Based on ABC-TV's
DARK SHADOWS

Barnabas Collins
And The Gypsy Witch

What new terror stalks those who attempt to unravel the secrets of the Collins family?

Marilyn Ross
BARNABAS COLLINS AND THE GYPSY WITCH

It was Halloween night when Barnabas and his lovely distant cousin Roxanna decided to visit the Gypsy fortuneteller.

“What do you see in my future?” Roxanna asked nervously. In the shadowy tent, the ancient Gypsy was somehow frightening, and Roxanna was grateful that Barnabas was with her.

The Gypsy lowered her eyes to gaze into the crystal. “Your house is under a curse,” she said at last. “The cold hand of death is over it. There will be sudden and violent deaths... many of them!”
Other Books In This Series
By Marilyn Ross

Barnabas Collins and Quentin’s Demon
Barnabas Collins and the Mysterious Ghost
The Peril of Barnabas Collins
Barnabas Collins Versus the Warlock
The Phantom and Barnabas Collins
The Foe of Barnabas Collins
The Demon of Barnabas Collins
The Secret of Barnabas Collins
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The Mystery of Collinwood
Strangers at Collins House
Victoria Winters
Dark Shadows
Barnabas Collins and the Gypsy Witch

By Marilyn Ross

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New York
To Ted and Roz Campbell for their art
and their hospitality!
The great mansion of Collinwood had more than forty rooms. And it often seemed to Maggie Evans that each room of the big house on the Maine cliffs held a secret of its own. Although for several years she had been governess to David and recently to Amy too, she was still making discoveries about the strange old building. There were still rooms in unused wings that remained locked—rooms whose windows were coated with dust and spiders' webs through which a light never showed.

She and Carolyn, Elizabeth's daughter, often speculated on the mysteries of these deserted areas of the imposing old structure. Collinwood had been the scene of many exciting and bizarre events during its long history. Legends had sprung up around it and around those who had lived in it. And even now there were some in the village of Collinsport who preferred to avoid setting foot on the estate once darkness had come.

Maggie had found the eerie tales of Collinwood both fascinating and frightening. But the house and its people never lost their attraction for her. She considered the estate a romantic setting and its people a colorful group. There were times when alone at night in her room a creaking board or a sudden shadow served to set off her imagination and she pictured phantoms come to haunt her.

But for the most part she enjoyed Collinwood and delved into its history. So it came about on a gray October afternoon that she first saw the lovely cameo that had belonged to a Roxanna Collins and learned the strange story concerning it—a tale as fantastic as any she'd heard about the old house before.

Maggie and Carolyn were talking in the living room when Elizabeth Collins Stoddard joined them. Smiling, the dark-haired mistress of Collinwood said, "You two don't seem to have much to occupy you this afternoon."

Carolyn told her mother, "We were considering a walk on the beach. But it's such a blue day."

"October in Maine is rarely warm," Elizabeth said.
"And once Columbus Day is over in this area you can count on it being chilly. In any case you needn't fret about the beach. I have a chore for you both."

"A chore?" Carolyn echoed in mild dismay.

Elizabeth’s eyes twinkled. "I don’t think Maggie will be so distressed about it. And you should also find it interesting. I want you to open and clean out one of the locked rooms on the third floor. I’m hiring a cook and I want a room prepared for her."

Maggie was at once excited at the prospect of investigating still another of the old rooms. Most of the time Elizabeth discouraged it. She said, "I’ll be glad to help, Mrs. Stoddard. On my own if Carolyn doesn’t want to bother."

Carolyn gave a resigned shrug. "I may as well do it. It’s too cold to go outside." She suddenly had an idea and gave her mother a wise look. "Can we keep anything nice we find?"

"I don’t know about that," Elizabeth said dryly. "I have no idea what treasures may be stored up there. I’ll certainly consider making you a gift of what you discover if it isn’t some very valuable antique."

Carolyn smiled and turned to Maggie. "Let’s start right away." And she asked her mother, "Which room is it?"

"My, we’re suddenly in a great hurry," Elizabeth said, amused. And she searched in her apron pocket and produced an old-fashioned straight key. "This is the key. It’s the third room to the left at the head of the stairs on the top landing. I want everything sorted carefully. You can make two piles in the hallway. One of things for Matt Morgan to carry down to the garbage and the other of items you feel we should save. There oughtn’t to be many of the latter."

They listened just long enough for her to finish and then raced up the stairs to the room they were to investigate and clear. When Carolyn turned the key it grated in the rusty lock and the door itself had swollen with dampness so that both girls had to exert some weight against it to swing it open. When they finally did get it open, they saw a good-sized room with the shades drawn to leave it in semi-darkness and with almost every inch of it filled with dust-covered ancient furniture and wooden storage cases.
The stench of age reeked in the room and Maggie hastily went over and battled with the window sash until she had it raised. Then she swung open the shutters to allow daylight to enter.

She turned to Carolyn. "It's been some time since this room has been aired."

"Years," the other girl agreed, staring around her. She went over and studied a cardboard label tacked on one of the boxes. Reading from it aloud for Maggie's benefit: "Roxanna Collins! That's who all these belonged to."

"The name is new to me," Maggie said, going over to stand beside her. "Where shall we begin?"

Carolyn made a face. "We'll have to do some dusting. Then we can check on what's in all these boxes and cartons."

When they opened the boxes they discovered that most of their contents dated back to 1895. Old calendars and newspapers, musty and yellow, gave them this clue. The clothing packed so carefully had once been stylish and valuable. Now it smelled of age, was creased from being boxed for years and ridiculously out-of-date.

Carolyn held up a white silk dress now yellowed from age. "I wonder who this Roxanna was," she said. "She couldn't have been much taller than me or weighed much more."

Maggie on her knees by an open wooden box studied the dress the other girl was holding up. "I'd say she was just about your size."

"I must ask mother if she knows anything about her," Carolyn said, putting the dress down to resume exploration of the box.

Maggie was absorbed in a newspaper of the day showing advertisements for a motor car known as the Pope-Hartford and another which was stick-steered and called the Brewster electric brougham. The few illustrations in the paper showed men and women in clothes vastly different in style from the present day. For evening wear women seemed to favor long gowns with equally long coats. The proper skirt length appeared to be the tip of the toe!

And the men's clothes were just as different. But it was the low price of most things that surprised her. She could
hardly believe that food had once cost so little. And
clothing was only a fraction of the price of what it now
was. She was absorbed in turning the pages of the long-ago
newspaper when Carolyn touched her on the arm.

“I’ve made a find,” Elizabeth’s daughter said excitedly.
“Mother will have to give me this!” And she held up a
beautiful cameo with an ornamental finely patterned bor-
der of gold.

Maggie stared at it. “Lovely!” she agreed.

Carolyn was examining it more closely. Turning it over
she said. “It has some engraving on it. ‘From Barnabas to
Roxanna, 1895’. Barnabas Collins must have given it to
this Roxanna.”

Maggie nodded. “Probably the grandfather of the Bar-
nabas Collins who was here not long ago.”

“I’d imagine so,” the other girl agreed, still studying
the cameo. “The English branch of the family always
seem to name a son Barnabas in every generation.”

She smiled. “I suppose because the one who founded
their branch of the family was a Barnabas Collins. The
one whose portrait is in the hallway. That was nearly two
centuries ago.”

“We know so little about the Collins family over there,”
Carolyn said. “Mother tried to get some information from
Barnabas during his last visit but he didn’t seem anxious to
go into details.”

“The British are so reserved.”

“Yes,” Carolyn agreed. “Barnabas spent all kinds of
time studying the archives here but he didn’t offer us any
information about the family in England in return.”

“This Roxanna must be known to your mother,”
Maggie said. “If she was a young woman at the beginning
of the century she must have lived well into your mother’s
time.”

“Of course,” Carolyn said. “I can’t imagine why she’s
never mentioned her.”

They settled down to the work of sorting and cleaning
up again. But though they almost finished clearing out the
room before dinner they made no other such find as the
cameo. When they went downstairs Carolyn at once ap-
proached her mother about the piece of jewelry.

Elizabeth smiled faintly as she examined the cameo.
“I’d forgotten all about this,” she said. “Roxanna left me most of her things. Somehow this must have been missed.”

“May I keep it?” Carolyn asked.

“Yes,” Elizabeth said. “I suppose so.”

“Who was Roxanna?” Carolyn wanted to know. “I don’t remember anyone by that name.”

“She died just before you were born,” Elizabeth said. “If you’ll wait until after dinner I’ll tell you all about her.”

And so they gathered by the fireplace in the study later that brisk October evening to hear the exciting history of Roxanna. Carolyn and Maggie both felt there must be more than just a routine story attached to the girl who’d received the cameo so long ago. And Elizabeth did not disappoint them.

Gazing into the flickering red, blue and yellow flames of the blazing log fire her attractive face took on a far-away expression. She said, “It all began in New York City about seventy-five years ago.”

Dusk had fallen on the clamor of the mean New York slum district. The saloons were lighted and filled with customers and small storefronts showed a murky glow as well. The gas lamps on the corners served to briefly highlight the rough denizens of the cobblestoned streets. Roxanna groped her way along a narrow sidewalk jostled now and then by the disinterested who hurried by her and not clearly aware of what had brought her there. Something in the back of her mind whispered that she had known great peril.

But what kind of peril? What dangers had she so barely escaped? The answer was not in her fogged brain. Some terror had gripped her and robbed her of her memory. Now she stumbled along amid these throngs of frightening strangers, hearing coarse shouts and jeers in accents unfamiliar to her and being leered at by humans with monstrously ugly faces. She would cringe away from each such approach and be greeted by hoots of ignorant laughter.

She brushed back a strand of her tangled hair knowing she must present a sorry appearance. Her clothing no longer showed elegance in its torn and mud-bespattered condition. And her face, intelligent and lovely, was
marred by smudges which hid her beauty. What had brought her to this abject state?

Staring straight ahead of her with dazed eyes she came to a crossing. As she ventured on there was an angry shout and someone roughly grasped her by the arm and dragged her back just in time to prevent her from being run down by two great horses drawing a wagon. She stumbled and almost fell, placing her hands over her eyes as the horses and wagon clattered by.

"Better go home to your old man and let him beat you sober!" a coarse male voice hooted in her ear as she straightened up again. There was a burst of loud, vulgar laughter at this remark.

She only wanted to escape from the taunting voice and so she rushed on across the street almost as blindly as before. Reaching the opposite sidewalk she stood weakly for a moment with her heart pounding wildly. If only her head would clear and she could remember!

As the darkness gathered around her this eerie world in which she found herself seemed more unreal. The filth and noise of the narrow streets did not relate to her past experience in any way. She passed a hand wearily across her forehead and strained to concentrate. How had she got¬ten there? Why did she have this haunting fear of huge yellow tongues of fire and pink smoke billowing around her? Of angry voices calling out her name!

It was no use! She couldn’t remember. So she stumbled on. Within a moment she was passing a yawning black alley and suddenly from its shadowy depths two faces, mean and young, loomed to leer at her. She was aware of them at once and froze with fear.

One of them, a man with a livid scar across his forehead, moved out to her. "What's the trouble, sweetheart?" he wanted to know. "Gentleman desert you?"

The other one surged up beside him with a knowing grin. "We can fix that up in no time. We're a couple of gents to properly take care of you!"

With that he seized her by the arm to drag her into the dark alley. Roxanna screamed and began to pound at him with clenched fists. It seemed to do no good at all. He hooted with laughter and held her as tightly as before. To
make matters worse his friend was there to encourage him on and block her way if she should be able to escape his evil grasp.

Roxanna continued to struggle and scream for help though she had no real hope that it would come. It seemed to her this latest development was all part of the nightmare which had been plaguing her. None of it appeared real. Not the dark streets, nor these ruffians nor what was happening!

Suddenly she heard the swish of a cane through the air and was aware of the whack of it as it came down on the arm of her attacker. The hooligan let her go with a wild howl of pain. Again the cane was raised in the air and brought hard on the skull of the other ruffian who promptly staggered and dropped to the filthy floor of the alley. As Roxanna crouched away in the darkness she saw a tall, broad-shouldered man in a caped coat raise the cane a third time and have it land on the collarbone of the first hooligan. He ran off into the street screaming with pain. Now the man in the caped coat gave his attention to her.

Going over to her, he gently took her by the arm. “Did they hurt you?” he asked. He had the pleasant tone of a man of culture.

“No,” she managed. “They just scared me badly.” She was still swaying on her feet.

“Not much wonder,” was his grim response. “Luckily I heard your screams. This is no fit section of New York for a young woman of your age to be out in alone.”

“I know,” she murmured.

He glanced down at the ruffian on the ground who had given a faint moan and was beginning to stir. “To save further unpleasantness we had better be on our way,” he said, guiding her from the blackness of the alley to the street with its faint illumination of gas lamps and shop windows.

She walked unsteadily, still dazed. “I’m sorry to be such a burden,” she apologized.

The man at her side was studying her. “Don’t worry about that,” he said. He had a gaunt, handsome face with a somewhat sallow complexion and a mane of dark hair which tumbled over his forehead. The cane he carried and
which he had used to such purpose was shiny black with a silver head of wolf-like design.

They came to a corner and he paused and staring at her with curiosity asked, "Where is your home and how do you happen to be here? I'd like to send you back in a coach."

The blank look remained in her eyes as she told him, "I don't know. I can't remember."

"Can't remember?" he asked sharply.

She shook her head in despair. "My name is Roxanna. That's all I know. Something dreadful happened. There was a fire and they came after me!" She raised her voice in a new note of fear.

The handsome man at her side gave her a restraining look. "You mustn't give way to hysterics," he warned her. "You must try to collect your thoughts and help me."

Roxanna gazed at him with a sorrowful expression. "I wish I could!" she cried with despair.

The man in the caped coat took the activity of the murky street in with a glance. Then turning to her again, he warned her, "I can't leave you here on your own or you'll at once be in as serious trouble as you were. This is one of the worst districts of the city."

Even in her confused state she was aware of this. "Please don't leave me," she begged.

He hesitated and frowned. "You're sure you can't remember who you are or where your home is?"

"No."

He sighed. "There's only one solution then. I'll have to take you to my lodgings. They are nearby and I can give you a room to yourself for the night. In the morning you'll probably feel better and be able to recall more about your background."

"Thank you," she said gratefully.

His face showed concern. "I trust I'm doing the proper thing," he said, and she was aware for the first time that he had the clipped accent of an upper-class Englishman. Everything about him instilled her with a feeling of confidence.

"If you hadn't come along I don't dare to think what might have happened to me," she said.

He nodded. "It is dangerous to stay here. Those
hoodlums may be even now rounding up some cronies to come after me and even the score.” And holding her by the arm he led her across the street and quickly along the gas-lit thoroughfare.

She was trembling as she fought to keep up with his swift strides. All this was as bizarre as what had gone on before. She had been forced to throw herself on the mercy of this man whom she didn’t know. She began to worry that maybe she should have asked him to put her in the hands of the police. Panic rose in her as she realized she could vanish on this black night and no one would know what had happened to her. No one would be able to trace her!

She said in a thin voice, “Should you have turned me over to a policeman?”

The gaunt man in the caped coat gave her a piercing look. “Have you any slight idea what the jails are like in this part of the city? If I give you into the keeping of the police you’ll be placed in a common cell with the drunken and degenerate. A kind of Dante’s Inferno of which you probably have no conception. Worse, you could wait in such a cell for hours until your family came to claim you or you were sent to one of the city hospitals. And their wards are not much better than the prison cells.”

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I was thinking of the inconvenience I must be creating.”

“I’m more worried about what people might think of my action,” he told her gravely as they continued their hurried walk. “While I wish to spare you the ordeal of a prison cell there are some who might see my generosity in a rather different light. They might accuse me of taking advantage of you.”

“But that’s not so!” she protested.

“I trust you will return to your full senses and be able to testify that later,” he said in a rather grim voice.

They turned into a side street narrower than the other one and not nearly so well lighted. Again Roxanna felt uneasiness though she was impressed by the appearance and manner of the man who’d rescued her. She was still entrusting herself completely to someone she knew nothing at all about.

“I live a few houses down here,” he said. “I have an of-
fice on the second floor and lodgings on the third. My servant Hare will bring you warm water to wash with and food.”

She was about to answer when the thing she’d been terrified of and fighting against at last happened. She collapsed! As she felt the darkness closing in on her she was vaguely conscious of his alarmed voice and his sweeping her up in his arms. Then there was a period of blankness.

“But of course she’s coming to!” A pretty girl with auburn hair was bending over her with a cheerful smile. “Isn’t that so, love?”

Roxanna gazed up at her weakly. “Yes,” she whispered. “There you are! Awake and talking!” the redhaired girl said in her expansive way. She turned to the gaunt man who was standing by anxiously and ordered him, “Go find Hare and have him fetch this poor creature some warm consommé.”

“You’re sure she doesn’t need a doctor?” the man asked.

“Not yet, Barnabas,” the girl said. “If she’s still in a state in the morning I’ll have Hare go find one.”

“I hope we’re doing the right thing,” the man called Barnabas said and walked away.

The redhead bent over her again. “Now don’t you try to do or say a thing for a spell yet,” she advised. “You’re very weak and you’ll feel much better after you have something in your stomach. There’s nothing to be afraid of. You’re in a good room in a nice lodging place rented by a fine gentleman. And I happen to be his friend, Molly Perkins.”

Roxanna was still thinking in anything but a clear fashion. She stared at the girl’s attractive, freckled face and repeated her name softly, “Molly Perkins.”

“That’s me!” the redhead said boisterously. “I sing and do a dance at the tavern across the street. Though mind you I’m not one of your average barroom floozies. I could be on Broadway if I liked. But I enjoy working among my friends.”

“Thank you, Molly,” she said.

The redhead glanced around nervously. “You’ll be better able to do that once Hare has brought you some broth.
I can’t think what’s keeping the man!”

