

Tzimisce: Calțuna

Place of Birth/Rough Date of Birth: Eastern Hungary, 1200

Place Of Embrace: The slopes of the Vtáčnik Mountains, Carpathia, 1218

Religious Leaning: Formerly Christian of a western variety, now Eastern Orthodox.

Who were they as human? Calțuna would never speak of these things, but for our purposes here, we shall say this much:

She was born on a cold winter's night, pulled from her mother by the hands of an Ishmaelite surgeon. The skill of the doctor can not be questioned, for the delivery was easy for both mother and daughter, despite her mother having been ill for the latter portion of her pregnancy, leaving both she and child in a state that in lesser hands would have been perilous. That such an enlightened mind could conclude the child before him to be a boy is nearly beyond belief, but mother and father were content with the proclamation and raised Calțuna as a son, despite having three proper sons already.

This was no easy life for Calțuna for her father was a noble of some minor blood, proven in his youth upon the soil of the Holy Land in defense of Christian rightness, and therefore as hard and unyielding as iron. Even worse, their family had since ascended into the ranks of the truly privileged, serving as retainers to the vaunted Arpad family...their loyalty bloodbound through ghouldom. It was her father's greatest wish that a son - true or mistaken, did not matter - might be chosen for further elevation, into the secret society whose name was Ventrue, and to that end encouraged bitter competition amongst the siblings. That any of the children survived to majority was a bit of a miracle, but only Lajos, the second-born, lost his life to the barbaric play of his brothers and sister. By then, father had already sired a replacement, and in a moment of shuddering clarity, Calțuna understood the doctor's motives: Had he proclaimed her a daughter, as he should have, she would no doubt have been dead before expelling her first mewling breath into the world. Is it possible, she wondered, that at the moment of her birth the doctor, having intuited her father's disdain for girl-children, had worked some mysterious sorcery upon her, thus saving her from her father's wrath? The idea had merit, she reasoned. Sorcery, she told herself, can be undone.

If the doctor knew her secret, Calțuna's mother did not. Calțuna could tell when she looked in her eyes that she saw only a boy. Still, mother recognized her essential tenderness, and in the quiet moments between fathers "lessons", she taught Calțuna the gentler arts of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Together, they shared the lives of great philosophers, poured over the histories of Greece and Rome and even older cultures, traced the routes of their Magyar ancestors upon maps of aged vellum, and learned to speak the languages not just of friends, but of their enemies too. And through careful observation, Calțuna learned the most important lesson of all from her mother: That there were ways to handle even the hardest of men.

It all came to an end on another cold night in the year 1215. Mihály, Calțuna's eldest brother, had emerged as frontrunner and had grown disdainful of the rules that had previously kept him in check. If possible, his brand of cruelty was even sharper and less restrained than father's, and on that particular night, when father was off on some errand or another, he decided the proper recourse for a dirty dinner fork was to strangle mother into unconsciousness before the very eyes of her other children. To Mihály's dismay, Calțuna had her own kind of sharpness, and he was dead before morning, his throat slit while he slept. Calțuna's misstep was believing father's apathy extended as far as his eldest son's life, but no, father had chosen a favorite, and Calțuna had just slain him. "You want to cut throats," he had said, "I'll give you throats to cut." And within a fortnight she found herself, at the age of fifteen, on the edge of the Hungarian abatis, where Nova Arpad's childer were waging a private war with a devil they called "Tzimisce".

In the three years after, Calțuna found survival in battle to be very much like survival in her own household...by wits alone. Easier here, perhaps, because at least here she had the virtue of Ventrue blood to embolden her. It was sweet indeed, and necessary, for on those fields of death she saw every conceivable horror, and every monster ever imagined by a child in the throes of nightmare. And then she saw what she most needed to see: One of the monsters reached for the soldier next to her, and in its grasp, he became something else...twisted and unrecognizable, but most importantly, *something else*. She cut him down where he stood and turned to face the beast - the Tzimisce, she realized - but it merely gazed at her. Gazed at her in a way no one else ever had, except maybe the doctor who brought her into this world. Then it turned and disappeared into the sky on the wings of an enormous bat.

Calțuna waited just a few nights, long enough to wean herself from the Ventrue blood - that she was able to do so at all speaks to the depth of her commitment here - and then stepped across the abatis into the primeval Transylvanian forest...a trespasser on the lands of Tzimisce. A week later, a young man bearing her face stumbled back into the camp, struck mute by whatever he had seen on his journey. That evening he was dead, torn to pieces by one of the bat-winged monstrosities that terrorized the Hungarians nightly. Nova Arpad herself prepared a note to Calțuna's father, praising his "son" for "his" years of service to the cause. In exchange, her father was allowed to choose a living son to be raised into clan Ventrue. Calțuna, known by a different name, was mourned only by her mother.

Who are they as Kindred? Calțuna no longer wears the body she bore for the first 18 years of her human life. Instead she has adopted a shape familiar to those of her new home, a mix of Rus and Romanian features...tall for a woman, with strong shoulders and hair so brown it's nearly black. She resides on the slopes of Mount Vtáčnik with her sire, Ruthven. Though better than the life she knew before, this is not an entirely a happy arrangement; while Ruthven loves her, she abhors his more bestial side, seeing only in it a possible weapon, and nothing at all worthy of affection. But the cunning that served so well in life serves her now as well, and she's spent the years since her embrace whittling away at Ruthven's remaining resolve, knowing full

well that when the time is right she'll be able to turn him against whatever enemies she needs destroyed. Oh, they'll kill him in the process, but he won't go down alone. Beyond Ruthven, she has little knowledge of the Tzimisce clan as a whole; she would be very good at its politics, and sympathetic to its more outre elements who seek to expose their hidden shapes and meanings through Vicissitude, were she free to make a life of her own. She knows of the upstart Tremere - even before her embrace, while dwelling among the Hungarian camps, she heard the name often - but seldom gives them much consideration. The Ventrue, on the other hand, she thinks of often...somewhere inside of her, she still craves the taste of their vitae.

She worries about her mother and thinks often of her safety.

Where might she end up in the modern nights? In time, she will escape Ruthven, ascend the Tzimisce social ladder to become a (quietly) influential player in its games, and will at one point become lover to Vlad Dracul*. What happens beyond that point? I haven't decided yet.

Art notes: None yet, but maybe coming.

* apparently Vlad really did have a lover by the name of Calțuna.