# **Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: Vasili, Ireena, and The Shrine of the White Sun**

## Vasili von Holtz

Vasili von Holtz is the alter ego that Strahd uses when he doesn't want to be recognized. Vasili is only mentioned a grand total of three times in the module: once in the Coffin Maker's Shop, once in Watcherhaus, and once in the appendix in reference to the Abbot. Each of these name drops is quite small, so if you missed the references, it's not terribly surprising.

Like many things in Ravenloft lore, Vasili's character has been recently expanded on by the subreddit and other sources to become more prominent in the campaign. And until this point, I haven't written about him at all. So, to alleviate the questions I get about him, I'll go ahead and give you my thoughts.

* **A Little About Vasili**
  + From what we're told, Vasili appears as a young nobleman. When interacting with him, he often avoids outright lying in favor of half truths or reversals. For example, if asked about his residence he says that he owns a "property not far from the Village of Barovia." Strahd has always been an eloquent speaker, so talking in polite circles is absolutely within his ability.
  + Otherwise, Vasili simply *is* Strahd. He's not a different person, just one we know wearing a different face. While someone like van Richten can easily act out a different personality, Strahd has never had the need the be a completely different person. He's not an actor or a spy and he hasn't any proficiency with performance or deception. So really, the joke that Vasili von Holtz is just Strahd in a fake mustache isn't that far from the truth. XD
  + Why would Strahd want to wear a disguise? For the most part, to interact with common folk without them freaking out. Sometimes it's nice to have a quick business transaction without the shopkeeper falling over themselves in fear lol. But more specifically to the campaign, Strahd might want to use a disguise to interact with the Tatyana reincarnation. Ireena, for instance, is likely to instantly reject Strahd as he is. But young noble, Vasili? He might have the chance to woo her.
* Unpopular opinion time. I hate Vasili von Holtz. His character seems to get *a lot* of traffic on the subreddit and while I understand why, I don't agree with it. It seems to me that Vasili has dazzled most DMs the way he's meant to dazzle players. The idea of him is shiny and full of possibilities. But the reality of his implementation is chock full of holes and can end very poorly.
* **Why Don't I Like Vasili von Holtz? Well...**
* **Not an Actor**
  + To reiterate, Strahd is no actor. Yes, he's charming. Yes, he's charismatic. But he's also proud. Strahd is proud of who he is and of his accomplishments. Even when Tatyana chose his younger brother over himself, Strahd *never* wanted to be Sergei. He was upset that Tatyana chose someone less worthy but that choice was a fault on Tatyana's part, not his own.
  + Additionally, Strahd never had to lie in his childhood. His upbringing was never about being something he wasn't. He was no romantic trapped in the role of a royal, eager to escape his responsibilities to be 'who he truly was' (cue the dramatic, Disney princess swoon). No, Strahd was *born* to be a king. And he excelled at it.
  + So the idea that Vasili von Holtz acts like a completely different person seems like an utterly foreign concept to me. If Strahd puts on this disguise, he's still Strahd. Vasili's face is no different than a change of wardrobe. If you choose to use Vasili and play him the same way as Strahd, fine. That makes sense. But if he becomes another NPC in the way that van Richten and Rictavio are very different NPCs, then I can't help but see an overwhelming disconnect.
* **Not a Liar**
  + On a more fundamental level, Strahd is no liar. He's evil, absolutely. But he's never been a trickster by any means. When he addresses the party during Strahd encounters, he's honest, even when he doesn't have to be. Remember that Strahd has nothing to gain from lying and he takes no enjoyment from fooling others. It's part of that lawful evil code that he has. Strahd is a man of honor, and honorable men don't lie. At least from Strahd's perspective XP.
* **Wooing Ireena/Tatyana's Incarnation**
  + Let's say that Strahd does put on his shiny new face and commit himself to wooing Ireena, but otherwise acts completely like himself, only omitting enough to make the face plausible.
  + Strahd the Abuser
    - Remember that Strahd is not a good person. He's controlling and gaslighting and he sees the people he "loves" as possessions. Wearing a different face doesn't change the way he treats others, including Ireena. If Strahd starts to woo Ireena, he'll be unnecessarily pushy. And if Ireena rejects his advances at all, he'll likely take offense and act out with that verbally abusive, gaslighting behavior.
    - Strahd will also inevitably treat Ireena like Tatyana. If, for instance, Tatyana was fond of roses but Ireena hates flowers, he'll go out of his way to gift her flowers. And when Ireena is obviously pretty ambivalent about the gift, Strahd will get frustrated. He may even insist that if only Ireena smelled the flowers or stared at them long enough, she'd learn to like them. And then he'd gift her more roses in hopes of forcing a changed opinion, insisting that Ireena's hatred of flowers is a flaw on her part that needs to be corrected.
    - To the other PCs, Strahd will be distant and judgmental. Yes, he's looking for a successor, but at every turn the PCs prove themselves unworthy. He'll comment on their performance passive aggressively and slowly but surely whittle away at their self-confidence. Eventually, he'll make them feel two inches tall at all times, unless they call him out and start some sort of fight. And if the party *does* speak up against him, Strahd is *not* going to admit he's wrong. *Ever*. He'll push and push until people either fall in line or leave. Because *that* is what an abuser does.