Roxanna was indeed weak. She closed her eyes and soon was conscious of the voice of her benefactor in the room again. Shortly after, Molly Perkins bent over her once more, saying, “I have your broth, love.”

She weakly allowed the girl to spoon feed it to her without attempting to say anything. The effort was beyond her. It was enough to manage downing the broth. She saw the gaunt, handsome man known as Barnabas silently watching. And when she had finished and was stretched out on the bed again he came close and stared down at her.

“Molly will be here to look after you,” he said, his voice seeming to her like a hollow echo in the softly lighted room. “If you need anything just call her. I will be away on business in the morning but if you require a doctor, Molly will have my servant get you one. And I’d like to have you remain here until I return tomorrow evening.”

“Yes,” she whispered again, only partly aware of all that he’d said. The broth was refreshingly warm in her stomach. She closed her eyes.

“Poor thing! Who could have treated her like this?” she heard the blunt Molly Perkins say. But she was too weak and drowsy to show any reaction. Instead she took the path of least resistance and sank into a deep sleep.

She awoke with a start to find an ugly bulldog face peering at her. The squat man had dark side-whiskers and heavy black eyebrows that made him even more frightening. He was wearing a vest and a striped shirt.

Sitting up she cried, “Go away!” And drew the bedclothes protectively around her.

The man with the ugly face grinned maliciously and made an animal grunting sound in reply. Roxanna was on the verge of calling for help when Molly came into the room.

The redhead came over to the man and said, “Hare, you’re up to your old tricks! Frightening young ladies! You’d do yourself more credit if you went to the kitchen and prepared this poor girl’s breakfast!” And she stood there with arms akimbo glaring at him until he left.

Roxanna gave her a grateful look. “How can I thank you?”
“Barnabas is the one who deserves your thanks,” the tavern singer said. She was wearing a dress of some gray material with a ruffle down the front of her long skirt and ruffles at the sleeves. The bosom was low cut and revealing.

“Indeed I know that,” Roxanna agreed. “My head is much clearer this morning.”

“You were in a proper daze last night,” the other girl said. “I'll bring you a basin and some warm water.”

Roxanna washed and dressed and was soon seated at a small table in the room enjoying her first meal since her frightening ordeal began. She looked up from her toast with a smile.

“Everything was so terrifying last night,” she said. “I couldn’t even recall my own name. And I didn’t know whether the man you refer to as Barnabas might be a foe or a friend.”

Molly, standing by, nodded. “I don’t blame you for being frightened. This is no part of the city for a lady. The likes of me can manage because I grew up here. But they'd spot you right away as being from outside and go after you.”

Her face clouded. “That was what happened. Luckily your friend Barnabas was there to save me.”

The redhead assumed a bright air. “Do you know your name this morning?”

“Yes,” she nodded. “My name is Roxanna Collins and my home is in Collinsport, Maine.”

“Collins!” the other girl said in astonishment. “You're not joking me, are you?”

“No. Of course not. My father is in the lumber business.”

Molly Perkins eyed her strangely. “Did you ever hear of a place called Collinwood?”

“Of course!” she exclaimed. “I live on property only a short distance from Collinwood. The Collins family there are distant relatives of mine.”

“Well, that beats all!” Molly said in amazement.

“What?”

“Barnabas is a Collins,” the redhead went on to explain. “And he’s also distantly related to the Collins family at Collinwood. He occasionally makes visits there.”

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Roxanna was stunned. It was almost too much of a coincidence to believe. And yet she knew there was a Barnabas Collins, an Englishman she had been given to understand, who travelled a great deal and every so often returned to visit Maine. This undoubtedly was the same man.

“I’ve heard Barnabas Collins mentioned,” she said. “But I’ve never met him.”

“You have now,” Molly was quick to remind her. “He is the one who saved you last night and this is his apartment.”

“I’m anxious to thank him,” Roxanna said rising. “Where is he?”

Molly looked slightly guarded. “You won’t be able to talk to him until this evening,” she said. “Barnabas is absent on business. He is every day.”

“Oh!” she said, disappointed.

“The hours will go by quickly until dusk,” the red-haired girl promised her. “Then he’ll be back to listen to your story. If you remember, he asked you to remain here until he returned.”

“I think I do,” she said. “I was very weak.”

“You remember your name,” Molly said, studying her intently. “So you finally know now what happened to you.”

A gleam of fear showed in her eyes. “Yes,” she said. “I do.”

“It must have been pretty bad?” the other girl ventured. Her pretty face was clouded with terror. She looked at Molly and in a low voice said, “So bad I can hardly bear to recall it.”
Molly Perkins insisted that Roxanna spend most of the day resting. And since she was still suffering from the torment of her ordeal she needed no great coaxing to agree to this. She spent much of the afternoon sleeping. At six o'clock she joined the actress in the dining room for the evening meal. They were waited on by the bulldog-faced Hare, whose weird presence still made Roxanna feel uneasy.

Molly must have noticed this for she gave her a look of sympathy across the table and said, "You mustn't mind Hare. He's peculiar but very devoted to Barnabas. I suspect he senses that you're afraid of him and is enjoying playing the role of ogre."

Glancing towards the door that led to the kitchen of the flat to make sure Hare wasn't within hearing, she asked the redhead, "Can he not talk at all?"

The other girl shook her head. "No. Not beyond the odd grunting sounds he makes. But don't make the mistake of thinking he's not intelligent. He is. He hears perfectly and understands everything. Barnabas places a great deal of trust in him."

Roxanna paused over her plate of cold beef to ask, "Exactly what sort of business is Barnabas Collins in?"

Molly at once became vague. "He's a very wealthy man," she said. "And I believe he has many interests."

"His office is on the floor below?"

The redhead showed wariness. "That is where he spends his days. And he will not allow any interruptions. It is one of his firm rules."

"Indeed," Roxanna commented, not fully understanding. Her brief acquaintance with the handsome Barnabas had left her with a good impression of him. And she found it hard to picture him as being a cold tyrant in anything. Yet Molly was hinting this was the case.

"Of course Barnabas is a fine man and a kind one, as you have reason to know," the actress added quickly as if she'd read Roxanna's mind and wanted to set the record straight.
"I couldn’t agree more," Roxanna said quietly as Hare entered the dining room again to serve their tea. Nothing was said while he remained in the room.

In spite of her liking Barnabas, there was no question that he lived in a rather strange fashion. His complete withdrawal during the daytime hours and this dour manservant were but two of the things that marked him as peculiar. He was charming but there was an air of mystery about him.

But then that was true of this lodging place. The murky rooms had a brooding silent atmosphere which she couldn’t understand. The memory of her earlier adventures in the city brought a tiny shudder to her. Molly at once gave her a concerned stare.

"Are you sure you’re all right?"

Roxanna nodded yes. "It’s just that I was thinking of that other business before Barnabas rescued me."

Molly’s pretty face registered interest. "I’m more than a little curious to hear all about it," she admitted. "And Barnabas will be here in a moment unless he changes his routine."

She raised her brows. "He always joins you after dinner?"

"Yes. He isn’t much for food," Molly said. "I don’t think in all the time we’ve been friends I’ve ever sat down to a regular meal with him."

She was about to question the girl more about the ways of the handsome dark man when the door to the apartment opened and it was Barnabas. He showed pleasure in seeing her at the table. He crossed the room, impressive in his caped coat.

"I can see that you are feeling much better," he said, standing by her.

"I am, thank you," she said politely. "Due in a large part to Molly."

"Molly is indeed a gem," he agreed. "I hastened to end my chores as soon as darkness came as I’ve been most anxious to hear your story."

"And so am I," Molly said in her hearty way. "So you must begin to tell it at once as I’m due at the tavern for my first round of songs in little more than an hour."

Barnabas gave the girl an amused look. "I wish you’d
give up being a saloon entertainer,” he told her. “There’s no need for it now. And it does rob me of your company far too much.”

Molly rose from the table with a dimpled smile. “I’m glad you feel that way. But I have my career to think of. One of these days I’ll graduate from entertaining in saloons and become a favorite of the music halls.”

“I’d like to think so,” Barnabas said. “If that’s what you really want. But I’d much prefer it if you’d retire.”

Molly’s green eyes held an impish gleam. “I might for a husband and family, you know.”

Barnabas at once became aloof. In a careful voice, he said, “I’m sure Miss Collins isn’t interested in our arguments. Let us give her a chance to tell us what brought her to wandering the New York streets in dazed terror last night.”

Roxanna gave him a smile of gratitude. “You mustn’t concern yourself about me,” she said. She suspected that these two were in love but something was holding them back from becoming man and wife. While she had no wish to interfere she thought it a pity that the handsome man and the attractive girl couldn’t resolve their differences.

They all left the dining room for the comfort of the small parlor. Hare had lighted a fire in the modest brick fireplace. Barnabas sat beside Roxanna on a love seat while Molly deposited her trim form on a footstool near them and waited with open interest to hear Roxanna’s account.

The reflection of the flames livened Barnabas’ sallow face as he studied her. “May I ask what brought you to New York?”

“Yes,” Roxanna said with a troubled expression on her lovely face. “My father was anxious that I complete my education here. He felt it wise to give me some experience of a great city.”

Barnabas nodded gravely. “You mentioned that your father is in the lumber business. What is his name?”

“Andrew Collins,” she said. “You must have heard of him or perhaps you’ve even met him. Our house is close to Collinwood. My father is a tall, gray-haired man. He was married twice. And he’s been twice widowed. I was the daughter of his first marriage. And I have a half-sister,
Ariel, and a half-brother, Robert."

Barnabas showed interest. "I think I may have heard
my cousins mention your father," he said. "But I'm al¬
most positive we've never met."

Molly, seated before them on the footstool, seemed
filled with curiosity. "Do you get on with your half-brother
and half-sister?" she wanted to know. "I have a half-sister
and we fight all the time."

"We get on very well," Roxanna said. "I assure you
I've missed them since leaving Collinwood. And my only
reason for coming here was to learn about the city. It was
our family lawyer, Artemus Hoag, who suggested I be
placed in the care of the widow of a good friend of his, a
Mrs. Sybil Makham."

"And this did not turn out well?" Barnabas suggested.
A look of fear crossed Roxanna's face. "You can't
imagine how awful it was. Mrs. Makham was at the train
to meet me when I arrived. She was a pretty, fine-featured
woman in her late thirties. I thought she had an almost
demure look. She wore a black dress and a neat widow's
bonnet. And she was accompanied by a suave, fair-haired
man whom she called her brother. It's strange but from
the first moment I stepped off the train to be greeted by
them I had a feeling that he wasn't her brother."

Molly leaned forward. "What happened next?"

"This William Oakes had a carriage waiting for us,"
Roxanna went on. "We rode through the city streets and I
was astounded by the size and noise of New York. Even
Boston seemed small by comparison. Sybil Makham was
very nice to me and asked me a lot of questions about
myself. She kept turning to the blond man supposed to be
her brother and commenting on how pretty I was. This
seemed to be oddly amusing to him. At last we reached a
brownstone house in a quiet side street and they said this
was where they lived."

"And that was when the trouble began?" Barnabas
asked quietly.

"Almost at once," Roxanna said, her eyes reflecting the
fear of those days and nights. "I realized I was to be more
a prisoner than a guest. Sybil Makham took me up to an
apartment on the top floor of the old house and left me
locked in there. The only person I saw for more than two
days was an ugly old woman who brought me my meals. I was terrified and asked her to let me speak to Mrs. Makham or her brother but the old woman only laughed at me.”

“Not hard to tell the sort those two were,” Molly spoke up, her lovely face indignant.

“I cried myself to sleep both nights,” Roxanna went on. “I couldn’t imagine how I would get word back to my father or even manage a message to the police. I felt trapped and I didn’t understand any of it. It seemed incredible that a friend of Lawyer Hoag’s would behave in this manner and that I had come to the woman on his recommendation. Then late on the third night the supposed brother of Sybil Makham’s came to my room. I saw at once he had been drinking. I begged him to let me leave but instead he laughed at me and took me in his arms. I was trying to escape from him when she came to stand in the doorway and watch us. She called out his name and there was a look of absolute hatred on her face! William Oakes released me and stood before her.”

“And then what?” Barnabas asked.

“There was an angry scene between them. She sent him away and then I begged her to let me go. Told her I wanted to return to my father and Collinsport. She made cruel jokes about my pleas and informed me I was to be sent away on a ship to South America. This left me in a state of absolute panic. I was locked in the room again and no one but the old crone came near me.”

Molly Perkins spoke up angrily, “There are too many in this city like those two. An innocent girl hasn’t a chance!”

Barnabas motioned the redhead to be silent. He turned to Roxanna again and said, “Go on with your story.”

She closed her eyes and gave a deep sigh as she recalled her hopelessness at that awful moment. Then opening her eyes again she told Barnabas, “I was truly desperate. I spent the entire night pacing up and down in the living room of the apartment. From downstairs I could hear loud voices and laughter, the boisterous laughter of men and women. It was the same sound that came regularly every night. I had no idea what was going on but I knew the house was an evil place. Somehow I must escape from it. So I decided on a wild attempt to gain my freedom. I
had a small box of matches in my suitcase. I rummaged until I found them and then set the drapes on fire."

Molly gasped. "You could have been burned to death or suffocated!"

"I know that," she admitted. "But I no longer cared. I went into the next room and closed the door and waited. As the flames began to spread and the room filled with smoke the people down below must have become aware of the fire. Sybil Makham came up and unlocked the door. When she saw the fire was out of hand she began to scream. She was still screaming when I rushed out of the side room and fought my way past her. She was too upset by the fire to try to stop me. I raced down the stairs, choking from the smoke. A lot of men and women were milling around and shouting and the man she called her brother ran by me without seeing me as he made his way upstairs. I pushed my way to the front door and escaped to the street."

Barnabas said, "And it was shortly after that I met you."

"Yes," she said. "I had suffered a kind of blackout from the shock. When you rescued me from those two bullies I had no idea who I was or where I was going. My mind had become a hopeless blank."

Molly gave her a reassuring smile. "Well, you needn't worry, you're safe now. And you've recovered your memory."

She gave a tiny shudder. "I still can't understand the meaning of it all. Lawyer Hoag would never willingly have sent me into such danger. He has been our family lawyer for years, my father trusts him completely. Why did he direct me to that evil house?"

Barnabas frowned. "It's a good question. I'll make some inquiries and see if I can find out. In the meantime you can stay here."

"I'd like to return to Collinsport as soon as I can," she said.

He nodded. "Of course. There is a night boat from Boston. And after I learn something about Mrs. Makham and her brother I'll personally escort you to the Boston train. Meanwhile, Molly will do her best to see that you are comfortable here."
"Depend on that," Molly said, rising. "Right now I'm due at the saloon. But I'll come back when I finish with my songs."

When the pretty redhead had gone Roxanna turned to Barnabas gratefully, "I don't know how to properly thank you. And Molly is a sweet person."

He was standing by the fireplace studying her with interested eyes. His eyes had a strange, troubled gleam and were deep-set under heavy black brows.

"She is a fine girl," he agreed. "You will be perfectly safe in her care."

"I have no wish to be a bother to you," she protested.

His smile was genuine. "I'm delighted to be of help," he said. "After all we are cousins, even if distant ones. I think it might be pleasant if you allowed me to call you Roxanna and you must use my first name."

Roxanna found herself blushing. Barnabas' easy charm was hard to resist. "Thank you, Cousin Barnabas," she said. "I am sure my father will be eternally grateful to you."

"It's nothing," he said, his hands clasped behind his back.

"How long since you've been in Collinsport?"

He frowned. "Too long. It may be that I'll return when you go back."

"I wish you would," she said at once. "I'm really too nervous to make the journey alone."

"Perhaps Molly will accompany you if I'm not able to," Barnabas said. "Or even Hare."

She found herself in an awkward situation. Deciding it would be better to be completely frank with the older man, she said, "Truthfully Hare frightens me a little. He's so strange."

Barnabas looked disappointed. "I'd hoped you two might be good friends."

"He's very hard to understand."

"But completely loyal," Barnabas said. "You'll like him better as you come to know him."

"Perhaps so," she said, without conviction.

Barnabas said, "Surely you must have visited Collinwood and seen the portrait of my ancestor in its outer hall. A painting of the first Barnabas Collins."
Roxanna stared at him. “Yes, of course I have. And the portrait bears a remarkable resemblance to you. That is why I’ve been feeling that we’d met somewhere before.”

“No doubt,” he said with one of his sad smiles.

They talked on for a few minutes longer but she noticed that he had little to say about himself or the business which kept him occupied all during the day. In spite of his friendliness he was still a mystery to her.

At least she was safe and had the protection of this distant cousin’s lodgings until she was ready to leave the city—that could not be too soon as far as she was concerned. But she was curious to know what Barnabas found out about the infamous two who had virtually kidnapped her.

Barnabas excused himself and left her alone in the flat. But not for long. Molly came back from her show at the saloon glowing with confidence. She made a pretty figure in an orange gown with a low-cut bosom.

“They went wild over my songs tonight,” she told Roxanna. And then glancing around with questioning eyes, she asked, “Where is Barnabas?”

“He’s gone out to find some word about Mrs. Makham and her brother.”

“Whatsoever it is, it can’t be good,” Molly said crisply. She was standing by Roxanna.

“Perhaps I should have discouraged him,” she worried. “He may get into trouble.”

Molly laughed. “Don’t think that! Barnabas is a smart one. He can look after himself better than most.”

“Do you really think so?”

Molly touched a hand to her shoulder and stared down at her. “You are truly an innocent,” she said. “What a lot you have to discover one day.”

She felt her cheeks warm. “I know I must seem stupid. But I am ignorant of the city. And I know so little about Cousin Barnabas.”

“So it’s Cousin Barnabas now, is it?” Molly’s tone was mocking.

Roxanna felt even more embarrassed. “He suggested that I call him that.”

“Very nice of him,” Molly said. “And you can be sure he approves of you or he wouldn’t have suggested it. Bar-
nabas has a habit of turning his back on most people. He likes to live a solitary life.”

