

*Herrotir has not visited again since that night he felt your connection with Lolth. Perhaps it is because your mind has filled with questions he cannot answer, or perhaps it is because he is afraid. As you rest one final time in the Blue Water Inn, you hear Strahd's words echoing in your mind, "...I carved the heart from the Morning Lord..."*

*Could a man really kill a God?*

*You look up and to your surprise see a familiar face, the madness in her eyes has softened, but there is a hint of fear. "Who... who are you? How did you call me here?"*

*Before you stands the spirit of Mad Mary from Barovia Town.*

"Mary? I did not mean to call on you, but I'm glad to see you. Please, don't be afraid, I mean you no harm.

"We met very briefly in Barovia Town, not that long ago. I... I'm sorry. I fear that you being here is my fault in more than one way. Last I saw you, Mog was feeding you dream pastries? And you were worried about your daughter, Gertruda."

Varian sits down and tries to make Mad Mary feel more relaxed. He gives her a tentative smile and gestures for her to sit too.

*Mary shuffles slightly before sitting, returning your gaze. "A mind is a terrible thing to lose, as is a daughter... When Gertruda left, well, I never trusted Mog, but her poison numbed the pain. Without the pastries it seems I lost the will to go on, although in death my faculties have returned. I was a scholar once, a long time ago now. I felt drawn by your desire for answers... Who are you?"*

"I apologise, I don't think we were ever introduced. My name is Varian. I'm not from Barovia, I was brought here through the mists by the Vistani people." Varian pauses and shuffles a bit, looking uncomfortable. So much has happened he had forgotten how he'd got here in the first place. "Others were brought here at the same time as me and we've been travelling together. We seem to have bonded somewhat, if only by having similar goals and seeing the advantage of sticking together. Although I didn't come willingly, I've quickly started to get involved in a lot of Barovia's politics... also not on purpose I should say."

"We learnt of Mog and how she made the pastries... and couldn't stand by and let it keep happening. I know how grief can change us. How it can set us on paths we wouldn't normally take. I am finding more and more comfort in the dead and, hoping this won't offend you, I feel like it suits you too. I'm glad you're better now."

Varian smiles at Mary again, and tries to squeeze her hand.

"But you're right, I am looking for answers. I'm in a foreign land, set on a path that I don't fully understand, surrounded by foes I know barely anything about. But I've learnt that knowledge and information can be more useful than the sharpest dagger..."

Varian shifts ever so slightly, his muscles tensing and absentmindedly reaching for his dagger. His gaze finds Mad Mary's and he relaxes again. "I have a feeling that understanding the Morning Lord and his relationship to Barovia and The Devil might start me on the path to that information."

*"Varian".*

*Mary says the name slowly, frightened, no longer of you, but that she might break the spell that keeps her here.*

*"I am sorry for where you find yourself. This is a sinister place, but it is also a land steeped in history.*

*She leans closer, "For years I have gathered stories of Barovia's past. Once watched over by the Morning Lord, and the lesser spoken Mother Night. Nobody has memory of when the von Zarovich family arrived, whether they built Castle Ravenloft or conquered it. But they are the keepers of Barovia.*

*"Strahd's curse tore the valley from the world, plunging it into mist. Occasionally we drift near enough that travellers may cross, however this is not always the case. Strahd has ruled here for centuries, but when we are lost deep in the mists, I think time slips away. Millennia passing outside, whilst in Barovia mere weeks and days. Now we are close once more, and our passages of time seem to be aligned. I have read so much, sometimes it has felt as though I might manage to reach out and touch your world... a foolish and dangerous thought."*

*Tears gather in Mary's eyes, yet she continues.*

*"There is something wrong with this place. Not only are we trapped with the Devil, but it appears we are abandoned by our Gods. On occasion I have chanced upon an outsider who can speak of the Morning Lords teachings - so far removed are they from our own. Our religious texts have been mutilated beyond recognition. Nobody wants to believe it, but I am convinced Strahd has manipulated our faith to keep us broken. Lost and without hope."*

*"The Devil certainly has his hands deep in this. He brags about having carved the heart from the Morning Lord, dismisses people's faith and holy symbols, like they are nothing. I don't think I had heard of Mother Night until now.*

*"No, I don't think your gods have abandoned you. They were banished and censored. I believe you are right about the Devil's intentions. But that could tell us something more. If Strahd wants us to forget something, he might be afraid of it.*

*"Religion and the whims of gods is something I never cared about much. It has brought me a lot of pain in the past, and so I tried to stay away from any gods' attentions. But I can't deny their power and usefulness. I have a connection to a goddess, and she manages to cast some influence in Barovia, even through the mists. You say you've met outsiders who speak of the Morning Lord's teachings. Perhaps he still exists outside the mists, but your people have lost their connection to him."*

*Varian pauses for a moment, deep in thought.*

*"What do you know of Mother Night? She doesn't seem to have been as heavily censored as the Morning Lord was. Maybe it would be easier to finding her, or more information on her, and that could help us better understand Barovia's past."*

*Mary looks tired, seemingly shaken by something she said...*

*"As the Morning Lord brought life to this valley, The Mother Night, true to her name, watched over the dark. Few speak of her today, but she is mentioned many times in the scripture of the Silver Knights, the now ghosts of Argynvost."*

*Varian notices Mary's tears and reaches forward to try and comfort her. "Mary, are you alright? I am sorry for pressing you so much. I can't say I've had much practise with... compassion. Rose had been teaching me, but she hasn't been around to give me more tips." Varian smiles at Mary, attempting to reassure her and lighten the mood.*

*Mary stares into your troubled eyes whilst wiping the tears from her own.*

*"I hope you find this Rose. I too lost someone precious to me. Gertruda grew tired with my obsessive study, all I could ever give her were stories of a happier life. At best she's somewhere here with me*

“Do you know why she went looking for the witches? I’ve heard about them, but only in passing and with great fear. I wish I could offer some reassurance or help, but I don’t think I have the skills necessary to get involved.”

*“They offer a chance to escape...*

*...all they ask in exchange is your life.”*

*Mary mutters these words and begins to fade, you sense she has given all she had to offer this night.*