    - This relationship between Vasili and Ireena, and Vasili and the PCs, should be completely toxic. And while that's certainly a way to bring Strahd's villainy to life, it also takes time and should appear subtle. If you're willing to act out this abusive behavior each and every session, you run the risk of crossing a meta line. After all, you'll be basically bullying your players week after week. How long will that go on before it's too much for your table?
* **The Inevitable Outcome**
  + Let's say that all of that wooing actually works. Let's say Ireena actually falls in love with Vasili von Holtz.
  + Firstly, what would that say about Ireena?
    - On one hand, maybe you played Vasili as an actually charming guy, not like Strahd at all, and their relationship is a healthy one. But that means that you made Strahd go against his entire established personality as a proud, truthful, abuser.
    - On the other hand, you played Vasili with Strahd's established personality, but Ireena falls for him anyway. That means that you are completely victimizing Ireena, allowing her character to succumb to a knowingly abusive relationship. Ireena, as a character, is supposed to represent the liberation of the abused; basically, the idea that it is not the responsibility of a victim to heal their abuser, nor should they let their abuser rule their life. Ireena's entire character arc is about liberation and renewal. By letting her fall in love with Vasili and therefore Strahd, you are actively stealing that from her.
  + Secondly, what would that say about Strahd?
    - Strahd is a planner. He's an experienced military tactician, for goodness’ sake. If he's going to woo Ireena, he's going to think ahead at least a little bit. So maybe he does some planning for the actual dating. He figures out the flowers and whatever else. Fine. But how exactly does he see this process ending?
    - It doesn't take a genius to see that this plan has an extraordinarily high chance of failure. If everything goes well and Ireena loves Vasili, inevitably Strahd will drop the disguise and reveal himself. And then what? An, 'Oh, my love, it's fine! It's not like we've just adventured together and seen the horrors of your land and you're the guy that tormented me in my past lives. It's not like you've been lying to me all this time and the very foundation of our relationship is false. Of course, I love you, Strahd!'
    - Sure, Strahd is proud and doesn't see anything wrong with his actions. But he's smart enough to realize that the ending reveal has a pretty high possibility of rejection and heartbreak. A plan with such high risk isn't something I can see Strahd implementing. He's not that stupid.
    - The only other option would be that he *never* reveals himself. Which means Strahd has to give up his titles and position and power and everything else. And Strahd simply isn't going to do that. If Strahd were actually willing to give up his power, he wouldn't need his pact with Vampyr and there wouldn't need to be a campaign lol.
* **Overall**
  + I know that this assessment isn't what you guys were expecting from me. Maybe you were hoping for a guide on how to flawlessly and easily play Vasili von Holtz. But the fact of the matter is, flawlessly implementing Vasili into your game is next to impossible.
    - In summation, the idea that Vasili acts quite differently from Strahd doesn't makes sense from Strahd's preestablished personality. Using Vasili to woo Ireena is a high-risk plan that seems beneath Strahd's intelligence. If Strahd wants to evaluate the party from an insider's perspective, Strahd has spies and magic that he can use quite comfortably instead of trekking through the mud like a lowly adventurer.
    - From a storytelling perspective, if Strahd actually manages to woo Ireena, that would do a severe injustice to Ireena's character and victimize her. Additionally, having Strahd travel with the party for a length of time would start to reorient the story around him, possibly framing him as a protagonist.
    - And lastly, if you include Vasili/Strahd as a long-term sidekick NPC, you would have to under-the-table be passive aggressive and cruel towards your party through him, which might be ok in the short term but can have many real life problems as the sessions continue. How often are you willing to berate your players unnecessarily through the Vasili mouthpiece?
  + The only way I can think to implement Vasili into the game is to do so sparingly, so that he hardly constitutes a NPC. For instance, you might have Vasili show up as a very minor Strahd encounter on the road to Vallaki, just as a way to quickly evaluate the party, and then reveal himself quickly. This encounter has nothing to do with wooing Ireena or long-term party contact. But even with such minor contact, it still portrays Strahd as a trickster, which he most certainly isn't supposed to be.
  + I understand why people are enchanted with the idea of Vasili. I understand that people love Strahd and want to see him more in the campaign. And I understand that people might use Vasili as a vehicle towards making Strahd redeemable (an idea which I avidly oppose as well). I also get the thrill of watching your players fall into a trap, watching your own mechanizations run smoothly towards the dramatic reveal. It's an exciting prospect. But remember that that fun scene in your head requires a lot of work and careful planning to accomplish. And one misstep could cost you a lot as the DM.
  + Sooooooo all of this is my long-winded way of saying that I don't use Vasili in my game. He doesn't make sense with Strahd's personality and he's a lot of work to pull off when I feel like I'm already juggling a lot as a DM. Plus, I have no interest in forgiving Strahd by idolizing an abuser as the main character in my game. If you disagree with my assessment, I understand. But I do hope this clears up any questions you guys have about my thoughts on Vasili von Holtz.