“Why?” she asked, rising.

Molly shrugged. “That’s the kind of person he is.”

Roxanna looked at her very directly. “I hope you’ll forgive my speaking so frankly. But I don’t want you to think I plan to intrude on you two. It’s obvious that you are in love with Barnabas and I can’t imagine why he hasn’t asked you to marry him.”

Molly’s answering smile was wry. “Don’t worry about it. I don’t any longer. Barnabas has to live his own way.”

And that was all the other girl would tell her. As it grew later, there seemed little chance of Barnabas returning that night. Roxanna said goodnight and went to her room. On the way she passed the burly mute servant, Hare, in the shadowed hall. He glared at her in such an angry fashion it sent chills through her. For the first time since Barnabas had come to her rescue she knew fear again.

She bolted the door to her bedroom and settled down to an uneasy sleep. She came awake some time later to darkness and what sounded like the rustle of wings in the room. The sound startled her so that she gasped and sat up in bed. Peering into the shadows she tried to locate the rustling she had heard, but she couldn’t. Then, as she was about to give up and attempt to sleep again she saw the shadowy form of Barnabas gradually take shape in a far corner of the room.

“Cousin Barnabas!” she cried out in a small, scared voice, drawing the sheets up against her.

There was no reply from the sad-faced figure in the shadows. In a matter of seconds Barnabas had vanished as quickly as he had appeared. It didn’t seem possible he had ever been there. Especially since she had so carefully bolted the door. She began to think she’d been suffering from a bad nightmare, the result of her frightening experience. She forced herself to rest her head on the pillow and close her eyes once more. After a while she slept again.

In the morning she recounted her experience to Molly. “It was almost as if I could reach out and touch Bar-
nabas," she said. "Yet it couldn’t possibly have been him. I must have dreamed it."

Molly nodded sagely. "Stick to that, honey. Believe it was a dream."

Roxanna felt she didn’t quite understand the other girl but knew it wouldn’t do to pry. Beyond a point Molly would tell her nothing. With a worried look, she said, "I’m anxious to hear from Barnabas. To know what he found out."

"You’ll learn soon enough," Molly said. "He’ll be here right after dinner tonight at his usual time."

"It wouldn’t do for me to go downstairs to his office and try to talk to him now, would it?"

Molly looked grim. "No. That wouldn’t do at all."

True to the singer’s prediction Barnabas arrived almost the moment they got up from the dinner table. And Roxanna could tell by the expression on his face that he had gotten some information.

In the parlor he told her and Molly what he had learned. "It wasn’t hard to trace them," he explained. "I found what house in the area had been destroyed by fire and followed it from there."

"Then the house did burn down?" Roxanna said.

"Yes," Barnabas nodded. "It was a total loss. And three people apparently died in the flames. The woman who acted as your keeper, Mrs. Sybil Makham and her gentleman friend, William Oakes."

"I knew it!" Roxanna said. "He was lying about his name. He wasn’t her brother, was he?"

"He surely wasn’t," Barnabas said grimly. "He was an unsavory character with a police record for various criminal activities. After the death of Sybil Makham’s husband she unfortunately came under his influence."

Roxanna listened eagerly. "I can understand now," she said. "And of course Lawyer Hoag, living so far away in Collinsport, would know nothing about this."

"Exactly," Barnabas said.

Molly looked indignant. "He should have found out before sending you to her."

"Without a question the woman’s character had changed over the years," Barnabas said. "Until by the time you arrived she was his partner in crime. She had
turned her home over to him to be used as a gambling house and worse."

Roxanna sighed. "Still I'm sorry they had to die in the fire."

Molly placed a comforting arm around her. "Don't waste your sympathy. Whatever happened to them was deserved."

Barnabas wore a bleak expression. "I'd say I agreed with that. The best thing you can do now is try to forget all about it."

"That won't be easy," Roxanna said. "It will take time."

Barnabas said, "Not as long as you think once you are safely back home in Collinsport."

"He's right," Molly agreed.

"I guess I'd better start back at once," Roxanna ventured.

This time Barnabas smiled at her. "Of course. As a matter of fact I'm going to be paying a visit to the old house at Collinwood for a few weeks. To be perfectly sure you get back home safely I'll escort you."

Roxanna was delighted and surprised by his offer. "You're sure it won't put you to any extra trouble?"

"I've been planning the visit in any case," he assured her. "I'm going to let Molly go with you on the train to Boston. And meanwhile I will settle some urgent business here in the city and meet you on the night boat. It leaves Boston in the late afternoon and arrives at Collinsport shortly after midnight."

Roxanna turned to the other girl. "Why don't you come and pay me a visit?"

"I'd like to," Molly smiled. "But I have my singing job at the saloon. I'm afraid the best I can do is see you safely on the boat in Boston. Then I'll come straight back here."

"And before we do leave," Barnabas went on, "I think we should spend at least one night seeing the city. We can't send you back to Maine without your having attended one play. I'll get tickets for tomorrow night."

Roxanna protested that this wasn't necessary but Barnabas insisted. Molly joined in on his side, promising to take the night off so she could accompany them. She also
promised to find one of her evening gowns that could be altered to fit Roxanna. Suddenly the horror and tragedy attending Roxanna’s advent into the great city were forgotten in their preparations for the pleasant evening.

Molly selected a pure white gown for her and spent a good part of the day trying it on her and altering it to fit. Roxanna was overwhelmed by the girl’s kindness. And by the time Barnabas, elegant in full evening dress under his caped coat, came to take them to dinner, she was suitably gowned in her borrowed finery.

It turned out to be a wonderfully exciting night. They were going to see a musical comedy on Broadway and have dinner at Rector’s. Barnabas helped Roxanne and Molly from the carriage that had brought them to the gas-lit brilliance of the Broadway area and explained that Rector’s was among the most famous of eating places.

“It has no name to identify it outside,” Barnabas said, leading her to the entrance by her arm. “The griffin serves to do that.”

Roxanna gazed up at the weird illuminated figure hanging over the doorway. It had the body of a seated lion, forked tail of a devil, eagle’s head and perked up collie’s ears. It hung suspended over the door.

“This is the first revolving door we’ve ever had in New York,” Molly announced proudly, and she pushed her way ahead through the door, a graceful beauty in dark blue with white gloves and boa.

Inside, Roxanna was equally entranced by the splendor of the fine restaurant. Ceiling-high mirrors covered its walls and the decor was Louis XIV in green and gold. She saw there must be at least a hundred tables downstairs, and upstairs where the headwaiter took them there were almost as many more.

Barnabas ordered a feast that included champagne and lobster. Waiters hovered over their table looking for every opportunity of serving them. In the background an orchestra played string music. It was the kind of fabulous place Roxanna had often dreamed about but never experienced. Now she was here as the honor guest of the charming Barnabas Collins.

The table was filled with fine food and wine. The
elaborate setting of white cloth, fine china and silver together with elegant crystal made it all the more impressive. In spite of her excitement Roxanna managed to enjoy her dinner, though she was troubled to see that Barnabas wasn’t touching any of the excellent food and he merely touched the wine glasses to his lips without drinking.

She felt compelled to lean over anxiously and ask him if he was feeling ill. “I hope you haven’t forced yourself to come here because of me,” she said.

“Nonsense,” he smiled. “I’m in the best of health. But I had much too heavy a luncheon. And I rarely drink.” To placate her he touched his hand to hers and she was startled to find that it was icy cold!

But he kept up an amusing conversation and she soon forgot her fears that he might not be feeling well. They left the restaurant for the busy street and made their way to the theatre entrance.

“Our seats are the best I could get,” Barnabas told her. “They are in the orchestra though I would have preferred a box.”

“Anywhere,” she said, thrilled. “I’ve never been in a really big theatre before.”

The place was crowded. The sea of faces around her made Roxanna dizzy. It was her first taste of the night life of the great city. The orchestra began its overture, the house lights dimmed and the curtain rose. It was an amusing story of the love affair between a peasant girl and a prince. Roxanna loved every minute of it. When the intermission came she could hardly wait for the lights to lower again and the second act to begin. Begin it finally did and she was lost in the pleasant fantasy of the music and story once more. At the final curtain she joined the others in applauding loudly. She felt she’d never been happier.

When all the curtain calls had ended they rose to leave. Barnabas and Molly were discussing the merits of the stars and she was still entranced by her surroundings. Looking around her she let her gaze lift to the boxes on either side of the theatre with their elegantly clad patrons.
All at once she froze as her eyes fastened on the demure beauty of a woman, clad in simple black, in an upper left box. For the face she was staring at was that of Sybil Makham! The woman who had supposedly perished in the fire, several nights before!
CHAPTER THREE

As soon as Roxanna had conquered her initial moment of fear she tugged at Barnabas' sleeve. When he glanced at her in mild surprise as they moved slowly towards the aisle, she whispered, "Sybil Makham! I just saw her in the box up there!" And she indicated the spot with a nod.

Barnabas looked concerned and quickly gave his attention to the box. "Where?" he asked.

"Standing there!" she said. But then to her dismay she saw that this was no longer true. The box was now empty. "They've left," she said urgently. "But if we hurry we should be able to catch up with them at the entrance."

Molly, elegant in her fashionable gown and boa, leaned forward anxiously to question her. "What is it?"

Standing between them in the row of seats Barnabas told the redhead rather impatiently. "Roxanna believes she saw Mrs. Makham in one of the upper boxes."

"The woman who died in the fire?" Molly asked in surprise.

Barnabas nodded and frowned. "There is a bare possibility it could be her. Let us make our way to the lobby as quickly as possible."

And they did. Though it was actually a slow business because of the crowds. Roxanna felt her nerves on edge. Finally they reached the large ornate lobby with its gilt decor. She strained to check on those coming down the stairs from the upper regions of the large theatre. She'd about given up hope of glimpsing the dark woman again when she saw her and an elderly, white-haired man making their exit to the street.

Heart thudding with excitement she hastily turned to Barnabas. "I saw her just now," she said. "She and an older man have left the theatre."

"Perhaps we can still catch up with them," Barnabas said, taking her arm and leading her and Molly quickly to the exit doors.

The street was almost as filled with people as the theatre lobby. This made it hard for them to spot the dark woman and her escort. Roxanna looked up and down the
street and despite the brilliance of the gas-lit signs couldn’t pick the two out again.

“Let us try this way,” Barnabas suggested, turning to the left. “Many of the crowd will be heading for one of the downtown restaurants.” And he guided her and Molly through the chattering groups clustered on the sidewalk outside the theatre.

Hansom cabs and elegant carriages were picking up many of the theatergoers. They’d gone only about a dozen yards when Roxanna spied them. This was happening only a short distance away.

“There they are!” she cried out to Barnabas. At the same time she ran ahead and caught the arm of the white-haired man in evening dress as he prepared to follow Sybil Makham into the carriage. “Please!” she begged. “I must have a word with the lady with you.”

Purple of face and with a heavy white mustache the old man stared at her in blank amazement. “What was that?”

Barnabas and Molly had now joined her. And it was Barnabas who took over the situation and told the old man, “We would like to speak to your companion for just a moment.”

The old man raised his eyebrows. Stunned, he glanced at the carriage door. “This is most unusual,” he sputtered. Roxanna apologized. “I’m sorry. But it is urgent.”

At that moment the dark-haired woman in the carriage leaned forward to gaze out at them indignantly. And all Roxanna’s excitement subsided. It was not Sybil Makham! True, the woman resembled the evil Sybil but at close scrutiny there was a vast difference in the two faces. Roxanna was caught in confusion and shame.

“Well?” the woman demanded coldly.

“I’m sorry,” Roxanna said abjectly. “I have made a mistake.”

Barnabas apologized to the old gentleman and then they all three moved on leaving the couple still sputtering with annoyance. Roxanna was forlorn and shamed by the experience.

“It was so stupid of me,” she faltered as they walked along the quieter section of the street.

“You mustn’t feel badly about it,” Barnabas said kindly. “It was a natural mistake.”
“Of course it was,” Molly declared. “After what you’ve gone through it’s not much wonder you’re upset easily.”

Their assurances made her feel better but the haunting memory of that face seen in the distant box still troubled her. She began to secretly wonder if it hadn’t been Sybil Makham she’d seen standing there and later she’d mistaken this other stranger for the evil woman. But having made one absurd error she didn’t dare offer any such theories to Barnabas or Molly. And especially since it was accepted that Sybil Makham had died in the fire. Better to leave it at that.

They took a carriage back to the lodgings downtown. And it was there in the small parlor that Barnabas said goodnight to her. He was sympathetic as he told her, “You must try to ease your nerves. I’m sure returning to Collinsport will be good for you.”

“It will,” she agreed.

“I won’t be seeing you again until you board the night-boat in Boston,” he informed her, his deep-set eyes studying her. “Molly will take care of all the arrangements in leaving here. You will take the train to Boston and she will accompany you to the boat.”

“You’re both far too kind to me,” she told him.

He smiled sadly. “It is my duty,” he reminded her. “We are both members of the same family even though we belong to distant branches.”

“That is true,” she agreed. “Of course you must be friendly with Theodore Collins, who now lives at Collinswood with his wife.”

“Only through correspondence,” Barnabas said. “I have made arrangements with him to rent the old house while I am in Collinsport.”

Roxanna sighed. “I should tell you that he and my father don’t get along well.”

“Indeed?”

Her pretty face flushed. “It’s something I don’t know too much about. Theodore Collins inherited Collinwood and the fish packing plant, while my father was given all the timberland belonging to the family. Theodore Collins apparently thinks some of the timberland should have been his as well.”

“These things happen,” Barnabas agreed.
"As a result we never visit and barely speak. I felt I should tell you before we return to Collinsport."

"I'll try to avoid taking any sides in the dispute," Barnabas said. "And I do appreciate your warning me."

"Will Hare be going to Collinsport with you?"

"Yes. I never travel anywhere without him. Surely you're not still afraid of the poor fellow?"

She smiled wanly. "I try not to be. But I do find him hard to understand."

"Because of his affliction," Barnabas said, those deep-set eyes fixed on her. "I will say goodnight. You must try and get a good night's sleep. You will be doing a lot of travelling beginning in the morning." And in an unexpected gesture he moved close to her and touched his lips to her forehead.

Roxanna was grateful for the affectionate gesture and also a trifle startled. For his lips had been as cold as his hands. Again she worried that this grave, handsome man might be suffering from some disease. He left her and she went to her own room.

Next morning Molly Perkins was all bustle and excitement. "We're taking the train to Boston in a few hours," she informed her. "It will get us there just in time for you to board the boat before it leaves."

"And what about you?" she asked across the breakfast table.

Molly buttered her toast. "I'll stay in Boston overnight with some theatre friends of mine and come back here tomorrow."

"Won't you change your mind about visiting me?" Roxanna begged. "I'd so enjoy it. And I think Barnabas would like having you there."

Molly laughed. "You're wrong about that. I told you Barnabas often likes to get away by himself. I'd be in the way at Collinsport."

Roxanna frowned slightly. "I guess I don't understand Barnabas."

"And it's not likely that you will," the buxom redhead said in an amused tone.

The girl was wearing one of her typical low-necked dresses and Roxanna couldn't help noticing a conspicuous
red mark on the side of her throat. She asked Molly, "That crimson mark on your throat. I haven't seen it before."

Molly showed unusual embarrassment and quickly reached up to cover the red mark protectively with her fingers. "It's a birth mark," she said. "I usually keep it covered with powder."

"You must," Roxanna agreed. "I can't remember seeing it before."

"It's not important," Molly said and quickly changed the subject to the problem of packing.

Since Roxanna had been living mostly in clothes she had borrowed from Molly, she had little packing to do. The burly, mute Hare seemed to be unusually busy occupying himself between upstairs and Barnabas' office below. In the bright morning sunlight he looked less forbidding and likely to justify the praise Barnabas had bestowed on him. He moved about with competence, taking Molly's bags downstairs.

At last it was time to leave the low-ceilinged, shadowed lodgings which had served as a refuge for Roxanna since her rescue by Barnabas. She and Molly went down the winding, dark stairs to the second-story level where Barnabas was said to have his office. They arrived at the entrance to this other set of rooms in time to discover an energetic Hare presiding over the removal of an ornate casket.

Roxanna was shocked to see what was going on. She stood there as two workmen strained to get the imposing casket through the doorway and on down the steep stairs. Hare was uttering grunts of encouragement and warning as he occasionally helped with the heavy coffin.

Molly stood back in the shadows of the landing. "We'd best let them get that down first."

She gave the redhead a surprised look. "What does it mean? Why should Barnabas keep a casket in his office?"

The other girl smiled grimly. "He is a man of strange obsessions. One of them being that he wants to be buried at Collinwood. There is a family cemetery there not far from the old house."

"I know it."

"Barnabas has been anxious to select his own coffin,"
Molly went on. "He has had this one specially constructed for him and he is taking it back to Collinsport to be ready there on the day he needs it."

Roxanna was shocked. "Isn't that morbid! Barnabas is much too youthful and handsome to think about death!"

Molly gave her a queer look. "Death is his constant companion."

Staring at the girl, she asked, "Is he really sick? I know his hands are icy cold and last night he kissed me goodnight. I've never felt lips so chilled."

"It's an affliction he suffers from but which offers no immediate danger," Molly said. "You mustn't concern yourself about it. Such things only serve to annoy Barnabas."

Roxanna stood in the dim shadows in silent bewilderment as the men finally got the cumbersome casket out the doorway and began to awkwardly descend the steep, narrow steps. She saw that the casket was of solid oak and ornately carved. It had handles and trim of heavy copper. Certainly Barnabas had gone to a great deal of trouble to select a fine box for his final resting place. But such an action did not seem in character with the man she knew. Perhaps, as Molly kept maintaining, she didn't know him nearly as well as she thought.

It seemed to take an eternity before the men reached the street with their grim burden. Then Molly and she followed them down in time to see the coffin loaded on a wagon. Hare superintended this and then came over to see them into a waiting carriage.

