

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Oh shit our first Celine POV!

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Celine opens her eyes. For a long moment, she just stares up at the ceiling overhead. Not because she doesn't remember where she is or why she's here, but because she's currently swallowing down the urge to scream as she goes over the events of the previous night in her head.

Last night... had not gone well. No, that was an understatement. Last night had very nearly been a complete catastrophe brought upon by days of little to no sleep and an over-reliance on stimulants. She had allowed her judgment to be compromised in a truly spectacular fashion and made a number of mistakes that would have to be addressed and fixed over the coming days.

... She hadn't fucked up this bad in a long time, truth be told. Not even when she'd pulled several all-nighters to make sure Rumi, Mira, and Zoey's debut as HUNTR/X went off without a hitch. That had been the last time she let herself get even remotely this sleep deprived, but everything had ultimately worked out that time.

Everything had not worked out here. Bobby had found out about demons and more than that, Celine had thrown some rather unkind words in his face that had given him all the ammunition he needed to stand up to her and put her in her place. Mira and Zoey, meanwhile, would be questioning all of the things Celine seemingly didn't teach them, from how to manipulate the Honmoon to capture demons, to the fact that some demons were once human, to the very existence of half-demons in the first place.

Rumi... well, at least Celine hadn't fucked up and admitted outright that Rumi had demon patterns or something like that. Mira and Zoey still didn't know that secret, thankfully. And they wouldn't find out either so long as Celine had anything to say about it.

For as close as the girls were to each other, she refused to risk everything by testing their bonds with something like that. After all, Celine already knew from personal experience how that could end. She wouldn't risk Rumi's life on a 'maybe' that they would understand.

Still, there would be questions. And unfortunately, Celine suspected the demon knew about Rumi's secret as well. His words were too pointed, his comments downright weaponized. He'd played Celine like a fiddle and she had let it happen, fool that she'd been. But he wouldn't have been ABLE to play her like a fiddle without having certain knowledge in the first place.

... Truthfully, in the light of day with the proper amount of sleep, Celine could acknowledge that she'd handled that interaction most poorly of all. Yes, he was a demon and the only good demon was a dead demon... but at the same time, Celine should have been the one in control.

It should have been her asking the questions in a calm and composed manner, poking holes in his answers and exposing him to the girls for the liar he *had* to be.

Instead, the demon... this 'Jinu'... had run circles around her verbally. He'd tricked her into making the mistakes, poking holes in all of HER answers instead.

In fact, going over the conversation again in her head, Celine realizes that it might not just be Mira and Zoey questioning her at this point. Rumi... she would need to talk to her as soon as possible, to get them back on the same page.

The Golden Honmoon wouldn't hurt Rumi. Celine believed that with all her heart. Even if she didn't have proof that it would remove Rumi's patterns, even if she couldn't say that much with absolute certainty... she could at least say she knew the Honmoon would never harm one of its hunters.

And that was what Rumi was, in the end. Her heritage didn't matter. What was on her arms didn't matter. Rumi was, at the end of the day, a hunter through and

through. One of the Honmoon's Chosen Three. The Honmoon would no more hurt her than it would harm any other human being... that, Celine was confident in.

... But maybe she could put off the conversation with Rumi for a little while. Just... just until she'd gotten her bearings and put out some of the smaller fires that Over-Caffeinated Celine had started on her behalf. Like for instance, Bobby.

Grabbing her phone off the nightstand, Celine looks at the time and lets out a groan, a hand going to her forehead. It was past noon at this point, meaning she'd been asleep for over twelve hours. On the one hand, her body had clearly needed it. On the other hand, what had she missed while she was sleeping in?

... Probably nothing too important. Even if some of them had woken up at six am, that was still just a quarter of a day. What could possibly happen in six hours, right?

Nodding to herself, Celine unlocks her phone and shoots Bobby a quick message.

Celine: Need to talk to you ASAP, Bobby.

Immediately after hitting send, she winces. That sounded far too hostile and would probably make Bobby think he was in trouble with her if she left it at that. She needed to make it clear that they were still on the same side and-

Ping!

However, before she can think of a follow up message to send, Bobby has already responded.

Bobby: Sounds good! I'll assume that you've just woken up. I'm glad you got plenty of sleep. Currently out with the girls and Jinu getting him some real clothing. Anyways, we should be back to the tower soon. Make sure you eat and drink something please!"

Celine just stares for a long moment, mouth slightly agape. She... wasn't used to being aggressively coddled. Or at least, she hadn't been for a long time. The last person to treat her like this had died twenty four years ago, after all.

For a moment, Celine works her jaw, half-tempted to tell Bobby off for being so... personal with her. But in the end, she can't bring herself to do it. The truth was, he was more involved in their personal business than ever before now. What was it she'd said yesterday? 'Unfortunately integral'. Ugh, she was never living any of Over-Caffeinated Celine's words down, was she?

But more than that, Celine needed Bobby on her side. Especially if this 'Jinu' was going to be sticking around. She needed to understand exactly what he was and what his goals were, because as things currently stood, he apparently had a soul and that... that changed things.

Demons didn't have souls. They also weren't supposed to be able to interact with the Honmoon, let alone ignore it's grasp like it wasn't even there when a hunter (even a retired one) used it to hold them in place.

Grumbling a little bit to herself, Celine climbs out of bed and makes her way to the fridge of the apartment. She prepares herself something easy and eats fast, guzzling down some water along with the food. Then, once she's done, she heads for the elevator to make her way up to the penthouse.

Her intentions are simple. She's going to investigate the spot in the Honmoon where she tried to hold Jinu in place the night before. Sure, her previous inspections of the rainbow patches the demon had put in the Honmoon had turned up nothing, but maybe she would discover something with fresh eyes.

