember, surrogate as she was. Always watching out for you, taking you into the city of Bentara, explaining how everything works, how people look at the world, showing you wondrous shops and markets. But that eagerness and intelligent absorption of knowledge stole away that doe-eyed ignorant bliss.

Your keeper, your beater, your teacher, Mistress Urînæchær – the woman who gave your first of many lessons. Now, happiness could only be achieved through effort and obsequious pleasing, otherwise the whip would bring bleeding. Unique schooling was dished out at every waking hour, rules, puzzles, and challenge after challenge, tests and abuse, strict was the regime, a regime unquiet, foreshadowed in slight comments whispered by Mistress Urînæchær.

Every lesson is relief from pain back to pain. Caged to near starvation just to teach the ability to escape, thrown into the Bay of Izar to teach swimming, tortured and scarred to teach mental fortitude, sneaking, hiding, stealing... each with its punishment and anything failed brought *whip with teeth*. Praise came though, Mistress Urînæchær had a glimmer of something more than lust in her eye when you succeeded and that glimmer, if only a shadow of the glimmer Lusham used to beam with, was worth the pain to escape it.

Lusham still did visit after Mistress Urînæchær removed you from the servants, concerned greatly, fussing always but never a word. They were strange days and nights, most often after *whip with teeth*, when she would come and nurse you to strength. One night Mistress Urînæchær caught Lusham tending your lashes, and the next day was the first of the household without your motherly friend.

The dwarf Lusham is a Priest of Jaysek from the underground city of Ton-Bor. She was warned many decades ago through dream of the sorcerer Ventine and a 'Black Harvest' that would come to the city. Discussed with her clan it was decided she seek employ in Bentara to get close to Ventine. She managed to get work with Mistress Urînæchær and through diligent and loyal service soon was seneschal of the household the woman of the court ran. Quietly she observed rites to Andaras held in the basement and Celimé's mother, Antiana forced into situations she'd run from. Lusham took care of the child dumped, instantly observing the Dyar features, and intended to take the child away but her involvement led to her expulsion. Ventine was well aware of her status and too used his genetic knowledge and surgery to expunge any vestige of the saviour she may have been.

As the years aged you, so did Mistress Urînæchær release you, and freedom was sweeter than even that paling glimmer in her eye. Small trials, strict rules, break them and the punishment was severe. Severe, that was shown to you after the first excursion into Bentara where upon returning successful and proud, Mistress Urînæchær smiled and congratulated you at the same time she wrapping *whip with teeth* around your neck. Dragged and screaming into the dungeon under the villa, the box she locked you in with the spiders wasn't to be opened from within.

Many years were spent refining everything taught within the villa, striving to achieve the level that Mistress Urînæchær rapidly set and re-set. The concept of freedom, of escape from Mistress Urînæchær took a slow growth from the moment you first tasted the air unfettered. Seed it did, and grow and cast its branches into every fibre of your system until plans soon were laid out, money was saved, every task pushed

harder than usual so as to accomplish more in the hours unaccounted for. Everything was perfect and absolutely all that could be accounted for had been. And then it all dissolved with the arrival of Ventine.

I've been watching you for some time now. His words were like the trigger to releasing a wall of warm, smothering grease that quivered. Sorcerer and Court Advisor, Ventine, a powerful man not just in the political arena where he held strength, but also in his well-known standing as Sorcerer extraordinaire. Even on those nights in transit sitting huddled in corners for the right moment to proceed, the name Ventine was hushed with consternation. His words meant nothing, but this presence, his being only empowered what was already deemed as true by the masses. Mistress Urînæchær fawned, whipped herself at the feet of Ventine. I'll be watching you. His last chilling words stamped onto your chest by licentious leer.

Ventine has his suspicions of Celimé but apart from intellect and ability has not manifested anything to cause him alarm or to bring her into the fold more. What he does know is that he must watch her moves very closely and will not let her become a free spirit any time soon.