She got in first and as Molly followed her, the redhead told Hare, "I expect you'll be riding with the coffin."

Hare nodded, grunted and closed the door of the carriage. Molly and Roxanna sat back on the horsehair cushions as the vehicle started up and began a rough passage over the cobblestone streets.

In the semi-darkness of the carriage Roxanna turned to inquire of the other girl. "Where is Barnabas? When will he join us?"

Molly glanced out the side window of the carriage. "Not until we reach Boston. He'll be on the night boat."

"But how will he get there?"

"It would be wise of you not to ask too many ques-
tions,” Molly said, turning to her with a wise look on her attractive face. “He is occupied with some business but he will get there in time. That is all that need concern you.”

The comment was not offered in the tone of a reprimand, yet Roxanna felt it to be one. She realized she had no right to question these two people who had so kindly befriended her. She decided to be content with Molly’s explanations. Surely any eccentricities Barnabas might possess were harmless ones. And he was a handsome and charming man. So much like the portrait she’d once admired in the hallway of Collinwood in the days before her father and Theodore Collins had become enemies.

It was in this relaxed frame of mind she made the long train journey from New York to Boston. Immediately on their arrival in the New England city Molly engaged another carriage to hurry them from the sooty, noisy confusion of the railway station to the clamor of the docks. The impressive sidewheeler steamer was already taking on passengers and cargo when Molly escorted her up the gangplank.

To the officer on duty Molly said, “This is Miss Roxanna Collins. I believe a stateroom has been engaged for her.”

The bearded ship’s officer consulted a list and then smiled at them. “I have it down here. Do you wish to go to it now?”

Molly glanced at her. “It would be best, I’d say. Barnabas will be able to find you there easily.”

“Yes,” she agreed. Roxanna was a little alarmed at the idea of losing Molly as a companion. She was still uneasy about being on her own. There was always the feeling that Sybil Makharn or the equally vicious William Oakes might emerge from the people around her to take her in custody again. The scars of her kidnapping were still fresh.

Molly told the officer. “You can show us to her stateroom.”

It was below the main deck and small but furnished nicely. As soon as the ship’s officer left them alone Molly gave her a warm smile. “Now you mustn’t be nervous. Barnabas will be joining you shortly.”

She glanced out the porthole and saw it was already getting dark. The lamp in the wall bracket burned in a
wan fashion to give the tiny stateroom an eerie glow.

"I still wish you were coming along," she told the other girl.

"Some other time," Molly said. "Don't worry about anything, especially not about Barnabas. You'll discover it's best to accept him as he is."

"I will," she promised, not understanding Molly fully. But this was often the case. "I suppose Hare is not on board."

"If not he will be shortly," Molly said. She grimaced. "And the casket!"

Molly frowned slightly. "Yes. But don't concern yourself about it. And don't mention it to Barnabas. He can be sensitive about such things."

"I'll be careful," she promised.

Molly took her impulsively in her arms. "You have been good for both of us, honey! Barnabas has gained from having someone to protect. He's become very fond of you. Just don't make the mistake of falling in love with him!"

Roxanna blushed at the other girl's warning as she released her. "I have no right to do that," she said. "You and Barnabas are in love."

Molly eyed her with a sad smile. "I don't expect anything will ever come of it," was her sighed reply. "But you remember what I told you."

And before Roxanna could make any reply the girl opened the cabin door and left. Alone in the eerie atmosphere of the tiny stateroom she felt completely let-down and fearful. It was true she would be home in Collinsport within a few hours if all went well. But those hours seemed a frightening hurdle at the moment. She sat down on the bunk and prayed that Barnabas would soon come.

It was pitch dark outside the stateroom porthole when the steamer gave a blast of its melancholy horn and the giant sidewheels began to rotate and churn the harbor waters. The ship moved slowly away from the docks and she could see the city lights gradually fading in the distance. Still Barnabas had not appeared.

She was beginning to feel faint from hunger when a soft knock came on the stateroom door. She went over and
asked, "Who is it?" before sliding the bolt on the door back.

"Barnabas," said his familiar voice from outside.

Almost joyously she threw the door open to discover him standing in the darkness of the corridor with a smile on his gaunt face. He was wearing the familiar caped-coat and was hatless.

Stepping inside, he asked, "Did Molly take good care of you?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "But I've been lonely and upset, waiting for you. I was afraid you might have missed the boat."

"I was careful not to do that," he said. "Now I must get you upstairs to have some dinner."

With Barnabas' arrival all her fears vanished. It was a pleasant night and after dinner they spent much of their time strolling on the deck together. Since it was late in the season the ship was not crowded with passengers. They had the deck almost to themselves. When they came near the middle of the big vessel where the threshing sidewheels were located they had to shout to hear each other. So they spent a good deal of their time forward in the bow where it was reasonably quiet.

"We should reach Collinsport shortly after midnight," Barnabas informed her. "Theodore will have a wagon there to pick up me and my luggage. No doubt we can make room for you and be able to drop you off along the way at your own home."

"My father won't be expecting me," she said. "So it's not likely he'll have a carriage at the docks unless he's expecting some freight."

"There's no need to worry in any case," Barnabas said in his reassuring way. He glanced at her in the cool darkness of the deserted ship's bow. "I think you told me that your father is a widower."

"He was married twice," she said. "My mother died when I was born. Then father married Barbara. She was the mother of my half-sister, Ariel, and Bob, my half-brother. Father experienced a second tragedy when Barbara took a fever and died while they were touring in Europe. That was twenty years ago and we children were
very young. So we've grown up without knowing a mother."

"Very sad." Barnabas was sympathetic.

"It has been especially hard on father," she agreed. "I don't think he's ever been quite himself since the death of his second wife. He is a very aloof, cold man, even with us children."

"But you and your half-brother and sister get along well?"

"Better than you might expect," Roxanna told him. "Ariel is very pretty but she has a quick temper. I'd say that's her only fault. But her angry moods don't last. Robert is a quiet young man, he's nearest my age; there are only two years between us. Ariel is three years younger than I am. Robert likes the lumber business and the out-of-doors. Between his work and fishing and hunting, he's rarely at home."

Barnabas smiled. "You sound like an interesting family group."

She stared out across the darkness of the ocean. "I don't know what they'll think about my returning home so soon from New York."

"When you explain they'll understand," Barnabas said. "I'll talk to your father about it if you like."

Roxanna looked at him nervously. "You'd better leave it to me," she warned. "He's not friendly where strangers are concerned. And you say you've never met him."

"I'm afraid not."

"You will this time," she promised. "And he'll be grateful to you for what you've done for me. Father is a very fair man even though he can be difficult at times."

Barnabas nodded. "I've not been back to Collinsport for some time. I suppose I'll find a few changes."

She looked up into his grave, handsome face. "I hope you won't find too many," she said. And she realized how interested she was in this man she'd known such a short time but who had come to mean so much to her. In the back of her mind there was the vague echo of Molly's warning to guard against falling in love with him. She decided that advice might be hard to follow.

It seemed that he was thinking of her in romantic terms,
for almost at once, he asked, "Are you engaged to some young man in Collinsport?"

She laughed lightly. "Not really."

"But you've surely been seeing someone," he persisted.

"There was one boy, Reid Sterling, his father owns the general store. We've gone out together."

"Is it serious?" Barnabas asked lightly.

She shrugged. "I don't know. I don't think so. New York changed me. The world of Collinsport suddenly appears to be very small."

"It is."

"I must give myself time," she went on. "Perhaps I should make another try at living in a city, and hope that this time my father will be able to make more suitable arrangements for me."

"That would be a must," Barnabas agreed in a dry voice. "It's getting colder. That coat Molly gave you is not heavy. I think we should go inside."

The hours went by quickly with the interesting Barnabas as her companion. Then they were standing below decks waiting for the sidewheeler to pull in to the wharf at Collinwood. Barnabas was at her side and Hare stood a little distance off watching them. He always seemed to be apprehensive about his master. His eyes seldom left Barnabas. The deckhands began to prepare for the landing and had the gangplanks ready. Roxanna thought about that casket and wondered if it would cause talk.

The cold darkness of the dock was relieved by torches flaming at suitable intervals. Barnabas helped her up the gangplank. And almost the moment they reached the dock a thin man with side-whiskers came to greet them.

"Welcome back to Collinwood, Mr. Barnabas," the man said, giving her a curious glance. "I have the wagon here as you ordered."

"Thank you," Barnabas said. "Hare is taking care of the unloading of our things now. Once you have them safely on the wagon this young lady will be driving along with us. She is the daughter of Andrew Collins and we'll let her off at her home."

The thin man touched a hand to his battered hat. "Yes, Mr. Barnabas." And he gave her a brief smile. "I thought
that I recognized you, Miss Roxanna, but I wasn’t sure. Knowing that you’d been away.”

With this said he marched off into the darkness. They followed him to the waiting wagon with its two black horses. Very shortly Hare appeared with two of the dock workers carrying the coffin. They didn’t seem to be having nearly as much trouble with it as the men at the house in New York had. When it had been placed in the wagon along with numerous other articles of luggage Barnabas helped her up on the seat beside the driver. Then he swung up to join her. Hare sat in the back of the wagon with his stout legs dangling over the rear. And they began the drive along the dark, uneven roads to Collinwood.

They reached her place first and Barnabas ordered the driver to halt and helped her down from the wagon. Then he walked with her to the door. The house appeared to be in darkness. He stared up at the ivy-clad brick building. “Of course everyone is in bed,” he said.

“I don’t think we’ll have any trouble rousing someone,” she said. “My father is a very light sleeper. In fact he often reads late into the night. His room is at the back of the house so we couldn’t see the light from here.”

“We’ll see what happens,” he said. And he knocked loudly on the white-painted wooden front door. Then they both stood there rather tensely waiting for what would happen next.

Roxanna was struck by the strangeness of her return in the black gloom of this after-midnight hour. She would have a story to tell her father. She worried as to what his reaction might be. Would he believe her or would he feel she had made too much of the affair? It would all depend on his mood. She glanced toward the wagon silhouetted against the dark night. The figure of the driver ramrod straight on the seat with the reins in his hand and the dumpy body of Hare sitting at the rear were outlined plainly as was the wagon. And again she pictured the ornate casket reposing in the wagon and wondered at the melancholy strain in the man beside her that would make him want to order his own coffin and store it in the old house against the day of his death.

No one had answered the door yet so Barnabas
knocked once again. He gave her a grim smile. "Perhaps you will have to be my guest at the old house for the night."

"I'm sure someone will come," she said. "But I do want to see you again."

"I'll come by tomorrow evening," Barnabas said. "I won't have an opportunity before then. I'll follow my same pattern of solitary work in the daytimes while I'm staying here."

"I see," she said. "I didn't realize you had business here."

"I have brought a number of tasks with me," Barnabas told her. "Most of my journals need updating."

As he finished speaking, the front door opened and her father stood there in his dark dressing robe and holding a candle in his hand. His austere features registered surprise at seeing them.

"Roxanna!" he exclaimed. "I wasn't expecting you back."

"I know," she said. "I'll explain later. Barnabas was kind enough to bring me. I'm sure you have heard of our cousin, Barnabas Collins, though I know you've never met."

Her father's wiry gray hair seemed all on end at this moment of his interrupted sleep. His hollow-cheeked stern face revealed annoyance. In a grim voice he said, "Yes, I have heard of Barnabas Collins."

Barnabas extended his hand. "I'm happy to meet you, sir. I'll not keep you at this late hour." Her father shook hands with Barnabas reluctantly. Then Barnabas smiled at her. "Goodnight, Roxanna."

She went inside as the wagon started on its way. Andrew Collins glared after it and then came to join her, closing the door behind him. Angrily he asked her. "What does this mean? Returning here with a man like him. Surely you've heard the stories about him?"

She stood there in the wavering circle of soft light provided by the candle in her father's hand. Staring at him with troubled eyes, she said, "You haven't given me a chance to explain!"

His austere face was set in grim lines. "Why did you
“Something dreadful happened!” she protested. “Mrs. Makham turned out to be an evil woman! I don’t know what would have become of me had it not been for Barnabas.”

“I find that hard to accept,” Andrew Collins said scornfully. “You may not recall the rumors regarding him when he was here a few years ago but I do.”

“He’s a fine person!” she said defiantly.

Her father frowned so that his heavy gray brows almost met. “I seem to remember that he had the reputation of being much too friendly with the village girls. And there was a story that he’d attacked one of them. I don’t know the details but he was invited to leave Collinwood in a hurry. And now he’s brazenly back!”

Roxanna was upset. “You’re surely confusing him with someone else,” she insisted.

“We’ll find out about that,” Andrew Collins said grimly. “And we’ll also find out the truth about what happened to you during your New York stay. For the moment we’ll let it all rest. Take this candle and go up to your room.”

She knew him too well to argue. “Yes, father,” she said quietly. And she accepted the candleholder from his thin, veined hand. At the stairs she turned to say, “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight,” he said coldly.

She went on upstairs leaving him in the dark shadows of the hall below. Most of her life he’d been like this. Ever since the death of his second wife in Europe. He’d returned to Collinsport a haunted, unhappy man. And with age he appeared to be growing more neurotic and unreasonable. She entered her own bedroom and placed the candle on the dresser. The sight of the familiar room with its gaily-patterned drapes and bed-coverings lifted her spirits. At least she was safely home, thanks to Barnabas. And she prepared for bed.

But her sleep was to be disturbed by a series of strange nightmares. Bad dreams that made her turn and twist under the bedclothes and rumple them wildly. First she was caught on a lonely area of the sidewheeler’s deck and evil Sybil Makham and her wily accomplice, the blond William Oakes, were coming after her. She screamed and...
tried to escape but there was no where to go except over the rail into the ocean. As they closed in on her she poised herself and plunged into the water. But she had made her leap too close to the threshing sidewheel of the vessel and now she was being dragged into it!

No sooner had this nightmare ended than she suffered another. This time she was walking alone down the dark corridor of a musty old building. At the very end of the corridor a soft light glowed through a narrow doorway. As she reached the doorway she was presented with an eerie sight. An elaborate coffin had been set out on a stand. And at its top and bottom were silver candelabra with three lighted black candles in each of them. A weird fragrance of incense filled her nostrils as she hesitantly made her way into the chamber with its undraped stone walls.

She approached the casket with a look of fear on her lovely face. And as she came near she saw there was a body in it. It was Barnabas! Barnabas with his eyes closed and his sallow, handsome face expressionless, and those icy hands folded across his chest. Barnabas dead in the casket of his own choosing. She began to sob and couldn't stop herself. Amid her sobbing, the nightmare ended.
A creaking sound wakened her to the morning light. She raised up quickly in bed to discover the door of her room opening. She stifled her desire to cry out and was relieved in the next moment to see that it was Robert, her half-brother, who was coming in to say good morning before he left for his work in the lumber woods. He was a big youth, handsome in a rough way, wearing a red flannel shirt and rough gray lumberjack’s breeches tucked inside heavy boots. He had curly brown hair and roguish gray eyes.

"Welcome home, Roxanna," he said as he came over to her bedside and planted a kiss on her cheek.

She smiled up at him. "It’s good to be home!"

"What happened in New York? You were so excited about it!"

"A lot of things," she said, a shadow crossing her face. "I’ll explain it when I have more time."

"I’ll count on that," Robert said, gazing down at her fondly. "I’ve missed you and so has Reid Sterling. He’s been plaguing me to find out if there was any word from you."

She blushed. "Poor Reid!"

"I’ll see you tonight," Robert said. "And don’t let father be too hard on you. I imagine he’ll be disappointed you didn’t remain in New York since he went to so much bother making the arrangements."

"The arrangements didn’t turn out well."

"Tell him so," Robert said. "Place the blame on him and then he won’t be in any position to condemn you." He took her hand in his for a moment before he left her to get up and dress.

The morning was bright for October. She tried to place her fears behind her. And she was determined not to allow her father to bully her or say anything against Barnabas.

The first person she met downstairs was her half-sister, Ariel. The younger girl was emerging from the dining room.

"I heard you were home," Ariel said in her pleasant, husky voice. She was a trim brunette with large, lovely
green eyes. Though she possessed a sullen streak she could be very nice when she liked. For the most part Roxanna got along with her.

"I arrived on the night boat," she said.

"I wish I had known you were coming," Ariel mourned. "I like the fun of going down there in the middle of the night. I would have made father let me go meet you."

"I didn’t know I was coming," Roxanna said, "or I would have written. It was only planned a day ahead. I returned with Barnabas Collins."

Ariel’s green eyes sparkled with interest. "What’s he like? He’s coming to rent the old house. They say he’s handsome."

"I found him very nice."

"You must introduce me to him," Ariel insisted.

"I will at the first opportunity," she said.

"You’re so lucky!" Ariel mourned. "You always get the best-looking men. You’ve had Reid Sterling mooning about you for years and now you’ve added Barnabas Collins to your string of conquests."

She smiled thinly. "I’d hardly say that. I don’t know Barnabas well. We’re merely good friends."

"I still envy you," Ariel said frankly before she started upstairs.

Roxanna ate breakfast alone. When she emerged from the dining room her father was waiting for her in the hallway. His worn face bore a grave expression.

"I hoped you would come out soon," he told her. "I’ve been wanting to go into the details of your New York visit."

"It was a harrowing experience," she informed him. "Just thinking about it now makes me break out in goose-flesh."

Her father’s stern face showed no sympathy. But in his crisp voice, he said, "Very well. Come into my study and tell me about it from the start."

While her stern parent sat at his desk silently, she told him of her experience. When she ended her account he rose from his desk and began to pace slowly up and down before her. His hands were clasped behind his back.

"If what you’ve told me is true," he said, "this is a very serious matter. You were placed in great danger through
my following Lawyer Hoag's advice. But I can't imagine him being guilty of such a thing."

She stared up at her parent anxiously."But he wouldn't know how his friend Mrs. Makham had changed. It was an innocent error on his part."