Now that she wasn't internally freaking out like she had been when the girls first called her off, or as sleep deprived as she was last night, maybe there was something to be figured out from the situation...

Of course, there's a saying about 'the best laid plans' and all that. Celine doesn't remember the saying fully, but she finds herself wondering if it has something to do with cats. Because as she steps out of the elevator and into the girl's

penthouse, she turns the corner provided by the kitchen counter and nearly jumps out of her skin.

There, sprawled out belly-up over the rainbow patch of Honmoon where Jinu had knelt the night before, is a certain massive blue tiger, treating the damn thing like it's a sunspot or something! Hand to her chest as she swallows down the scream that threatened to slip out, Celine calms her racing heart even as the sound of a magpie alerts her to the presence of the other one as well.

The six-eyed bird with the tiny hat upon its head from the night before is perched off to the side... and is very clearly laughing at her. Meanwhile, the giant blue tiger looks up at her with his paws in the air and half-curved over, his tail swishing back and forth across the floor down between his legs.

Frowning as she finally catches her breath, Celine looks at the both of them for a long moment, considering what she knows.

Last night, she'd been in no state to think things through. But now? Now she stares at the two supernatural creatures and finally shakes her head as she comes to a stark realization.

"You two aren't demons."

The bird outright smirks at her, making a noise in the back of its throat that Celine almost feels like she should be offended by. The tiger, meanwhile, just tilts his overly massive head to one side, looking at her with a stupid expression on his face.

It would honestly be cute if he weren't so massive and she couldn't see his claws from here. And yet, regardless of how dangerous he clearly was, she knew she was right.

"... You're guardian spirits, aren't you?"

It was only something she'd heard about in passing from her own mentor. They were exceptionally rare these days, supposedly. Rare enough that even Celine's

teacher hadn't ever actually seen one, merely heard about them. And Celine herself had never laid eyes on them either... until now, she suspects.

See, the thing Over-Caffeinated Celine from the night before had missed was HOW the tiger and bird entered the penthouse. They didn't bound up over the edge of the balcony or anything like that. They came up through a hole in the floor... a hole in the Honmoon.

They could traverse the Honmoon without issue and while it seemed like the demon Jinu had similar abilities, she saw no hints of the iridescent power he wielded in either of these two creatures. Nor did their way of moving through the Honmoon create the same rainbow patches that the demon did. No, these creatures were something else entirely. Something more ancient than most demons...

She wishes she had the girls here to ask more questions because last night in her state of sleep deprivation, Celine had let Zoey get away with saying they were 'friendly'. And then she'd allowed herself to be thoroughly distracted by the presence of the demon Jinu after that and never actually followed up.

... Were these guardian spirits with him? Or were they something else entirely? Frowning, Celine looks between the bird and tiger.

"Why are the two of you here? Why now? Are you here to help or hinder my hunters?"

The Tiger could represent a number of things. On the one hand, tigers were a representation of terror in Ancient Korea. On the other hand, this particular tiger reminded Celine more of the Jakho-do paintings that she'd studied when she was younger. Where the tiger's terrifying appearance was sacrificed in order to depict a form where it was far more friendly... even lovable.

Meanwhile, the Magpie has always been considered a symbol of hope and joy in Korea. They were often believed to be heralds of good news. There was an old saying... 'if a magpie cries in the morning, a welcome guest will arrive'.

But all of that... those were just old, barely remembered stories. And Celine had long since learned not to put her faith in fables.

The tiger suddenly rolls over onto his belly, looking at her with an almost predatory glint in his eyes. The bird caws and then swoops down from its perch, passing dangerously close by her to land atop the tiger's head. Both of them look at her and Celine bristles at what she thinks she sees in their gazes. Judgement.

"You two... who are you to judge me? Guardian Spirits or not, I won't allow you to persist in this place if you're a danger to the girls, do you understand?"

The magpie actually rolls its eyes at that. The tiger just sits up, his massive bottom resting right in the middle of the rainbow patch that Jinu created the night before when he stepped out of her useless attempt at binding him. Celine scowls, glaring at the both of them... before realizing how foolish she's being.

"... What am I doing? I'm picking a fight with animals. Focus, Celine."

Maybe she didn't get enough sleep after all. Although as she tries to get herself back on task she realizes her original reason for coming up here was... well, currently occupied. It was going to be rather difficult to examine just what the demon with a soul had done to the Honmoon with a blue tiger's fat ass in the way after all.

For a moment, Celine considers trying to get him to move... before deciding to keep her dignity instead. But then what else is she going to do with her time? That's when her eyes alight upon the smartphone left sitting on the kitchen counter a few feet away from her. Rumi's smartphone, to be exact. Why was it here if she was out with the girls and Bobby and the demon?

Celine reaches for the phone, only to freeze in place when the elevator behind her starts to chime, alerting her to the fact that someone is currently using it to come all the way up to the penthouse. Turning, she swallows as she amends that thought... it was probably going to be multiple someones.

Bobby HAD said they would be back at the tower soon, after all. Very well then. It would seem the choice had been taken right out of her hands. Straightening up, squaring her shoulders and setting her jaw, Celine prepares to come face to face with everyone Over-Caffeinated Celine had made a fool of herself in front of the night before.

... She would just have to put her best foot forward and see what could be done to begin salvaging this mess.

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A/N: Trying to balance giving a good look at Celine's characterization with keeping the secrets she knows about secret for a little longer. Hope I did good!

Shoot me a Comment or Like over on the Patreon or drop a message in the Discord if you're enjoying the story! Knowing you guys are liking this (and also what you're liking in particular) makes it all the more fun for me!