## The Shrine of the White Sun

* **History**
  + In my [post on hallowed ground](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/90syxm/fleshing_out_curse_of_strahd_the_church_of_st/), I wrote a brief history about the Shrine of the White Sun, which I'll repeat for you here.
    - The villagers of Kresk sought to drown a dastardly criminal in the pool. Though his exact crimes have been forgotten, it is said that he was a wild degenerate.
    - St. Markovia arrived and saw the man drowning helplessly under the judgment of the gathered crowd. Though his punishment was fitting, Markovia jumped in to save him anyway. She then gave a great speech to the people on the importance of mercy and forgiveness that not only moved the gathered Kreskites, but also completely changed the heart of the criminal.
    - The criminal gave up his wicked ways and moved to the Abbey. He was virtuous thereafter, never again faltering. Markovia's act of mercy combined with the effect on the people of Kresk consecrated the pool as hallowed ground and made it a sacred site, one of the few left in Barovia.
* **Forget the Silly Gazebo**
  + I honestly found the pool much more interesting than the actual gazebo shrine structure. Since the pool is also more visible on the map, it's much more memorable to your players. I would personally recommend redirecting any focus the book puts on the gazebo to the pool instead.
* **A Prophesied Item**
  + If you wanted to put one of the prophesied items in Kresk, I would recommend that it be the Tome of Strahd and that it be here at the pool. The Tome is not nearly as powerful as the other items, so giving it to a potentially low-level party isn't game breaking.
  + Not the Gazebo
    - However, I would definitely nix the gazebo thing for the hidden item.
    - For one, if this is an incredibly important shrine to the people of Kresk, it'd likely be more well maintained. Surely a stiff wind couldn't just knock it over for the players' convenience.
    - And two, I think the people of Kresk would notice if the players demolished a shrine to the Morning Lord. That would be really not okay to most Barovians, I'd say. XD
  + The Pool
    - Instead, put the item at the bottom of the pool. I personally put the Tome in an airtight chest sealed with an *arcane lock* spell. A swimming player can spot the chest on a DC 14 perception check. Once found, it'll take a DC 13 athletics check (or another creative method) to drag it from the mud to the shore line.
    - Frankly, it makes sense to me to hide something from Strahd in a pool of holy water which would literally hurt him to try and go near.
* **Pool's Abilities**
  + I changed up the abilities of the pool's water to make it a little more subtle.
    - The water from the pool is essentially Holy Water and can deal 2d6 radiant damage to fiends and undead.
    - The water also has minor restorative properties. Drinking from the pool gives the consumer the effects of a minor healing potion. This effect can only be gained once per 24 hours.
    - If the water is taken from the pool, these magical properties disappear after 10 minutes.
  + These minor changes accomplish a couple things. It's an excellent place to hide a prophesied item from Strahd from the holy water. Getting rid of the restoration spell ability once again reinforces that curses can't just be cleansed easily in this campaign. And the distance constraint means the players can't just bottle the water.