Andrew Collins scowled. "The sort of error that shouldn't take place. Artemus Hoag will answer to me for this."

He paused in his pacing to turn and study her sharply with his steely gray eyes. "I'm taking your word that you've not exaggerated any of this. Not made a mountain out of a molehill."

"I've told you the truth and nothing more."

Her father hesitated grimly for a moment. "Then it would seem I'm indebted to this rascal Barnabas!"

Roxanna was troubled by his tone. "You have a very wrong opinion of Barnabas," she argued.

Her father did not appear impressed. "We shall see," was his grim retort. "When did this Barnabas say he would be calling on you here?"

"This evening." She waited worriedly for his reaction.

It came soon enough. Andrew Collins said, "I'll see that Lawyer Hoag is here at the same time. I want to talk this matter out with all the parties involved present."

She rose in protest. "But I don't think Barnabas need be drawn into this thing further," she said. "He's done more than enough for me as it is."

"There are certain parts of his story I wish to test," her father said coldly. "Most of the evidence against Mrs. Makham and this fellow posing as her brother comes on his say-so. I would prefer to give Artemus Hoag the chance of questioning him."

"But it's so pointless," she protested. "I know Sybil Makham was evil without any supporting evidence since I suffered at her hands."

"I still wish to test the facts," Andrew Collins told her. "I'm very upset by this failure in our plans. It means adopting an entirely new scheme to finish your education."

"I'm quite willing to remain here," she said.

Her parent's austere face showed sarcasm. "I have no doubt of it. In your present state of mind, being near this Barnabas is all that seems important to you."
“That’s not fair!”

“Do you deny that you are infatuated with him?”

Roxanna was taunted to the point of tears. “Gratitude has little to do with infatuation,” she protested and turned and ran out of her father’s study.

She did not pause until she was outside in the morning sunshine. It was cool but pleasant on the lawn fronting the neat red brick house. The Andrew Collins’ home was not nearly as large or as impressive as Collinwood but it was well built and the grounds were kept in good condition. From the lawn she could see the rambling structure of Collinwood on a slight hill to her right.

Beyond the main house of Collinwood and its outbuildings was the old house which Barnabas was renting. She hadn’t been over there in a long while. Not since the hard feelings between her father and Theodore Collins had come out in the open. In fact her father had forbid her setting foot on the neighboring estate. But then he was so unreasonable in many things. She despaired of her future at home.

Robert was lucky in that he was away at work and out of his father’s grim surveillance most of the time. In his free hours he was usually absent, hunting or fishing. Ariel, the youngest of the family, was more favored by her parent. She was also a quiet girl who spent much of her time reading in her room or in some secluded corner of the house. Roxanna, more active, was the one who usually found her father opposed to her actions. As a small child she believed it was because she had a different mother that Andrew Collins was more stern with her. Roxanna then supposed that her father hadn’t loved her mother as he had his second wife—that it was because he’d never gotten over his infatuation for his lost Barbara that he favored this half-sister and brother. Now an adult, she no longer felt this. She knew her parent to be a difficult human being whose temperament was opposed to hers. It was something she must learn to live with. But there were moments, such as this one, when she was sorely tried.

There was an orchard at the bottom of the lawn and at this season the apples were usually ripe and ready for picking. She wandered towards the orderly rows of spreading trees and saw that they were loaded with luscious fruit.
She was standing there when the sound of approaching hoofbeats made her turn. When she did she was pleasantly surprised to see Reid Sterling riding up on his dappled gray mare.

The stalwart son of the town's leading merchant enjoyed the life of a gentleman farmer. And riding was one of his passions. Looking impressive in his brown riding habit and cap, he dismounted and came striding over to her.

"I came as soon as I heard you were back," he said with a smile on his round, pleasant face. And he took her in his arms for a brief kiss.

She pulled away from him with a nervous glance towards the house. "We'll both be in trouble if my father saw that," she warned.

Reid smiled at her and tapped his riding crop against his leg. "Old Andrew doesn't frighten me. And if you'd marry me as you should he wouldn't be able to bully you."

"Please, Reid!" she said.

"So you didn't like New York?"

"I'm afraid not."

"I knew you wouldn't," the young man in the riding habit said smugly. "But I didn't think you'd find out so soon. And what's this I hear about you coming back with Barnabas Collins?"

"What about it?" she challenged him. "I needed company for the trip and he provided it."

"I guess you're not too particular about your company then," was the young man's jealous reply.

"You have no right to say that, Reid Sterling," she said angrily. "Barnabas is a handsome and likable person and he was extremely kind to me after we met in New York."

The young man's face was mocking. "You should hear the talk that is going around Collinsport about him this morning!"

"I'm not interested in idle gossip!"

"This is more than gossip," Reid Sterling said, weighing his riding crop in his hands. "It's based on fact. Folks are saying that your friend Barnabas is a madman. Do you know what he brought with him on the boat last night? A coffin!"

Roxanna felt helpless in the face of this truth. With a
despairing wave of her hand, she asked, “Whose business is it but his?”

“They say he always travels with a casket. And he has a weird habit of prowling around cemeteries at night. He’s got some kind of liking for the dead.”

“You don’t understand him!”

“And maybe you do?” The young man taunted her.

“I have no wish to invade his privacy.”

Reid Sterling was close to her now and gloating. “I’ll tell you what’s wrong with him. He’s crazy. There’s madness in his branch of the Collins family. If Theodore had any sense he wouldn’t have allowed him to come back to Collinwood. Not knowing about the first Barnabas Collins. You’ve seen that portrait in the hallway of Collinwood.”

“What about it?”

“That’s the one who fled to England after they proved he was tinged with the vampire curse and attacking young women for their blood,” Reid said in triumph. “And this Barnabas Collins is the spitting image of him!”

Even the knowledge that the young man making these wild statements against Barnabas was doing so because he was jealous did not allow her to forgive him fully. She said, “You have no right to blame Barnabas for things that happened a hundred years ago!”

“I’m trying to warn you he’s tinged with the same curse,” Reid told her. “And he’d better watch his step this time. The first girl that’s attacked here with a red mark left on her throat will be the signal for the villagers to come after him and see he pays for it.”

Roxanna stared at him wide-eyed. “What are you saying? What is this about a red mark on girls’ throats?”

“It’s the trademark of the vampire,” Reid boasted. “When he attacks a girl he bites her in the throat and drains blood from her. It’s that blood which keeps him alive. Keep a vampire from getting human blood and he shrivels and dies.”

Strange thoughts were going through Roxanna’s mind. Thoughts which had a frightening content. She recalled being seated opposite Molly at the table in the dining room of the lodgings rented by Barnabas. She had noticed the strange red mark on the buxom girl’s throat and drawn
attention to it. Molly had seemed upset and made a rather lame excuse about its being a birthmark. Roxanna had doubted this at the time and Reid Sterling's weird accusation added to her doubts.

In a small voice, she asked Reid, “Are you accusing this Barnabas Collins of being a vampire?”

“I'm not saying anything,” Reid said with a malicious smile. “I'm just warning you to be careful in picking your friends. And if he is a vampire he'll soon give himself away.”

“The superstitious people in the village are bound to start imagining they see all manner of things,” she told him.

“I say just stick to facts,” the young man said with a wink for her. “And one of the known facts is that vampires never show themselves in the daylight hours. And Barnabas never does.”

“You can't be sure of that!” She protested though she realized it was true.

“Sure enough,” Reid said. “And another fact is that vampires sleep in coffins during the day. So maybe it does make sense for Barnabas to travel that casket with him everywhere he goes.”

Roxanna felt ill. “I don't want to talk about it anymore,” she protested.

“Fair enough,” Reid said. “We'll wait and see what happens. Can I call on you this evening?”

She shook her head. “No. Father is having some friends in and I have to help entertain them.”

“Not Barnabas, I hope?” He was taunting her again.

“Reid, please go!”

“Sure, I'll go,” he agreed with mock pleasantry. “I'm just starting out on my morning ride. I'm not one of those characters who stay cozy in my coffin all day.”

And with this last taunting remark he left her. He waved to her with his riding crop, then wheeled the horse around and rode off. She was still standing there watching after him when Ariel came across the lawn to join her.

Her half-sister asked, “Wasn't that Reid Sterling?”

“Yes.” She avoided looking directly at Ariel. She was still upset.

“You sent him away?”
"I suppose so. He was going in any case. Why?"

Ariel gave her a searching look. "If you're not in love with him I wish you'd tell me. I like him. I'd marry him in a minute if he asked me."

Roxanna shrugged. "He's free to make his own choices."

Her half-sister gave her a reproving look. "Not as long as he thinks you're in love with him."

Roxanna made no reply to this comment. It had been a difficult morning. She'd been in far too many arguments to want to be involved in another one. So she walked away from her sister to lose herself at the other end of the apple orchard. When she was alone she stood in the shadow of the trees and tried to think it all out.

She was convinced much of this cruel gossip about Barnabas was simply not true. And yet certain facts could not be ignored. There was the business of the coffin and his habit of shutting himself away from everyone in the daytime. Neither of these things meant the fantastic charge Reid and the villagers were making was true. But they could be used against him. And then there was the disturbing matter of the red throat marks. She had seen such a mark on Molly's throat!

But the redhead's explanation of the mark could have been honest. She had no right to jump to some other wild conclusion because of an evil seed planted in her mind by the jealous Reid. Her conversation with the young man had convinced her of one thing. Barnabas should be warned that he was very much in the public eye in Collinssport and he must be extremely cautious in all his actions.

Who was there to warn him but herself? This conclusion made her decide to defy her father's orders and try to bridge the barrier that Barnabas provided for himself in the day. As soon as she had lunch she would steal over to Collinwood and try and reach him at the old house. She knew it would cause her trouble if she were found out but she felt it would be worth it to let Barnabas know how precarious his position was.

It wasn't until after two o'clock that things settled at the house enough for her to feel she could safely leave. Then
she left by a rear door and took a path remembered from her days as a youngster that was a shortcut to Collinwood. The path had apparently not been used much recently and was grown over in places. Bushes clustered along the path on either side of it and this hindered her. Eventually she came out in the open again to the rear of the barns. She made her way around these to the old house.

The shutters were closed and to all indications the drab building seemed to be deserted. But she knew Barnabas and his manservant had moved into it the previous night. She was hoping that Barnabas might be there now and willing to see her. Mounting the steps she tried the door handle and to her pleased surprise it turned easily and she was able to step into the dark hallway.

There was an uncanny silence about the old house. It closed in on her so that she wanted to call out to Barnabas. But she did not want to alarm him. So she moved a few steps down the shadowed hall wondering where she might find him. She refused to believe that he slept in that casket during the day. She preferred to picture him seated at his desk in one of the remote rooms working at copying material from the journals he’d brought with him.

A board creaked under foot, causing her to start and her eyes widen with alarm. Then she at once felt silly that she’d allowed her childish fears to surge up so and take control of her. She groped her way along towards the end of the hall. But she never did reach it. For she was suddenly seized from behind by ruthless hands that gripped her arms until they burned with pain. She cried out in terror.

She was dragged back down the hall to the front door and then through the open door into the sunlight. She still was unable to tell who had swooped down on her. The heavy breathing of her captor and the roughness of her treatment were all she had to go on.

“Free that girl!” The words rang out in a sharp tone. And on the verge of fainting she was grateful to see the portly Theodore Collins standing there. He was pointing an accusing finger at her attacker. She was at once released. And turning, she saw that she’d been the victim of a scowling Hare.

Rubbing her paining arms, she cried, “Are you mad? I
just wanted to help your master!”

Hare’s only reaction was a sullen grunting sound. He stood his ground before the steps of the old house, guarding the door and glaring at her.

Theodore Collins, the master of Collinwood, came over to her. “Are you all right, girl?” he demanded.

She gave him her attention. The stout, choleric man was well known to her. She said, “Yes, thank you, Mr. Collins.”

The stout man squinted at her. “You’re Roxanna, aren’t you? Andrew’s eldest daughter?”

“Yes. I didn’t mean to trespass.”

His eyebrows raised. “Then what are you doing here?”

“I had to speak to Barnabas Collins on an urgent matter.”

Theodore nodded grimly. “And you see the trouble it has brought you? If you know Barnabas at all you must be familiar with his rule of no visitors during the daytime.”

“I hoped he might make an exception,” she murmured, the pain of her pinched arms still bothering her.

“And you’ve just learned that he doesn’t ever make exceptions,” the master of Collinwood said in exasperation. “This brute of a Hare has no imagination at all. He merely carries out the orders Barnabas gives him in the most direct way.”

“I know that now,” she said.

“As soon as Barnabas shows himself here trouble begins,” Theodore Collins raged. “If you have any sense at all, young woman, you’ll go back to your own property and remain there.”

“I will,” she said in a small voice.

“Then, be on your way! Don’t linger!” Theodore Collins advised her tartly.

Humiliated, she turned and began the journey back to her father’s property. Not only had she failed in her mission she had also put Barnabas in a bad light in Theodore Collins’ eyes. It was ironic that her attempt to help should have only caused Barnabas more trouble.

She blamed the hulking mute Hare. The burly manservant enjoyed violence and delighted in carrying out the orders Barnabas had given him in that cruel way. Her arms still aching, she followed the path through the bushes. And
she made up her mind to include a warning about Hare's behavior in her talk with Barnabas when he came to see her in the evening.

The day passed rapidly. Right after dinner Lawyer Artemus Hoag arrived and her father took him to his study. A short time later Roxanna was summoned to the study to join them. When she entered, Artemus Hoag got up to greet her. He was a big, husky man, well-preserved for his fifty-odd years.

"I'm delighted to see you again, Roxanna," he said, taking her hand, a look of sincerity on his bronzed, squarish face. "Though I must confess I can't believe what you are supposed to have endured at the hands of Sybil Makham. I have always looked upon her as a fine lady."

"That was surely true at the time you knew her," she acknowledged. "But since her husband's death she has fallen under an evil influence."

"So it would seem," the lawyer worried. "I would instigate an investigation into the matter but your father informs me the woman and two others perished in the fire."

"That was the word Barnabas brought me," she said. "So it shall have to remain a mystery," Artemus Hoag sighed. "I can only offer my deep apologies for what took place. I shudder to think of the fate from which you may have escaped."

Her father spoke up with annoyance. "As things stand I find the situation anything but ideal. We are placed in a position where we are forced to show gratitude to this Barnabas Collins. He even had the audacity to announce he'd call on Roxanna this evening."

The lawyer gave her a significant look. "If you'll forgive me, Roxanna, I've been studying your lovely throat."

"Why?" she asked in a startled tone.

"Looking for the red mark of the vampire's bite," the lawyer said with a grim expression on his bronzed face. "I have frequently encountered it on young women's throats in the village when Barnabas was visiting here before."
CHAPTER FIVE

The starkness of the lawyer’s statement left nothing to the imagination. Roxanna felt her cheeks burning as she quickly defended Barnabas by saying, “I can only tell you that in all my dealings with Barnabas Collins he has been a kind gentleman and a true friend.”

Artemus Hoag smiled mockingly at this. “Then I can assure you that you have been more fortunate than most of the young women who have encountered him.”

Her father was frowning as he suggested, “It seems to me I should refuse this fellow admission to my house!”

“No, father!” Roxanna turned angrily on her stern-faced parent.

She was to receive support from a surprising quarter. For it was the tall, broad-shouldered lawyer who advised Andrew Collins, “I don’t think that is the best way to handle him, Andrew. It is possible the fellow may have more information about the Makhams than we realize. I say encourage his visits in a modest fashion and try to learn what we can from him.”

Her father looked puzzled. “But if you suspect him of madness and vampire tendencies I cannot willingly expose Roxanna to him!”

“None of those things have ever been proven, father,” she was quick to point out.

Hoag looked grimly amused. “She’s right in that, Andrew. We’ve been suspicious of Barnabas but he’s too wily to have left us absolute proof. Otherwise he wouldn’t have been able to persuade Theodore Collins to let him return to Collinwood. But while Barnabas was here before, strange things happened and a number of women were attacked.”

“The criminal needn’t have been Barnabas,” Roxanna said.

“Perhaps not,” Hoag agreed. “But all suspicion pointed to him. I’d say you may cultivate his friendship in a cautious way. And the moment you discover anything that may point to his having dealings with the supernatural, report it to your father.”

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She stared at the lawyer's bland face. "You're suggesting that I pose as a friend to Barnabas and spy on him for you!"

Hoag nodded with satisfaction. "You have expressed the situation most clearly."

"But that would be despicable!" she protested.

Her father's austere face showed scorn. "One does not worry about ethics in a case like that of Barnabas. You fight fire with fire. Since it seems he holds you in high esteem you have a chance to perform a service to the community. Try to discover the dark secrets of his nature."

"If the man is innocent you will find that out," Lawyer Hoag went on suavely. "So it could be that you might be doing him a good turn as well. I find your father's attitude most generous. As he has pointed out, he could refuse to open his house to Barnabas."

Roxanna listened to the two elderly men and her thoughts were moving at a rapid pace. She was weighing the situation and trying to decide what she could best do for Barnabas and herself. And it became all too obvious that she would gain nothing and perhaps lose a lot by opposing the wishes of the wily lawyer and her father. Better to humor them in this. Pretend to play their game and at the same time put Barnabas on his guard. Far better than to have her father forbid her seeing the charming man from New York.

So she said, "Very well, I'll do as you suggest. Not because I believe Barnabas is guilty but because I feel sure he is innocent."

"I admire your honesty," Lawyer Hoag said with a smile. "Just take care your admiration for the fellow doesn't blind you to the facts about him."

"I will be on my guard," she promised.

Her father turned to her sternly. "We are placing great confidence in you, Roxanna," he reminded her. "I trust you realize your responsibility in this delicate situation."

"I fully understand what is expected of me," she assured him quietly. She might have added that no matter what, she would do nothing to incriminate the man who had rescued her from her horrible plight in New York, but she didn't.