Entrapment again. The lights shuttered out and the pain, as the effort once delivered with object of desire now lay smothered. It took Lusham to awaken that desire again, catching you as you blundered outside. As the fear of capture at the arms of Ventine faded replaced with relived submission her words were serious and her manner agitated. Your life will be sad until the past sets you free. Nothing more. No glimmer of hope, even acceptance depressing to bear.

Your mother was a whore. From Sel-kai, who dumped you with Mistress Urînæchær who took you. Your mother once lived here in Bentara, strode the court of Count Korel and outraged it, driven into exile. Of this, Mistress Urînæchær told you during severe reprimand, her composure challenged during excess inciting her rage to new heights by provoking her control to waver. This thing, family, you've seen it in the windows of Bentara, but all you have are a few bitter words from a mountain of hate.

Your first birthday, eighteen years, Mistress Urînæchær says since you first arrived, celebrated in the dungeon dressed up with all manner of decoration. Not your true birthday but as close to one as you'll get. Initially feeling more a celebration for her than for you the liberating news announced to the spectacle of notable yet alien men and women gathered you would cherish. Freedom not just for one night but for as long as it would take. Mistress Urînæchær delighted the peculiar pantomime that clapped and approved to the announcement of your departure to Sarnak within the year to work among the Directorate Headquarters. Knowledge of life beyond Bentara wasn't something offered to you in training, moreover it was something blanketed, but rumours of the large city sprang to mind; a city of Amazon warriors and diplomats. As the night progressed the consideration it was some hoax to torment you could not be shaken, but most of the memories of that night following the

announcement are buried, removed from your hands except the unalterable fear of remembering. Ventine was there in the dungeon with the rest of those strange guests and what transpired you have either forgotten or... From that night on inception into a form of social life became another weekly lesson, though more a surreal mad performance. Not just breaking into houses, but application of etiquette, clothing and step, would form the backbone to gaining entry to socialites' homes and hearts. Prying on the prosperous if only for a short time, time enough for Mistress Urînæchær.

The night spent in the dungeon that soon degenerated into a rite to Andaras may be locked from her memory, but the fact of the matter is that Ventine attempted certain spells during the rite upon her only to have them unravel, whether the undoing of Andaras or something else he wasn't quite sure. It has only made Ventine all the more curious about her nature, he sees her as his prize, his working project.

A year later the order is plain, travel to Sarnak, and arrange work within the Directorate Headquarters to work your way up the ladder of trust and report everything back to Mistress Urînæchær. She in turn promising to let Ventine know you are progressing correctly through weekly letters requested from you. Yet one more lesson remained before travel to Sarnak, being the attendance at the official opening of the newly constructed Library by Count Korel. The formal attendance as young noble of Danarchis now leaving for Sarnak formed the beginning of your masquerade to carry on to the Amazon city. A year spent in deception establishing the role to play had worked. Everything was set, again. Dressed in finery, but not overdone, you appraised the crowd milling about the newly minted books and freshly laminated shelves with the way only you could, finding opportunity and targets conversation to listen to. Perhaps it was this that brought you to the attention of Bryce Korel, the Count's seventeen old son, who mentioned as much to you, with him two companions alert and tense. It was the first person to speak to you without cue. A stumbling reply of not knowing many of the faces and something about out of town you are sure you replied just before Mistress Urînæchær swooped to greet and save you, young Bryce's words trailing, "Another claw for that talon but...". Her words eclipsed his as her pretension of friendship smothered you away. Ventine moved closer and the boy left his own father's contribution to the city. That night was the last beating you had.

Three days later, standing with a small bag and a week's worth of coins including enough to get you upon the arriving carriage. Mistress Urînæchær beside you, dressed smart, nose held above those poor and disenfranchised. No word said, boarding swift and the horses too. Soon Bentara withdrew and Sarnak welcomed.

Celimé has yet to manifest any powers as a result of her heritage, but manifest they shall.