## Ireena

* **Recap**
  + Way back in my [Village of Barovia post](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8xu9lo/fleshing_out_curse_of_strahd_the_village_of/), I talked about Ireena. I recommended that her functionality as a character in the campaign be given to a PC if at all possible.
  + However, if your player group doesn't really allow that comfortably, I also talked about Ireena's plot related flaws as a NPC.
    - Since Ireena is the main target of Strahd's attention, she essentially becomes the main character of the campaign really early on. Generally, a NPC shouldn't be the main character of a campaign. Your PCs should be. It's definitely possible to make NPCs the primary protagonists and make it totally engaging, but there are a lot of variables that come into play. For instance, what if your party doesn't like Ireena or aren't invested in her story? Just like we all have favorite locations in the CoS module which we're more invested in than others, you can usually count on your players being invested in their own backstories. So, it's much easier and usually has a larger emotional payoff to reorient things towards your party.
    - Another flaw with RAW Ireena is that her personality is all but erased in favor of her connection to Tatyana, a figure the players will never even meet. This essentially means that the party's ally and potentially the main character of the story is worth significantly less in comparison to a dead lady they'll never see.
    - Ireena's ending - either at the shrine in Kresk or in the 'Endings' section of the book - gives her this campy scene where she flies into the arms of ghost Sergei and disappears. It's really unsatisfying to say the least.
  + If you haven't read [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/)'s [post on running Ireena](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8vsw2p/my_notes_on_running_ireena_without_making_her_a/), I would *highly* recommend you do so. The advice greatly improves Ireena as both a character and as a useful companion to your party. If she ends up being a NPC in your game, this post will fix most of those flaws.
* **Ireena as a PC**
  + If you were able to work Ireena's functionality into a PC's backstory, *awesome.* But now you probably have a bunch of other concerns on how to run that character.
  + The PC's Invincibility
    - The biggest concern you probably have is combat. Strahd doesn't want his love harmed and would prefer that his minions stay away from Tatyana's reincarnation. So if the PC gets into combat, the enemies just won't attack that PC? That seems unfair, right?
    - Yes, it is wholly unfair and shouldn't be run that way. There's some great understanding amongst most readers that Strahd literally has absolute control over his realm. And while the players might perceive his control as absolute, that is actually quite far from the truth.
    - Even if there's some ambiguity in the RAW text, I would interpret his control much more loosely. For instance, I recommend that Strahd only controls animals that can see him. If he takes a walk in the woods and comes across a pack of wolves, they defer to him like a god creature. But when Strahd isn't around, they're just like any other wolves. Similarly, Strahd doesn't have absolute divination over his land. He actually has to use his spies and spells to perceive his realm from his castle. I'm a fan of making the odd PC roll wisdom saves against Strahd's *scrying* every so often, for instance. Or, if the PCs make a crazy plan with Arrigal around, it's going to take a couple days for Arrigal to ride to Castle Ravenloft and report.
    - Once Strahd sees the Tatyana PC, he'll want to keep her safe, yes. But he's not going to be around to protect her. Smothering Tatyana is how Strahd lost her in the past, so we can sort of metagame him a bit to say he won't do the same this time around. The combat encounters in the book still occur and the PC can still die. Though if she does, Strahd will be *pissed.* XD
  + The PC's Relationship with Strahd
    - After Strahd meets the PC in the Village of Barovia, he'll try to woo her. (Just, not as Vasili lol) I would pace out the campaign by days and makes sure to have one 'encounter' per day. Maybe Strahd sends the PC a love poem one day, roses another. If he writes her letters, he tries to reassure her of his enduring love and the safety of his castle.
    - After a bit of time, Strahd will get pushier. He'll try to plant false information about the other PCs in hopes of turning the Tatyana PC against their allies. He'll be a bit more interested in Vallaki politics, instigating the Feast of St. Andral and other societal upheavals to make the PC feel like there's no safe place in the world but at his side.