The discussion went no further because at that moment
Barnabas arrived. Andrew Collins had left word for him to be shown directly to the study and the handsome dark man entered the room with a knowing look on his sallow face. He first gave his attention to her.

"I felt I must call on you, Roxanna," he said, "to make sure you had recovered from your long journey."

She managed a wan smile for him. "I'm feeling much better."

Her father cleared his throat and told Barnabas, "This is Lawyer Hoag. I don't know whether you've met or not."

Barnabas turned to the man who was much his own height and stature though older looking. He offered him his hand, "I have heard of you," he told the lawyer, "but I don't think my hasty visits to Collinwood have allowed us to meet before."

Lawyer Hoag shook hands with him. Then he said, "Your visits have been of short duration. And last time you left with little notice."

Barnabas seemed quite undisturbed by the lawyer's words. "Perhaps so," he said airily. "My business takes me many places. Often I receive an urgent summons to some far-off spot."

"Yet your visits here have made a strong impression on the villagers," Lawyer Hoag said urbanely. "They often talk about you."

"So I understand," was Barnabas' reply.

"I hear you came to Roxanna's aid in New York when my friend, Mrs. Makham, treated her so vilely. I wonder if you'd mind repeating the story in detail for my benefit."

"Not at all," Barnabas said. And maintaining his stand in the center of the book-lined room he went over a brief version of what had happened.

Roxanna listened to his modest account of the terrifying events with growing appreciation of his strong character. Her father's stern face held an expression of grim resignation as he heard him out in silence. Lawyer Hoag's reaction to the story was difficult to determine since his bronzed face had taken on a veiled look.

But when Barnabas finished, the lawyer nodded his head in approval. "It would seem that you were the hero of the occasion, sir," he told Barnabas. "And I have learned a
lesson that was probably sorely needed. Never again shall I depend on my recollection of anyone to measure their character in the present."

"That would be wise," Barnabas agreed with a note of irony in his voice. And he turned to her with a roguish gleam in his eyes. "There is a moon tonight. I suggest we take a stroll along the cliffs and enjoy it. The view of the ocean can be magnificent. And if you wear a cloak you'll be warm enough."

Her eyes met his in happy understanding. She turned to her father and Lawyer Hoag with a faint smile. "If you will be kind enough to excuse me."

Her father's expression was bleak. "Do not go far and return soon," he said in his dry voice.

Lawyer Hoag's smile was full of secret meaning. "I have no doubt the moon on the water will be beautiful. There's no reason why you shouldn't gain much from such a stroll."

She and Barnabas left the study. In the hallway he helped her on with her cloak. But it was not until they were outside, walking slowly in the silvery magic of the moonlight that they ventured to talk.

Barnabas gave her an amused side glance. "I didn't expect your father to be so ready to welcome me. And both he and that Lawyer Hoag appeared anxious for us to go off together."

She halted and glanced anxiously over her shoulder in the direction of the house to make sure they hadn't been followed. She saw no one and the faint light of the windows of the house were distant enough to give her courage to speak up frankly.

Gazing earnestly into his face, she said, "Couldn't you tell? It's part of a plot against you! They expect me to try and trap you!"

"Indeed?" His heavy black eyebrows raised. "Not that I'd have any part in it," she exclaimed angrily. "But I had to make them think so or I wouldn't be allowed to see you at all."

Barnabas smiled grimly. "I begin to appreciate the situation."

She shrugged unhappily. "I suppose one shouldn't blame them too much. I don't think either my father or
Lawyer Hoag are bad men but they are surely stupid in some ways. For superstition has its basis in ignorance and stupidity."

"Superstition?" Barnabas stood a commanding figure in the moonlight and presented the word to her as a question.

Roxanna hesitated. Then with an effort, she went on, "I hardly know how to say it," she faltered. "But you must know what I'm talking about. That in this small village you are regarded with awe and fear."

A faint smile played at the corners of his heavy-lipped mouth. "I have been vaguely aware of it."

"These people don't understand you," she continued desperately. "And any variance from the routine is considered abnormal in a place like this. Your bringing a coffin here with you last night and your remaining in the house in the daytime have aroused superstition."

"I know."

"To make it worse there's the legend about your ancestor, the first Barnabas Collins," she said. "He was thought to be a vampire. And these people are fearful that you may also be tinged with the curse."

Barnabas' burning eyes fixed on hers. "And so they watch for the tell-tale red mark on the throats of their daughters and wives, fearful that I may be preying on them."

She stared at him. "So you do know," she said in a whisper. "You've heard all that they say."

"All of it." His tone was grim.

"It's not true," she said in unhappy protest. "I don't believe it! You have your eccentricities but you're not the evil demon they paint you to be."

He took her hands in his and once again she was conscious of their chilling touch. But that didn't shake her faith in him. Molly had warned her he was not in good health. And Molly knew him better than anyone here.

"I'm grateful for your honesty," he said with sincerity. "And also for your faith in me. That is what I must ask from you. Complete faith even though at times my actions may seem not to warrant it."

Roxanna smiled at him tenderly. "I do believe in you."

His eyes were troubled. "I regret what happened this afternoon. But you mustn't blame Hare too much. He was
attempting to give me the protection I must have. And he hasn't learned to trust you yet. He is a simple fellow and complexities escape him."

"I shouldn't have gone over there," she said. "You warned me not to come during the day. But I was so worried for you."

"I understand your motives," he said in a sympathetic voice. "But you must not expose yourself to danger."

"Theodore Collins came by," she said. "And he was upset by the way Hare was behaving as well. I'm afraid I did more harm than good."

"I can manage Theodore," Barnabas assured her. "And I have spoken sternly to Hare. I'm sure if you should encounter each other again he'll behave in a much more considerate fashion."

"Is it safe for you to remain here?" she worried. "I mean with so much public opinion against you."

A strange look crossed his handsome, weary face. "Collinwood has a strong attraction which I sometimes find it impossible to resist. I must return here from time to time. You may find that difficult to understand but it is true."

"I'm happy you're here," she said. "If things were different I'd like to see you remain here always."

His smile was gentle. "I wish I could, little cousin."

She shook her head in frustration. "Don't call me cousin," she begged. "Our relationship is far too distant for that." Her eyes met his. "How much better if you could one day call me wife."

His answer was to draw her close to him and kiss her lightly on the lips. The coldness of his lips suddenly had a strange fascination for her and she responded ardently. And this had its reaction from Barnabas. His lips caressed hers in a more passionate way. And as a climax to the embrace he held her less tightly and bent down to gently touch his lips to her throat. The tingling ice of them sent a frosty thrill along her spine.

"What happens now?" she whispered.

He laughed quietly. "We'll enjoy this lovely countryside and become good friends."

"You will be careful?"

"Doubly so now that I also have you to consider," he
promised. “And you must play your role well. Make your father and that lawyer think you are enjoying spying on me. You can even tell them anything that comes to mind and will satisfy their superstition.”

She smiled ruefully. “I doubt if I’ll be any good at that.”

“The important thing is that we go on seeing each other,” he told her. “So there will be no argument with your father I say you should go straight back to the house now.”

“What about you?”

The gaunt face was relaxed. “I shall stroll some more in the moonlight. I often find great satisfaction in walking alone. I’ll watch you safely in the house from here.”

Roxanna left him with great reluctance. And as she began the short walk back to her front door she suddenly realized that in being with him she had lost all ability to measure time. She had no idea how long they talked out there. And the embrace between them had seemed both fleeting and endless. There was great confusion in her mind. But she could still feel that icy tingling where his lips had pressed ever so gently against her throat. It had seemed his kiss had only lasted for seconds and yet she couldn’t be sure.

Reaching up she touched the spot with groping fingers. And then she gathered the cloak up around her so that it would hide this sensitive area of her slender throat. When she’d covered part of the walk back she turned to wave a final farewell to Barnabas but there was no sign of his romantic figure outlined against the moonlit night. He had promised to watch her in safely but he had disappeared.

She couldn’t understand it. Then as she neared the house she was startled by a fluttering of wings just above her—a quick nervous fluttering that came unexpectedly. She glanced up with a hint of fear in her eyes and saw what she believed to be a giant bird. But she could not make it out clearly. It swooped up into the shadows of the night silently and just as she touched the heavy brass doorknob it came close over her head once more. With uneasy thoughts she hastily went inside.

In spite of the fact she’d thought she’d only been absent a short while the house had now settled down to a sleeping
silence. She judged that Lawyer Hoag must have gone and her father had at least retired to his bedroom to read if not to sleep. All these things led her to believe she had lost track of time. A small lamp with a nervous flame glowed in a wall bracket lighting the stairs. She began to cautiously make her way up to her room. Not until she reached the landing did a creaking board betray her. Almost at once the door of her father’s room opened and he emerged in his dressing gown with a book in hand to sternly confront her.

Frowning, he asked, “Do you realize you’ve been gone more than two hours?”

“I’m sorry,” she said, pressing her cloak closely to her tingling throat. “It was such a lovely night.”

“So it would seem,” her parent said dryly. At the same time his cold eyes appraised her. “Did Barnabas betray himself in any way?”

“No,” she said. “I doubt that he would at our first meeting here. He merely talked about Collinwood and how much he enjoyed it.”

“A wasted night then,” Andrew Collins said with displeasure. “I trust Lawyer Hoag’s scheme brings better results in the future.”

Roxanna forced herself to play the role in which they’d cast her. “I’m sure it will,” she said.

“You look pale and weary,” her father said. “Go straight to bed.”

They said goodnight and she went on into her own room. The maid had set out candles at either end of the long dresser with its large mirror. In the privacy of her room she let the cloak fall and peered anxiously at her reflection. And the mark was there! The same red mark she’d seen on Molly’s shapely throat!

So she’d been right! Barnabas had tasted her blood on this moonlit night and that was why she’d lost all sense of time. He’d put her in a kind of trance. But why would he make this reckless gesture on their first night together in the village? Possibly because he wanted to test her. Discover if she would keep silent about what had happened or go running to her father and Lawyer Hoag with this evidence against him!

Still staring into the mirror, she realized it might have
been a clever trick of Barnabas to simulate a vampire’s kiss and test her belief in him? She couldn’t be sure of anything. Yet her faith in him was untouched. She refused to believe he offered her or anyone else in Collinsport any harm.

In the morning the mark on her throat had vanished. She was grateful for that since she felt that her father might well place her under closer scrutiny by daylight than he had the night before. Her memories of the evening with Barnabas were entirely pleasant. Yet she knew she must keep her fondness for this strange cousin to herself.

Ariel put her to the test later in the morning when they sat together in the sunporch at the Collinwood side of the red brick house. Casting her eyes in the direction of the great sprawling mansion on the cliffs her dark-haired half-sister questioned her about the previous evening.

“I hear you were out with Barnabas Collins last night,” Ariel said.

“Just for a little.”

“You weren’t home when I went to bed,” Ariel said with a hint of annoyance. “I must say father allows you more liberties than he does me.”

Roxanna smiled at the younger girl. “You just choose to think that.”

“No, it’s true,” Ariel persisted.

She had no intention of informing her gossipy half-sister why she’d been offered such freedom. So she said, “Father treats me differently because I’ve been away from home for a while.”

Ariel’s lovely green eyes questioned her. “What are you going to tell Reid Sterling if he finds out? You know how jealous he’ll be.”

She smiled. “I’m depending on you to make him fall in love with you.”

“There’s no chance of that while you’re around,” was Ariel’s bitter comment. “He’ll make things unpleasant for this Barnabas if he decides there’s a romance between you two.”

Roxanna changed the subject but she knew Ariel was right. But she was too happy in her new relationship with Barnabas to really worry much. As the days and nights passed she became more content with things as they were.
The ugly whisperings that had attended the advent of Barnabas in the small fishing village seemed to have subsided. Lawyer Hoag was away in Boston on business for a while and her father seemed to have forgotten about the strange pact she’d made with him. She was left to enjoy Barnabas’ company without any restrictions.

Barnabas continued to be warmly affectionate and still aloof when the moment suited him. She was not yet completely able to understand him. Yet she had no fear of him nor did she believe he dabbled in the supernatural. His eccentricities were no more than you might find in any wealthy bachelor. She had asked him about the casket and he’d very casually mentioned storing it in the cellar.

The single cloud in this clear sky of bliss was the jealous Reid Sterling. He’d paid several visits to her home in the two weeks since Barnabas had come to stay at Collinwood. The pattern of his behavior was the same every time. He warned her against Barnabas and repeated his love for her.

He’d called on her last one evening when she’d already promised to meet Barnabas. Cornering her in the big parlor, he’d pleaded with her to stop seeing Barnabas.

“At least two of the village girls claim to have been attacked by a man resembling Barnabas,” he warned her. “And they both had that strange red mark on their throats. It’s only a matter of time until he’ll be caught by the police.”

“A man resembling Barnabas,” she said calmly. “That doesn’t mean it was him.”

“You know what that red mark on a girl’s throat indicates,” Reid had said. “Barnabas has feasted on her blood!”

Roxanna smiled inwardly. If that should be the case Barnabas had been nourished by her more than by any of the others. For there had been many times after spending a blissful evening with him when she’d found the tiny red spot on her slim throat. And she was willing that it should be there.

She had told Reid, “I’m not ready to think of anyone in a romantic way yet. Why don’t you court Ariel? She’s terribly fond of you.”

He looked unhappy at the mention of her sister. “Ariel
is all right,” he said. “But it’s you I love.”

Yet recently he’d seemed to have given up on her. And he had actually come to make calls on Ariel. This relieved Roxanna, who was much too involved with Barnabas to think of anyone else.

But even with Barnabas there were moments when her faith wavered. One of those times had been when he’d invited her to a partridge supper with wine at the old house. Hare had set out a table in the living room. And since it was getting close to November and quite cool the servant had started a blazing log fire in the fireplace.

Sitting down at the table Roxanna had been delighted. And then she saw that the festive setting was for only one person. She glanced up at the handsome Barnabas with astonishment.

“ Aren’t you going to join me?” she asked.

“I’ll sit with you,” he said.

“But you’re not going to eat or drink anything?”

He shook his head. “No. I had a more than ample dinner.” And he pulled up a chair and sat across from her.

“But I’ll enjoy watching you.”

It upset her but she tried to hide it. And she recalled that she had never seen him take food. And when he touched his wine glass to his lips he’d never sipped from it. Odd!

On another occasion, again at the old house, they had passed a large mirror in the hallway. She’d casually looked into it and then a stinging shock had ran through her. She’d seen herself in the mirror but there had simply been no sign of Barnabas in the depths of the giant expanse of reflecting glass. She couldn’t understand it and decided she was mistaken. That it had been a kind of illusion.

Taking Barnabas by the arm she’d tried to take him back to stand before the big mirror. “ I want to look at us together in it,” she told him.

But he had refused to do as she asked. “ Another time,” he told her.

“ Please!” she begged him.

“ Not now,” he’d said in a tone that told her it was useless to try and persuade him.

A third time he’d bewildered her. At his suggestion they’d gone to the old cemetery for a walk one night when
the moon was full. It was an autumn full moon tinged with red and under it she could see his strong face as they moved through the open iron gate at the entrance of the hillside burial place of the Collins family.

Barnabas came to a halt before a gravestone marked with the name "Josette". He had stood silently there for such a long time that she became concerned.

“What is it?” she asked him.

But he had made no reply. He merely kept staring at the worn gravestone.

She glanced at the stone and could see no reason why he should be so upset. Gazing up at his gaunt face, she said, “Why are you behaving this way? You frighten me!”

Only then did he turn to her and she saw the tears brimming in his eyes. In a quiet voice, he told her, “It has to do with long ago. You wouldn’t understand.”

“I could try,” she said sympathetically.

The shadow left his face and he gave her a fond look. “I’m sure you mean that,” he said in his gentle fashion. “But I will not burden you with it. Let me show you the tomb of the founder of Collinsport.” And he had led her off.

Roxanna worried about these moments when full understanding between her and the man she’d grown to love was not possible. She tried to dismiss them from her mind and she refused to nag him about them. But they lingered in her memory, small ripples of disturbances to mar the even surface of their romance.
CHAPTER SIX

The week of Halloween arrived. And in Maine this meant early darkness with nipping frost and an orange full moon. It also brought the whopping big pumpkins, the rosy apples and the other products of the autumn harvest. And more than at any other time in the year both children and their elders were filled with the excitements and mysteries of hobgoblins and ghosts. So it was not surprising that during the period of grisly thrills the gossip about Barnabas should be revived.

Hoag returned from his business in Boston and almost at once paid a visit to the house. The big, powerfully built man wore a smug look on his bronzed face as he announced to Roxanna and her father in the privacy of the study, "Barnabas Collins is up to his old mischief!"

Andrew Collins gazed at his friend sternly. "Are you sure? Roxanna has seen a good deal of him during your absence and she claims his behavior has been model."

Hoag's eyes glittered with malice as he turned to her. "Either Roxanna is unduly partial to the fellow or he suspects she is watching him for us and is deluding her. He has not been quite the same gentlemen to other young ladies of the town."

Roxanna was at once on her guard. She asked the lawyer, "Why do you say this?"

"Millie Brawn was seized in an alley off the main street shortly after midnight last night," Lawyer Hoag recounted with relish. "She was found wandering in a daze near the Blue Whale some time later. There was a distinct red mark on her throat and she claimed that the Devil had kissed her. And when she was asked what he looked like she said he was the spitting image of Barnabas Collins!"

Roxanna could not conceal the anger this accusation of Lawyer Hoag's raised in her. "You should know better than to pay attention to anything Millie Brawn says," she exclaimed. "She's practically a half-wit and she drinks."

The lawyer spread his hands in a gesture of resignation. "I'm only telling you what she said. And in this case the townspeople seem ready to believe her. She was in a bad state when they found her."
Andrew Collins was frowning. “Is there going to be any action taken against Barnabas?”

