

Verna

A resourceful young lady with a mysterious past; 20 years old. Is pretty, but not as slightly built as a noble lady. Only wears sensible shoes, and dresses that are practical enough to run in.

Verna has...

- Below-average **strength** (d20)
- Above-average **agility** (d10)
- Average **health** (d12)
- Average **knowledge of the world** (d12)
- Very good powers of **perception** (d8)

Verna is...

- An outrageous **liar** (d8)
- Devastatingly **charming** (d8)
- A fast **runner** (d10)
- Good at **climbing** in and out of windows (d10)
- Good at **sneaking** around (d10)
- Reasonably well-versed in **local politics** (d12)
- A little rusty at **picking pockets** (d12)
- Aware of the basics of **dirty fighting** (d20)
- A terrible **mathematician** (d30)

Verna is carrying...

- A small knife—good for peeling potatoes, or stabbing city thugs.

You were born in a dingy cathouse in Blackwater. You have no idea who your father was, but you like to believe that he was of noble birth. Then you can pretend that you aren't *really* lying when you tell your marks that you're a young countess tragically deprived of her inheritance by scheming relatives—or the secret illegitimate daughter of a fabulously wealthy baron, or the lost heir of a noble house destroyed by war. There are so many mysterious pasts to choose from!

You realised from an early age that you were smart, and most people around you were not. You felt that it was most unfair that you had been born into such an ignoble station while so many fools were born into wealth and comfort, and sought to rectify this injustice by creatively redistributing the wealth of fools.

At first you snatched purses and picked pockets, but eventually you moved onto better things. It is far more rewarding to persuade people to give you money freely—and you have always had such an honest, trustworthy face.

For the past few years, you have been able to support quite a comfortable lifestyle by befriending wealthy people and having them take care of your expenses. You seduced young men, reminded dotty old duchesses of their granddaughters, and flattered upwardly mobile merchants with your company.

Unfortunately, after a recent flirtation with gambling, you were left deeply in debt to the orc Uthnarg—a base criminal who prefers breaking legs to collecting interest—and your latest friend was starting to ask some inconvenient questions.

Fortunately, you had already begun to groom a new patron—Roderick Payne, a gormless young nobleman who kept asking you to run away with him to his country estate. You had previously discouraged these invitations, being rather fond of the anonymity that a big city provided, but after a narrow escape from some of Uthnarg's thugs you decided that an extended vacation in the country was an excellent idea.

Unfortunately, when you actually arrived at Payne Castle, several things became apparent. The estate was a lot less grand, and a lot more full of sheep and cabbage, than you had previously been led to believe. More importantly, it was not in fact Roderick's estate, but the estate of his father. The present Lord Payne was in excellent health, and Roderick was unlikely to inherit his title and lands in the foreseeable future. Unlike his son, Lord Payne was not an idiot, and he didn't like you at all—he saw through your vague tale of woe from the start, and made it clear what he thought about his heir consorting with a city girl of dubious lineage.

Fortunately, Lord Payne realised that he finally had some leverage over his disobedient wastrel son. He permitted you to stay, on the condition that Roderick would thenceforth obey his instructions to the letter. One of the first tasks he set Roderick was the resumption of his long-abandoned military training—and when it had been completed to his satisfaction a few months ago, he sent him off to the war.

At first you were relieved—you didn't actually like spending time with Roderick very much—but you have started to worry. You have serious doubts about Roderick's competence in battle, and fear that he may be killed at the front—whereupon Lord Payne will unceremoniously toss you out on your ear. You have of course had little opportunity to collect enough money to repay Uthnarg—you could hardly rob Lord Payne's dinner guests—and you don't relish the thought of spending the rest of your life wandering around grotty villages and begging for food.

This is why, when you found out that Lord Payne was sending some of his remaining retainers to investigate the fate of his herbalist, you volunteered to assist them. You don't think you can ever make the man like you, but you can make yourself useful to him. If you perform some valuable service, he will find it more difficult to get rid of you—although you wonder whether he agreed to let you go in the hopes that you would get yourself killed.

Although you have no love for camping or peasants, you will be glad to get away from the estate for a while. You were beginning to get really sick of Lord Payne, the lamb and cabbage stew, the gossiping chambermaids and especially the lewd glances of the guards—you had to discourage several of them with your colourful Blackwater vocabulary, and in one case a swift kick to the groin. The forest will be a pleasant change of scenery.

You have another ulterior motive. This Altus fellow may have some valuables stashed somewhere in his forest retreat, and if he has met with some fatal misfortune, he won't be needing them anymore. It sounds like the man didn't have any friends, so you doubt anyone will notice if anything goes missing. And if you pay a visit to Red Creek afterwards, perhaps there will be further opportunity to lessen your debt while nobody is looking—although by all accounts the village is tiny and poor, you have nothing to lose by checking.

Your companions:

Sigthorn: the old dwarven caretaker. He is a kind and friendly dwarf, except when someone disturbs his beloved gar-

dens. To the best of your knowledge, his interest in gardening is not a typical dwarven pursuit. He observes the rituals of the Two Gods; you have seen him visiting the small temple on the grounds, and he wears the symbol of the Mother. You think he faintly disapproves of you; he almost makes you feel guilty about your multitude of sins.

Adalard: the half-elven wizard. You understand each other to some extent—both of you departed Blackwater rather hurriedly under unpleasant circumstances. Adalard left after a magical duel with a rival ended in his humiliating public defeat. You wish you could reminisce with him about your favourite city haunts, but when Adalard isn't called upon to provide entertainment he generally avoids company, bright light and going outside. He can't be very happy about this trip.

Tad: the orc-at-arms. He likes to play the dumb barbarian, but you know he's a lot smarter than he pretends to be. Smart enough to avoid getting sent to the front, for a start. He's had a chequered past as a mercenary, and you think he's quite competent with the sword. You're glad that he's coming with you—you're not sure how useful the others will be if you run into bandits.