    - In the last third of the game, Strahd will turn outright threatening. He'll purposefully target any NPC the Tatyana PC is attached to in hopes of forcing her to marry him. At this point, the relationship is openly hostile.
  + The PC's Connection with Tatyana
    - Of course, the PC doesn't know that they're a reincarnation of Tatyana. So make sure to pepper in little clues as the campaign progresses. If the Tatyana PC eats some dream pie, maybe their idyllic dream includes a handsome man in golden armor that they don't recognize. If the PC drinks from the pool in Kresk, they have another couple visions. When they visit Berez, they know the general layout of the town by muscle memory and can't explain it. And when they read from the Tome of Strahd, they find the story strangely familiar and have an emotional reaction that isn't theirs.
    - Most importantly, make sure that the Amber Temple reveals the full nature of the PC's connection with Strahd's curse. She needs to understand that the Dark Powers will outright kill her to keep her from Strahd and that she has a *very* high chance of dying young if Strahd isn't defeated. She is just as cursed as Strahd is and that should be some amazing motivation towards stopping him.
  + The PC's Death
    - What if the PC dies? Well, that's no different than if Ireena dies. If the Tatyana PC dies, Strahd will be pissed. He'll blame the other PCs, maybe angry murder a NPC or two or three, and otherwise turn into the devil we all expect.
* **Ireena as a NPC**
  + So Ireena is an NPC in your game. That's totally cool too.
  + Your first challenge will be getting your party to care about Ireena. You really, really need them to like her for her story to have strength. To start, I'll just go ahead and re-plug that [wonderful post](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8vsw2p/my_notes_on_running_ireena_without_making_her_a/) by [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/).
  + Otherwise, here are some things that I would recommend:
    - During RP interactions, make Ireena very interested in the PCs. In general, people like to talk about themselves. It's not narcissistic. It's just something that we all do. XD So through Ireena, ask the PCs about their backstories. Encourage them to talk about themselves. Doing so will color those RP interactions in a more positive light and therefore make Ireena more likeable.
    - As Ireena gets to know the PCs, make her actively do things that will make them happy. Does one player desperately want money? Maybe she goes out of her way to talk their way to a discount in a Vallaki shop. Is the paladin/cleric in your party really gung-ho about their patron god? Ireena is now *very* interested in learning about that god.
    - Secondly, don't make Ireena mope-y. No one likes a complainer. Yes, Ireena's had it pretty rough. Her father's died and now she's facing a future as an unwilling bride to the devil on high. But if you start having her go all, "Woe is me!" you'll lose the PCs' affections pretty quickly. Ireena is a fighter. She's steadfast, altruistic, and determined. She's not going to wallow in her own self-pity.
    - Thirdly, don't make Ireena a badass. You might think that portraying Ireena as a 'strong and independent woman' is good for her characterization. But while Ireena is strong-willed, you don't want her bulldozing over the party in combat the way Ezmerelda might. That kind of behavior can inspire distance from the party. Ireena is strong enough to take care of herself, but also *needs* the party's protection. She's the kind of girl who will never ask for help, but will always offer thanks when it's given.
    - And lastly, make dang well sure that Ireena is mechanically useful to the party. If you have a bunch of PCs that primarily do damage, show Ireena starting to practice with medicine kits. After a few encounters, she gains the Healer feat and can get downed party members back on their feet. If someone gets imprisoned in Vallaki and the rest of the PC's are occupied, Ireena might be the one to help break that PC out.
    - Ireena exists to be the most selfless NPC the party will ever meet. You want them to love her, and however you can manipulate that outcome, do it.
  + Ireena's Relationship with Strahd
    - Similarly, to Strahd trying to woo a PC, Strahd will begin sending Ireena gifts and letters very early. But the actual gifts matter a lot less in this case. What really matters is Ireena's reaction to the gifts.
    - As Strahd's attempts to woo Ireena progress, Ireena should get more and more upset. This NPC that is selfless beyond measure and beloved to the party slowly but surly breaks down under the passive aggressive harassment she receives from Strahd. She might eventually cry. She might scream in hatred and vow to kill him. However slow the transformation, your players should see the weight of Strahd's presence through Ireena's distress.