“I doubt it,” Lawyer Hoag admitted. “Your daughter made an excellent point when she suggested that Millie Brawn is not regarded as a reputable witness. Only that will save him. But the next time there is an incident of the same sort it will be different.”

“I should hope so,” Andrew Collins sputtered. “The fellow is a menace to all of us.”

“You’re being very unfair, father,” Roxanna protested. “You don’t really know Barnabas at all.”

Andrew Collins’ austere face registered anger. “Nor do I wish to,” he said. “And it seems to me you should cease being in his company since nothing has been gained by it.”

Once again it was Hoag who intervened on behalf of her seeing Barnabas. The lawyer told her father, “I disagree with you there, Andrew. I say let Roxanna go on with the friendship. The more this Barnabas comes to trust her the more likely he’ll reveal something of importance to her.”

“What of the risk to my daughter?” Andrew Collins demanded. “If he is the fiend you contend she surely can’t be safe with him!”

“Since he hasn’t harmed her thus far, the indications are that he won’t in the future,” Hoag said. And with a smile for her, he added, “You appear to have conquered Barnabas Collins with your beauty.”

Roxanna made no reply to this. And as soon as she could she excused herself from the meeting with the smug lawyer. She didn’t like Hoag but she was thankful that in his twisted way he’d helped her. By insisting she could safely go on seeing Barnabas he had quashed her father’s stand against the handsome man from New York.

That evening she met Barnabas at the point along the cliffs known as Widows’ Hill. And she recounted what had been said in the study, finishing with, “I have no idea why Lawyer Hoag should be so lenient about my seeing you when he is, after all, your enemy.”

Barnabas stood beside her in the darkness with a grim look on his face. “You may be sure he has his reasons.”

“What could they be?”

“We’ll have to wait to find out,” he said. “The story he
brought you about Millie Brawn being attacked was not true. Whether she made it up or he did remains to be seen."

And so the uneasy truce between Barnabas and the superstitious villagers continued. And then the Gypsies arrived. Roxanna first heard about them from her half-brother, Robert. He returned from one of his hunting trips to bring the news.

"Some Gypsies have set up camp in the woods not far from the old cemetery," he told her and Ariel when he joined them in the living room. "Not a large band this time but just a couple of wagonloads. They're camped in the clearing off the back road."

Roxanna asked, "Does father know?"

"I've told him," Robert said. "But I don't think he's going to order them off the estate unless they make trouble. The last lot that were here got in a scrape with some of the farmers. The farmers said they were stealing hens and other livestock from them."

"I remember," Roxanna said.

Ariel's pretty face had lighted up with interest. "They always have a fortuneteller with them. I'd like to have mine told."

Robert gave her a warning glance. "Don't venture near the woods alone. We don't know anything about these people yet. They probably aren't to be trusted!"

The dark girl looked petulant. "You're just like father! Too ready to believe the worst about everybody!" And she angrily left the room.

Robert frowned as he turned to Roxanna. "Ariel always wants her own way whether it's wise or not."

She smiled. "All girls like to have their fortunes told."

"A Gypsy camp is too dangerous a place for young girls," was Robert's verdict.

Still his news was exciting. And next morning one of the swarthy-skinned men from the Gypsy camp came to the rear door of Andrew Collins' house to ask for scissors to grind. Roxanna happened to be in the kitchen talking to the housekeeper at the time and she found a pair of scissors for the elderly man to sharpen. When he finished
and she'd paid him, she said, "I hear your camp is in our woods."

The shifty black eyes of the Gypsy regarded her warily. "Yes, miss," he said. He wore a colorful kerchief tied around his head.

"Do you have a fortuneteller along?"

The man nodded. "Old Bianca can look into her crystal and predict your future."

Roxanna smiled. "I must try and visit her."

"In the wagon with the red window curtains," the Gypsy said. "Old Bianca is always there and she'll charge you little."

"I'll remember," she promised.

She didn't mention her conversation with the gypsy to any of the others at the house. She knew it would only excite Ariel and make her more determined to seek out the camp. And she was inclined to agree with Robert that this could be hazardous, especially if Ariel went on her own. And she would probably want to do this to keep her fortune a secret.

Halloween night came clear and cold. The children of the servants put on grotesque makeshift costumes and bizarre masks. Following a custom her father had encouraged they paraded into the dining room at dinner time for treats. The half-dozen boys and girls, ranging in age from six to ten, solemnly marched around the table in the glow of the candelabra. Andrew Collins unbent a little and showed a thin smile on his patrician face as he doled out popcorn and nuts to the young masqueraders.

Roxanna, along with Ariel and Robert, applauded the children and gave them candy and apples. There was an eerie something in the air on this Hallows Eve that excited Roxanna. As soon as she could she slipped away from the house wearing a warm crimson cloak and took the shortcut through the bushes to Collinwood. She met Barnabas a little distance from the old house.

He came to her out of the shadows, an imposing figure in his caped coat. "Aren't you afraid to be out on this night of witches and phantoms?" he joked.

She smiled up at him. "There is a strange atmosphere about this night, isn't there? It makes you think there
could be something to all the stories about ghosts and hauntings."

The handsome Barnabas glanced up at the hazy moon. "There's a storm not far off if the moon is any sign," he said.

"Do you know what I'd like to do on this eve of mystery?" Roxanna asked him. "I'd like to go to the woods and have my fortune read. The Gypsies have a camp there."

Barnabas ran a hand over his unruly black hair, brushing a lock back from his high forehead. "I've seen the camp," he said. "There are only two wagons."

"But there's an old woman with them who looks into the crystal," she told him. "One of the men came to the house to grind scissors and told me."

"Do you believe in such predictions?"
She laughed. "Perhaps not. But it can be fun!"
Barnabas eyed her with mild amusement. "Very well," he said. "If you like I'll take you to this Gypsy witch to have your fortune read. But remember it was your idea."

"You don't approve?"
He shrugged. "I have never been anxious to look into the future. We are often better off not to know what lies ahead for us."

There was something in his words and the way he said them that made a tiny shiver of apprehension run through her. "I won't go if you feel I shouldn't," she said.

"Perhaps it may turn out to be interesting," he said. And with a touch of sober humor, he added, "I'm sure you'll never rest until you visit the Gypsy witch so let's go there tonight."

They walked across the moonlit field, passing the cemetery with its forest of gravestones coldly reflecting the moonbeams. The sight of the lonely burial place with its host of the Collins dead made her feel vaguely uneasy. She always wondered why the ancient graveyard had such a strong appeal for Barnabas. Often he wandered in it alone in the dark hours. It was one of his habits that had aroused gossip and suspicion among the villagers.

Barnabas had her by the arm as he guided her along towards the shadowy cluster of tall evergreens. It was on the fringe of this woods that the Gypsies had their camp. 74
Suddenly she heard the distant sound of flamenco music strummed on a guitar. It was a wild, abandoned air suitable for the weird spirit of this night of demons.

"The camp must be near," she told Barnabas, excitement in her voice.

"Ahead," he said. "You can see the campfire now."

And so they could. It was a modest fire and its yellow tongues cut into the blackness of the woods only a little. But as they approached it they were able to make out the shapes of the wagons and glimpse several shadowy figures gathered around the crackling flames. Upon seeing them approach, the Gypsies were at once on the alert. They stood closely together in protective fashion.

It was the elderly man who'd called at the house who came to greet them and he recognized Roxanna at once.

"So!" he said. "You have come to see Old Bianca at last. You will not regret it! She sees everything in her crystal."

"Where is she?" Roxanna asked.

"In her wagon," the old man said with a crafty smile that revealed flashing white teeth. He glanced at Barnabas to inquire, "Does the gentleman also want his future read?"

"Thank you, no," Barnabas said. "But I will accompany the young lady."

"Very well, sir. If you will let me tell Bianca you are here," the Gypsy said and with a bow he turned and quickly made his way to the nearer of the two wagons. A dull glow showed at its windows. He went inside.

She gave Barnabas a smiling glance. "You think me foolish, don't you?"

"On the contrary," he said. "This interests me."

The old Gypsy appeared at the doorway in the end of the wagon and beckoned to them. With Barnabas still beside her, Roxanna went over to the wagon and entered the narrow door. The interior of the wagon had been curtained off into two sections and was dimly lit by a candle on a table beside a crystal ball. In a chair behind the table sat the old Gypsy, Bianca. A dark shawl covered her head and only her wrinkled, nut-brown face was visible. Her eyes were fixed on the crystal which reflected the candle's light in its clouded depths.

The shadow of the hunched old figure was large on the
drapery of some gray material behind her. The light was so poor it was hard to make out her features clearly. Standing before the table with the crystal ball, Roxanna gave Barnabas a timid glance. His returning look of confidence was reassuring.

Then the old Gypsy woman chuckled harshly and without lifting her eyes from the shining crystal ball said in a rasping voice, “You have come to me to find out what fate holds for you. Bianca can see it all!”

“What do you see in my future?” Roxanna asked nervously. There was a sinister something about the ancient crone that made her afraid even though Barnabas was there at her side.

“I see death!” The crouched Bianca intoned, spreading her brown, emaciated hands over the crystal ball as if to shade her vision from their eyes.

“Death?” Roxanna echoed in dismay.

“Explain yourself, old woman,” Barnabas said in a voice strangely cold.

The Gypsy lifted her eyes to him and a frightened expression came to her ancient face. She began to mutter in a strange tongue and made the sign of the cross.

“What is wrong?” Roxanna asked.

The old woman lowered her eyes again to gaze into the crystal. “Your house is under a curse,” she intoned. “The cold hand of death is over it. There will be sudden and violent deaths. It will happen many times!”

“I don’t believe it!” Roxanna said, badly upset.

“It is in the crystal,” the old woman said, shading the glass ball with her hands again. “I do not lie.”

“Who is going to die and why?” Roxanna demanded.

The crone swayed slightly and moaning said, “I cannot see clearly. I have told you all the crystal shows.”

Barnabas impatiently tossed some silver coins on the table beside the candle. “There’s your pay, old woman. You should manage your fakery better than this. It is not enough to offer vague threats and frighten an innocent.” Turning to Roxanna, he said, “Let us get out of here. She has nothing to tell you.”

Old Bianca bent, moaning over the crystal, as they went. She paid no heed to the money Barnabas had put there for her. Roxanna was trembling and feeling ill as they
left the fetid air of the wagon for the fresh, cold night breeze. Barnabas held onto her arm and guided her by the campfire where the Gypsy men stood staring at them with unabashed curiosity. As they walked off into the darkness the mocking laughter of the Gypsies followed them. And almost immediately the flamenco guitar’s wild song cut through the night air.

Roxanna shuddered. “What an awful experience.”

“I think the old woman is mad,” Barnabas said.

“But she was so positive. She said she saw death. That many would die.”

“A cheap kind of sensationalism when she had nothing else to offer,” he said. “I wouldn’t let it bother me.”

She shook her head as they walked on across the field in the darkness. “I don’t know. It was all so weird. And she behaved so strangely towards you.”

“I suspect she thought I saw through her sham.”

“What if she was right? That there are going to be violent deaths at our house?”

“I’d wait until they happen before I’d worry,” was his advice. “And the chances are nothing will happen.”

She sighed, “I want to believe you.”

“Do,” he urged. “I know these fake Gypsy fortunetellers for what they are. Only a tiny percentage of them can make a true claim to second sight.”

She halted and looked up at him with frightened eyes. “Suppose she is one of those who can foretell the future?”

Barnabas grasped her firmly by the arms and looked deep into her eyes so that his burning glance held her in a hypnotic fashion. “You mustn’t think again about anything she said. Promise me.”

“I’ll try not to,” she faltered.

He continued to gaze at her. “It was a poor Halloween joke on the old crone’s part designed to get us to cross her palm with silver.”

“Perhaps,” she said with a sigh. “But so many things have happened lately that I don’t understand.”

Barnabas showed a sad smile on his gaunt face. “You’re allowing the strangeness of this witches’ night to influence you. You must fight against it.”

“I can’t help it,” she said unhappily. “I’m afraid. Afraid for myself and for you. You saw the way that old woman
acted and when she looked at you she crossed herself as if she was suddenly terrified. Why?"

“She saw that I had decided she was a charlatan.”

“No,” Roxanna said, studying him with worried eyes. "It must have been more than that.” From far off the echoing flamenco music mocked them.

“I’m going to take you home,” Barnabas said. And then he embraced her. He placed his cold lips on hers and his arms tight around her. She relaxed as she always did when he held her close. And then in a pattern that had become familiar, his lips moved to her throat to produce that spine-tingling chill kiss again. The frosty caress of his lips that induced a kind of forgetfulness and all reckoning of time. She was at peace!

She remembered little of the walk back to the house. They stood for a moment by the door and together stared up at the harvest moon. Its orange surface was crossed by a black cloud formation. And for a brief time Roxanna was certain she saw the crouched silhouette of the sinister old Gypsy crone etched on the moon.

“Look!” she cried and pointed to Barnabas to see.

“I see nothing but a passing cloud,” he said. “You’re allowing your imagination to run away with you. You need a good night’s rest.”

They parted and she entered the silent house. She was not satisfied with the way Barnabas had shrugged off the witch-like old Gypsy’s warning. On reaching her room she went to the window and opened the drapes to stare up at the moon again. And now the cloud formation had changed so that it appeared a monstrous vampire bat was outlined against the orange surface. With a small cry of dismay she closed the drapes to blot out the upsetting illusion.

Her sleep was uneasy. And it seemed appropriate that the morning should be dark and rainy. She went downstairs for breakfast but before she could cross to the dining room she was met by her father in the hall. Her father had an angry expression on his austere face.

Confronting her, he demanded, “What do you know about the portrait?”

Confused, she stared at him. “What portrait?”

“The portrait of your mother in the living room.”
Roxanna frowned. She knew there was a large-sized portrait of her mother hanging in a prominent place on one of the living room walls. It showed the long-dead woman in a regal pose. Ariel had often complained about it being there since her father had never had a portrait made of her mother.

She said, “What about my mother’s portrait?”

Andrew Collins gave her a stony glance. “Come and see for yourself,” he said harshly.

Roxanna followed him into the living room. When they came to the place where the portrait hung she looked up at it and uttered a gasp of surprise. Someone had ripped the canvas of the portrait in two criss-crossing slashes so that it was completely ruined. The lovely face of her mother was lost to the mutilation.

“How awful!” she said in a shocked whisper.

“If it was meant to be a Halloween prank I’d call it a stupid and vicious one,” her father spoke in a rage.

She turned to him with disbelief. “This was no Halloween joke. It was done by some deliberately malicious person.”

Her father’s austere face was shadowed. “Who?”

“I can’t guess,” she said. But she couldn’t forget the many mean remarks Ariel had made about the portrait. How the dark girl had resented this painting when there was no matching one of her own mother.

“I’ve questioned the servants and they claim to know nothing about it,” her father said.

“Someone must have gotten into the house.”

“That wouldn’t be easy unless they had an accomplice here,” Andrew Collins said. “You were out late enough last night. Are you sure you locked the door after you?”

“Yes, I think so.” But she knew she’d been upset and in the dazed state the kiss on her throat often induced. In the glass this morning she’d seen the red mark left by the lips of Barnabas. And she’d been careful to wear one of her high-necked dresses to cover the spot.

“You don’t seem too sure,” he said accusingly. “It could be that it was your carelessness that resulted in the destruction of your mother’s portrait.”

“I’m almost sure I locked the door,” she protested.

“Almost sure,” her father said sarcastically. And he
glanced up at the ruined painting. “I hope you can look at that with a clear conscience.” He stalked out of the room, leaving her alone.

Having lost all interest in her breakfast she was still standing there a few minutes later when Ariel entered the living room. She gave Roxanna an embarrassed look.

“I suppose you wouldn’t believe me if I told you I was sorry about this,” her half-sister said.

Roxanna turned to her. “I guess I would.”

Ariel grimaced. “I always resented the fact Dad had never had my mother’s portrait done to hang alongside this one. But I’d not dream of committing such vandalism.”

“Whoever did it must be mad,” she said.

“I agree.”

“Who noticed it first?” she asked.

“Robert,” Ariel said, naming her brother. “He had been sitting in here last night and left his pipe. He came in for it before leaving for the lumber camp and found the portrait like this.”

“I see,” she said slowly. Robert must also have had feelings about the painting but she couldn’t imagine him destroying it.

“Someone must have gotten into the house and done it as a Halloween prank,” she said.

“No,” Roxanna said. “It had to be done in spite.”

Ariel raised her shapely black brows. “That limits the suspects, doesn’t it?”

Roxanna was too upset to answer. But she could feel the curtain of tension settle down between them. The delicate balance of their mutual respect and fondness for each other was being threatened by this macabre incident.

The day continued gray and wet. The passing hours were an ordeal for a troubled Roxanna. In the late afternoon her father returned early from the lumber operation and supervised the hanging of a marine painting in place of the ripped portrait. She watched the proceeding with a heavy heart.

Roxanna was still troubled by the old Gypsy’s somber predictions. And it seemed to her this mutilated portrait might in some way be connected with the tragedies that had been predicted. The possibility frightened her. The
evening came and it was still raining. She began to doubt whether she'd be seeing Barnabas. She was anxious to describe this latest happening to him but didn't know whether he'd come by the house. He'd been very wary about meeting her father lately.

Shortly after eight Reid Sterling arrived to pay a call on Ariel. But as her half-sister was still upstairs changing into a different gown for her visitor it fell on Roxanna to take the young man into the living room and attempt to entertain him. It was awkward since only a few weeks before it was she he'd been courting.

Standing by the divan on which she'd taken a seat, he gazed down at her earnestly and said, "I'm glad we have this chance to talk. I've been hoping you'd come to your senses and stop seeing that Barnabas. I'm still in love with you, Roxanna. I always will be."

She gave him a reproachful glance. "Ariel will be down in a few minutes."

He paid no attention to this. "Barnabas is in trouble," he warned her. "Millie Brawn blames him for attacking her. And last night another girl was found wandering along the main road. And she had that funny red mark on her throat. She didn't remember what had happened to her but everyone knows it was Barnabas again."

