

After a decade apart, I crossed paths with her again. Esmeralda's heroic act of freeing me from Count Lugosi's dungeon likely saved my life. I'm uncertain how she discovered my imprisonment, but I pray she's safe after our parting in the woods. Sadly, she failed to arrive at our designated meeting place, and I'm fearful of her fate. I was stripped of all weapons, including my trusty raven cane, and had no choice but to act swiftly.

Therefore, I have decided to disguise myself as the youthful Rictavo, a performer and entertainer. Seeking refuge in the mysterious town of Vallaki, I plan to blend in with the locals and keep a low profile. However, this town is rife with political intrigue, and not all the inhabitants are who they appear to be. Some might even be Lord Strahd's allies—or work for him directly.

I can't help but wonder why Lord Strahd has disregarded Vallaki, a place full of secrets and hidden agendas. Perhaps it poses no threat to him, or maybe some force keeps him away. Either way, I have to tread carefully and keep up my guard.

I have been diligently jotting down notes about the various individuals in Vallaki, but the more I uncover, the more unsure I become of who to trust. There is a deep undercurrent of intrigue and deception in this town.

Baron Vargus, for one, strikes me as a man with a twisted moral compass and an inflated sense of self-importance. He is a cunning politician who has banned mention of Lord Strahd's name and holds endless festivals in a feeble attempt to ward off the darkness. He rules with an iron fist, relying heavily on his henchmen and the town guard to enforce strict laws. The people may be miserable under his regime, but they also feel a sense of security. The baron's wife, on the other hand, seems to be more concerned with holding court for the lesser nobles in the village. Their son, Victor, gives me pause as he seems to be dabbling in dark magic. I've witnessed more than one body being carried out of the baron's manor by the caretaker, and the baron is always hiring new servants.

Lydia Petrovna is the baron's wife and Father Petrovich's sister. The Petrovich/Petrovna name has a connection to the countess of Barovia, perhaps indicating a familial relationship. Lydia occasionally hosts tea parties for minor nobles. Vasili once attended, causing a stir among the attendees. Many of the ladies present are infatuated with him, and I have heard it said it is not a special affair if Vasili is not there.

Izek is the baron's enforcer and runs the local guard, often dispensing brutal punishment to those who cross the baron. He avoids Skran, the leatherworker, who is known for his fighting skills. I have seen Izek leaving Blinsky's toy shop with a wrapped package, but Blinsky refuses to divulge its contents.

Father Petrovich provides the only sense of hope and morality in Vallaki. Many villagers attend his sermons, but he avoids taking sides in the village's political struggles. Despite his steadfast faith, he appears to be weighed down by a secret.

The Martikovs. There is more to this family than meets the eye. They operate the Blue Water Inn and appear to be involved in secret meetings with travelers. Though they are not allies of the Vistani, their activities are no less suspicious. The extended family owns the Wizard of Wines vineyard, which has seen a decline in production lately. I have heard strange noises coming from the attic above my room at the inn but have not yet investigated. Despite their mysterious activities, the Martikovs have been kind and welcoming to me during my stay.

Vasili von Holtz has aligned himself with Lady Wachter but has also been spotted taking tea with the burgomaster's wife. He seems to avoid local politics and keeps a low profile in the village, only rarely leaving his manor. Despite von Holtz's reclusive nature, many of the young ladies in the village seem to hold him in high regard.

Lady Fiona Wachter, from one of the older noble houses, is another political force in Vallaki. She has gained the support of many of the lesser noble houses and is convinced that it is her time to rule. She believes the baron's provocation of Lord Strahd will bring darkness upon Vallaki. Lady Fiona holds Lord Strahd in high esteem, and I am uncertain whether she is allied with him or simply respects him in hopes of avoiding his wrath. Recently, she has been holding secretive meetings at her home late at night. Cloaked figures enter through the back entrance and don't leave until daybreak. Her husband has not been seen in months, and her daughter is rumored to be cursed.

Ernst has been seen with Lady Fiona Wachter at odd hours and often sits alone at the Blue Water Inn, quietly observing. He also seems to have an interest in the town drunk, Ysper Noggins, and has been seen buying Ysper ale at the Blackwater Tavern while listening to Ysper's stories. I have noticed him following me on more than one occasion, but whenever I turn to look, he is nowhere to be found.

Fredric the tailor is a great source of information on the noble families in Vallaki. During a fitting for a vest, he regaled me with information about the comings and goings of the wealthy in the village.

Anya is the only half-elf and part-Vistani in Vallaki and operates a potion shop in the town square. She keeps to herself but appears to have a friend in Zella, the wife of the leatherworker. Izek has recently taken an interest in her, although his motives are unclear. I have learned that Anya's sister was once accused of witchcraft but was saved from burning by many of the merchants in Vallaki. Anya's sister, instead, was merely exiled.

Lila is a midwife and herbalist who offers comfort and aid to mothers in Vallaki. She's friendly and occasionally helps the Martikov family at the Blue Water Inn. I tried her mushroom tea once and regretted it.

Henrik van der Voort is the town's coffin maker and a morose figure. I can't help but feel sympathy for him, given his constant dealings with death. The gravedigger, Milivoj, often visits him, and I have seen cloaked figures meeting with Henrik in the stockyard late at night.

Blinsky owns the toy shop. I was unable to keep my monkey, Piccolo, with me at the Blue Water Inn and found him a new home with Blinsky. I visit him from time to time. Blinsky is a cheerful man whom Piccolo has taken a liking to. He practices a type of low-level magic, which he keeps confidential. He claims it adds some zest to his toys and seems harmless enough.

There are others in Vallaki whom I haven't learned enough about or can't trust.

Skran Rangar and his wife own and operate the leather goods shop off the town square. Skran is a large man whom Izek fears, and his wife associates with Anya. I haven't visited their store.

Konick Halflinger is the wainwright who owns the Cart and Wheel and is friends with Henrik van der Voort.

Walpole owns the bookstore and is likely a valuable source of information, but he keeps to himself and only occasionally visits with Friedrich.

The Vollumps are the jolly couple that owns the Blackwater Tavern. Hildigard is known for making the best pies in Vallaki and is also the town gossip. Bullregard, her husband, appears to be dabbling in magic, and they're attempting to adopt a child.

Wayland is the town's blacksmith, an older but fit man who was once a guard in Vallaki. It is rumored he quit decades ago and became an apprentice to a dwarven adventurer who was also a blacksmith. Wayland's apprentice, **Horik Ginch**, has a bad attitude, and it's best to keep one's distance from him.