## Ireena's Endings

As written, there are three endings that you can expect for Ireena. Only one is mildly acceptable.

* **The RAW Text**
  + The Shrine of the White Sun
    - Ooooooof. The as written event for Ireena at the Shrine of the White Sun in Kresk is a rather flat and boring ending to say the least. Most players would leave such an event with a generalized, "okay then..." They can't complain because they succeeded in protecting Ireena, but they also feel let down and a little confused, like they missed something.
    - A placid reaction really shouldn't be surprising, though. The players have made it all the way to Kresk with Ireena, an impressive feat to say the least. In that time, they've developed a relationship with Ireena and love her. And in that time, they've likely learned very little about Tatyana, let alone about Sergei. Suddenly, Ireena just stops being Ireena and is yeeted into the pool by a ghost. You've gone through great lengths to establish Ireena as a character with depth, and this event basically tells the players that her character means nothing compared to a dead woman. It seems arbitrary, and leaves a bit of storytelling whiplash.
    - I wouldn't 'fix' this event. Instead, I would totally get rid of it. Ireena's interactions with the pool should be no different than those of the PC's. If you want her to have flashbacks to her past lives, that's a fine alternative. But don't overwrite Ireena with Tatyana.
  + The Epilogue Ending
    - If the Shrine ending is bad, this one is just as terrible. It openly calls out that same idea that Ireena's character means nothing compared to her past life. It also introduces Sergei, who completely pulls a Strahd and calls Ireena by the wrong name. And instead of being sucked into a pond, Ireena cloud walks into the sunlight. It's boring.
  + Ireena Dies
    - This is the only RAW ending that works for Ireena. It's not a pre-written event, mind you, but just the expectation that Ireena won't survive the journey to Kresk. There are a lot of enemies and dangerous events between her and her terrible ending. But this ending *does* work for her.
    - Narratively, remember that Ireena is a direct part of Strahd's curse. Strahd is doomed to live forever, ever chasing his beloved Tatyana but never able to actually obtain her. If he gets too close, an outright act of god is liable to come down and take Tatyana's soul from Strahd's reaching fingers. With Marina, for instance, he came oh so close to winning his beloved. But then the villagers of Berez killed her. Was that truly chance, or a fated part of his curse?
    - Additionally, Ireena's death can help motivate your players. If Ireena has traveled with the party for a time, she should hopefully be cemented as a friend to your players. They should *care* about Ireena. And when she dies, it'll give them a rallying call against Strahd. If Ireena dies, Strahd will also be pretty dang upset about it. He'll be more ruthless in his antagonism against the party and blame them for her demise, whether or not they are at fault at all. That antagonism will further motivate the players against the devil on high.
* **Rewriting Ireena's Endings**
  + Ireena Dies
    - Firstly, this ending is still okay for all the reasons I just stated. It's not a perfect ending for her, but it most certainly works and can be emotionally impactful for the players. If Ireena dies, you're fine.
  + Ireena New Storyline
    - Here's my quick summary of how I would handle Ireena.
    - First, I would establish Ireena as a strong ally for the party all the way through Vallaki. Then, at the end of Vallaki I would hold the Feast of St. Andral and have Strahd abduct her to his castle. I would use the Matikovs (or other NPCs) to emphasize that Ireena is likely lost and if the party wishes to save her, they need more power and/or allies.
    - Then, at the end of the campaign when the players go to fight Strahd at Ravenloft, I'd bring Ireena out. She still hasn't been turned into a vampire and she's been ardently resistant to Strahd, but has been surviving under house arrest. She joins the party in the final battle against Strahd.
    - During that final fight, Strahd finally understands that Ireena will never love him and forsakes her, vowing to try again on her next incarnation. They fight and Strahd is defeated, Barovia set free from the mists.
    - Ireena is a woman freed of her abuser and oppressor. She thanks the party and ultimately decides to become an adventurer, helping others like her. If the party goes their separate ways, maybe she joins one of them in their own ending.
  + This storyline seems simple, but it works for a lot of reasons. Firstly, it means that Ireena won't be a party sidekick all the way to Kresk or beyond. That would actually be a lot of sessions to keep a single NPC around. Secondly, Ireena isn't undone by Tatyana. She establishes herself as a strong character and then overcomes her abuser and starts her own life. That's an incredibly better story than her falling into Sergei's ghostly arms.
  + If you have Ireena in your game, I would highly recommend you use this altered storyline, or some variation of it.
* **The Tatyana PC's Ending**
  + An ending for the Tatyana PC isn't something you have to worry about. Basically, this PC's story is what Ireena's would look like if she were traveling with the party the whole campaign. However else this PC's backstory might interact with the campaign, focus on that first. And don't forget to keep up the pressure from Strahd's overly pushy attempts at wooing her. When Strahd starts to take out the PC's allies, it'll get more and more stressful. And eventually, at the final battle, the PC will take out their vampiric stalker and free their soul from the Dark Powers' curse.

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I hope that all helps answer any questions you have regarding Vasili, Ireena, and the pool! As I mentioned in the very beginning, I'm trying to fill in any gaps I've left in my Fleshing Out series before finishing it. If there are any subjects you think I've missed, feel free to suggest them!

- Mandy