"That's completely unfair," she said.

"Maybe," Reid Sterling said in a stubborn voice. "But there's every reason to think he's tainted with madness. He probably imagines he has the vampire curse of his ancestor and that's why he's doing these things."

"You'd be smarter to blame the Gypsies for any attacks made on the village girls," she said, defending Barnabas. "It sounds more like their work."

And she was rescued from more conversation by the arrival of Ariel, looking radiant in a yellow gown. She quickly excused herself to leave them alone in the living room. Then she went upstairs to her own bedroom. The rain made it unlikely she'd be seeing Barnabas and so she decided to go to bed early.

She was wakened in the middle of the night by a weird sound she could not identify at once. Sitting up in bed she looked into the blackness with troubled eyes and strained to locate the intruding noise. Then she heard it clearly—
a kind of bumping against her windowpanes. It gave her a peculiar, frightened sensation.

Quickly finding the candleholder at her bedside, she reached for the matches and in a moment had the benefit of the candle’s flickering tongue of flame. She slowly got out of bed and padded across the room in her bare feet. Reaching the window she hesitated and then drawing back the curtains held up the candle to try and see what it was bumping against her window.

At first she didn’t see anything. And then as the bumping came again she glimpsed the blurred outline of what seemed to be a huge bat. She gave a small cry of fear as she stood frozen at the eerie sight. A fear that the thing might break a pane of glass and enter the room swept through her. She quickly let the curtains close and went back to her bedside to put on a robe and slippers.

She halted to listen again and the soft thudding against the windowpane was still continuing at intervals. She felt she had to rouse somebody and enlist their aid. The thought of attempting to return to sleep with this weird creature at her window was out of the question. She made her way to the door and out into the corridor.

It was then she heard someone moving about downstairs and a door slam. Knowing that her father suffered from insomnia and often went down in the night to find himself a book, she at once decided he must be down there. She decided she would join him and try to describe the eerie thing beating against her window.

Careful to be quiet, she started down the stairs. Her candle was all that dispelled the darkness of the broad stairway. And as she cautiously descended she had a glimpse of her shadow, enormously and monstrously magnified, to make a sinister moving grotesquerie on the wall. A phantom version of herself that followed her every movement.

She’d barely reached the bottom of the stairway when she heard a key creaking in the front door. She stood there in abject terror with her eyes fixed on the giant oaken door. Somebody on the other side of that door had a key. In a moment she would be confronted by an unknown visitor.
The passing seconds were marked by her pounding heart as she stared at the slowly opening door. Then she saw the familiar figure of her half-brother, Robert. He nodded to her and came inside, closing the door after him. He was wearing a red hunting coat and cap and carried a rifle.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. “You look as if you’d seen a phantom.”

She swallowed hard. “You terrified me. I had no idea who might come through that door. Especially after what happened last night.”

Robert’s face shadowed. “Sorry I startled you. I was out doing some night hunting. Had no luck.” He paused to stare at her in surprise. “What are you doing down here at this unholy hour?”

Still holding the candle, she went over to him. “Something woke me up. I can’t really explain. It looked like a huge bat. And it was beating against my window. I decided to come down here. I heard someone moving around and supposed it was father.”

Robert stared at her. “You’re sure you didn’t have a nightmare?”

“No! There was something!”

“And you thought you heard father down here?”

“Yes.”

Robert glanced down the dark hallway. “If he is here he must be in his study.”

“I expect so. That’s where he usually goes for books when he can’t sleep.”

Her half-brother frowned. “We’ve made enough noise to attract his attention. It’s a wonder he hasn’t been out here to question us.”

She suddenly realized this was true. A chill shot through her. She gave her half-brother a startled glance. “Could it have been someone else?”

“We’d better have a look,” he said. And he leaned his rifle against the wall and took the candle from her to lead the way down the corridor to her father’s study.

Again she found her nerves on edge. She began to fear
they might still be confronted by some sinister intruder and she worried that Robert had put aside his rifle. The vandalism of her mother's portrait the night before indicated that someone had found his way into the house. Perhaps the same person returned to the house for more mischief.

They reached the door of the study and there was no light inside. Robert gave her a questioning glance and then went on in through the open doorway. The quivering flame of the candle gradually brought the details of the room in focus. She was relieved to see her father standing by one of the rows of books that lined the walls of the study. He was reaching up as if to select a book, his other hand pressed against the bookshelf as if to support him. He swung around to face them and she saw the look of sheer horror on his austere face. He reached out wildly with a thin hand and made a hoarse, gurgling sound. Then he pitched forward to the floor by their feet.

All this happened in the space of seconds and left both her and Robert aghast. Her half-brother hastily passed the candle to her and bent down over his parent. "Father, what is it?" he asked in a shaken voice.

But there was no reply. Andrew Collins lay there motionless. She was on her knees at his side and it was she who first saw the spreading stain of blood on his back just between his shoulder blades. His light brown dressing gown was soaked with blood!

"Look!" she told Robert in a tense whisper.

"Father!" The young man cried out in despair as it became obvious to them that their parent had been murdered. Then in a choked voice he told her, "He's gone!"

"Whoever destroyed the portrait must have done this," she said with stunned bitterness.

Robert continued to kneel there staring at the motionless form of his dead father. His pleasant face was contorted with sorrow. Then he slowly looked at her. "You may have heard his murderer."

"I suppose so."

"Whoever it was must have escaped through one of the other doors," he went on. "Or maybe they are still in the house."

She shuddered. "I heard a door slam."
He looked resigned. "I'm certain they're no longer here then." He got to his feet and she joined him. He told her, "We'll have to send word to the Police Chief at Ellsworth."

"By the time he does anything about it the murderer could be miles away," she said.

Robert shrugged. "It's our only course."

"The Gypsy!" she said, glancing down at her father's body again.

"What about the Gypsy?" Robert asked sharply.

She passed a hand across her forehead. "It's nothing really. Barnabas took me to the Gypsy camp. I asked him to. And one of the old crones read my future in the crystal ball. She said there would be many violent deaths here."

Robert looked astonished. "Why didn't you say something about it before?"

"I don't know. I didn't think it was important. I was sure you'd all laugh at me. Barnabas said she was merely trying to scare me!"

"This doesn't look like it," he said grimly.

She studied him with wide eyes. "Do you think she really knew what was going to happen? That she had heard one of the Gypsy men planned to murder father?"

"Who can tell?" he demanded. "Someone stabbed him to death. It could well be a Gypsy who did it."

"The Police Chief will know what to do," she suggested.

"I told father he shouldn't have allowed them to stay on our land," Robert said bitterly. "And now this happens."

"It may not have been the Gypsies at all," she reminded him.

"We can only hope it was and the Chief will be able to prove it," her half-brother said, with a knowing look. "It could be much more difficult if it turned out to be someone else."

"Who would want to murder father?"

"Many people might," he said with a grim expression on his young face. "I'm going to rouse the handyman and send him in to Ellsworth to notify the police. We're losing time with all this talk."

They went out into the corridor leaving the body behind them and Robert found another candle for himself and
went back to the servant’s quarters to rouse the handyman. She sat down in a plain chair in the hallway, nauseated and trembling. Ariel would have to be told but she would wait until Robert came back to do that.

The events of the night had been too much for her. And she was shocked that the Gypsy’s prediction should begin to come true so soon. Also, Robert had suggested a fresh avenue of terror in hinting that someone closer to Andrew Collins than the Gypsies might be responsible for his murder. She knew her father was unpopular with many people, including the owner of Collinwood, Theodore Collins, and the range of suspects could be wide.

She was still seated in the chilly hallway absorbed by these frightening thoughts when Robert came striding back holding his candle aloft. It struck her that in the short space since the discovery of their father’s murder he appeared to have aged. His pleasant young face was now set in a grim fashion that suggested her late father’s features to a surprising degree.

He came and stood by her solemnly. “I’ve got the handyman on his way,” he said. “Now we’ll have to inform Ariel and wait until the Chief arrives.”

She looked up at his weary face. “I still can’t believe it!”

Robert met her gaze in a strained silence. And she was at once aware that something was bothering him. Something he had been holding back from her. It was as though he was carrying on some inner struggle with himself as to whether to reveal his thoughts to her or not.

In a stiff fashion, he said, “There is something we should discuss.”

“Yes?” His strange manner brought all her fear rushing back.

His eyes searched her face. “You weren’t with Barnabas tonight, were you?”

“No. Why?”

He frowned at the flickering candle which cast fanciful patterns on his tired face. “I know how you feel about Barnabas. You have made that plain. You’ve been in his company almost constantly since you returned from New York with him.”
"I owe him a great debt. He saved me from a terrible fate."

"I realize that," her brother said quietly. "I also am grateful to him for that."

"Why have you brought Barnabas into things at this time?"

Robert gave her another of his evasive glances. "You must admit he is a strange person. That the villagers fear and detest him."

"Ignorance and stupidity on their part," she retorted. But a gradual feeling of alarm for Barnabas was surging through her. Robert had something in mind. Suspected Barnabas of something!

He said, "Tonight when I was crossing the lawn I was sure I saw a figure fleeing from the direction of the house and heading for Collinwood. I couldn't make out who it was clearly." He paused briefly and then in a tense voice added, "But I thought it was Barnabas Collins!"

"Oh, no!" she protested. "It couldn't have been. He hasn't been near here tonight."

"Not that you know of," Robert pointed out.

"You can't believe Barnabas would kill father!"

"I don't know who killed father," Robert said. "But there is a distinct possibility Barnabas was lurking about the house a short while ago."

"You can't involve him on such slim evidence," Roxanna protested with tears brimming in her eyes. "You only thought you saw him."

"I saw someone of his type."

"It could have been any one of a number of people."

Robert's eyes had narrowed. "Who else in the village wears a caped coat?"

This hit her hard but she quickly came back with, "Did you see his caped coat? From the way you describe the meeting you only saw a vague shadow fleeing in the darkness!"

"Doesn't it matter to you that our father lies in there murdered?"

"Yes. But I want justice for Barnabas no matter what! I know the kind of man he is. And I know he wouldn't murder father or anyone else for that matter."
Robert sighed with weary resignation. “Your trust in him is touching,” was his cynical comment. “Because I respect your feelings I’ll not mention the incident at this time. But if the police don’t find any leads and the Gypsies aren’t guilty I may have to bring it up later.”

“You should forget about it entirely,” she begged.

He shook his head. “I can’t do that. But for the present I’ll protect Barnabas. I can’t make any long range promises if the murder isn’t solved.”

They had come to an impasse. And she was terrified that he believed Barnabas to be a suspect in the case. It was the worst possible development. And in her despair and bitterness she began to wonder about Robert himself. He and their father had never gotten along well. Could Robert have slain their difficult parent and then left the house to enter again with her as a witness to his later arrival? It would make an ideal alibi. And it would also give him a motive for concocting a story about passing a mysterious figure in the darkness and hinting it was Barnabas. Barnabas was already suspected of misdeeds by the natives.

The following hours and the several days after the tragedy became a confused blur in her mind. Ariel collapsed and required a physician’s attention on learning of the murder. Robert, now the male head of the household, took on his responsibilities grimly and carried them out. She tried to help but knew she wasn’t contributing much.

Police seemed to be constantly on the grounds. And the stout Chief from Ellsworth spent a lot of time questioning them and searching for clues. He was a slow-moving, thorough, middle-aged man. Yet Roxanna had small confidence he would turn up the guilty party. Theodore Collins came over from Collinwood to pay his respects in a cold, formal manner, and seeing him made her wonder if he might not have finally killed his despised cousin, their father.

When the Chief was slowly going over the events and checking on those in the area, Barnabas’ name was casually brought up. Roxanna sat tensely in the living room waiting to hear if Robert would mention his suspicions
concerning the handsome man from New York. Fortunately he didn’t say anything. And in the evening Barnabas came to offer his condolences. Since Ariel was still confined to her bed upstairs she and Robert were the ones to greet him.

Looking distinguished in his caped coat and carrying his black, silver-headed cane, he stood by their father’s casket in the living room and expressed his sympathy. “This is a dreadful business,” he said.

Robert had a restrained hostility in his manner. “The police are still questioning the Gypsies but they have just about given up any hope of being able to pin the crime on them.”

Barnabas turned away from the open casket. “Who, then?”

Robert looked grim. “It has to be someone closer if the Gypsies aren’t guilty. Someone adept in the use of a knife or some sort of dagger.”

“That could be almost anyone,” Barnabas said. “Knives are usually the weapons of amateurs in murder.”

Robert was staring at Barnabas in an odd fashion. “I have my own theories about that,” he said.

Roxanna, hoping to ease the tension, told Barnabas, “It was very good of you to come.”

His expression was sympathetic. “You knew I would.”

He asked Robert, “When is the funeral being held?”

“Tomorrow,” Robert said curtly. “But it will be in the morning so we won’t expect you to be there. I know you never make an exception to leaving your house during the day.”

Roxanna could sense the sarcasm in her half-brother’s voice and knew this statement was meant to taunt Barnabas. She quickly said, “You knew father only slightly. We can’t expect you to change your regular plans to attend the funeral.”

Barnabas’ burning eyes fixed on her sadly. “If there is any chance at all I’ll be there.” He said goodnight to Robert, who remained standing by the coffin while she escorted Barnabas to the front door. He paused there to say in a low voice, “I’ll meet you in the cemetery at dusk tomorrow night.”
She nodded. “Thank you, I’ll be there.” His cold hand closed on hers in a tight grip of sympathy. And then he left.

Robert was waiting to greet her when she returned from seeing Barnabas out. Her half-brother was in an ugly mood. “I’ve had about enough of your Barnabas,” he said. “I may have to talk to the police about him after the funeral tomorrow.”

“Don’t be hasty!” she pleaded.

“I haven’t been,” he said. “But it’s almost certain the Gypsies didn’t kill father so we have to begin looking around. And in addition to the fact I think I saw Barnabas I’m suspicious about that cane of his.”

She frowned. “His cane?”

“Yes. I’m sure it conceals a sword. Gentlemen carry such weapons for their protection.” He smiled bitterly. “How convenient a sword-cane would be in committing a murder like father’s!”

Roxanna shook her head in protest. “You mustn’t think that, even if it should be a sword-cane Barnabas carries. He has good reason for having it. He’s alone at night a great part of the time.”

“I expect you to defend him,” Robert said in his new cold fashion. It frightened her how much he was becoming like her father. And she knew that it probably was only a matter of time before he passed on his suspicions of Barnabas to the police. And again she was plagued by the terrifying possibility that Robert could be the murderer and this was all part of a clever web of deceit on his part. Should the Gypsies be absolved of blame he would neatly turn the spotlight of guilt on the unhappy Barnabas.

The funeral in the old cemetery was a small one. Ariel was not able to attend though she did get down to the living room for a few minutes for a final look at her father. Her grief was so overwhelming they at once took her upstairs again. The morning was cold with a drizzle of fog in the air. Following the wishes of both her and Robert, the vicar made the ceremony brief.

Barnabas was not there. But Theodore Collins appeared at the grave side in heavy coat and stove-pipe hat looking like a figure from an earlier period. His face was set in a scowl all during the ceremony. When it was over
he came and shook hands with her and Robert and mumbled some incoherent words of sympathy. Then he marched off as if satisfied his duty had been done.

Robert watched after him grimly. "He wasn't exactly broken-hearted by the sight of father being lowered into the ground."

She nodded. "He always hated him."

"Their quarrels over property don't seem so important now," Robert said.

She gave her half-brother a questioning glance. "Do you think Theodore capable of murder?"

"Yes," was her half-brother's frank answer. "But I don't believe he murdered father." And with that he left her to go over and speak with the vicar.

This gave one of the other mourners whom she hadn't noticed an opportunity to join her. Reid Sterling came up with a sympathetic expression on his good-looking face.

"I'm terribly sorry for you, Roxanna," the young man said.

"Thank you, Reid," she smiled sadly. "I might have known you'd be here. I'll tell Ariel."

He sighed. "Please do. But it wasn't for Ariel that I came. I wanted to support you at this unhappy time."

"Please, Reid," she said in a low voice.

"I realize this is not the proper moment," he said. "But when else have you given me the opportunity of speaking with you?"

"Things have been so dreadful."

"Even before this happened," he said. "You've turned completely to Barnabas Collins. And you haven't stopped to consider what an association with him may finally lead to."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Then think about it," Reid said solemnly. "I believe Barnabas to be a madman. He might even be responsible for what happened to your father. You'll notice he isn't here today."

"You mustn't say that," she told Reid earnestly. "You are all wrong about Barnabas."

Reid stared at her hopelessly. "What can I say? He has you hypnotized. It must be that." And he turned and walked away.
Roxanna stood there alone in the foggy drizzle for a moment. She liked Reid but knew he was an impulsive youth who often spoke or acted before he thought. He was still in love with her and madly jealous. That was why he had gone on so wildly about Barnabas. She hastened to gain control of her upset feelings as she saw the vicar and her half-brother approaching.

At last the ordeal of the funeral was over. Hoag, who had been prominent among the mourners returned home with them. He sat in the living room and advised them more like a friend than as the family lawyer.

Sitting in an easy chair by the blazing log fire which Robert had ordered he spoke quietly of her father’s affairs. “Andrew had his finances well in order,” he assured them. “It will take a little while to settle the estate but you young people will all be wealthy.”

Robert, who was seated in a high-back chair next to Roxanna on the other side of the fireplace, gave the lawyer a scornful glance. “The money is the last thing on our minds at present.”

“I can quite understand that,” the big bronzed man said urbanely. “But it is a factor and one I’m bound to think of.”

She spoke up, “We’re still shocked by father’s murder. Our chief interest is to discover who did the awful thing.”

“Quite right,” Hoag agreed. “And I understand the police have kept a close eye on the Gypsies.”

Robert scowled. “It hasn’t brought results. I’m going to order them off the grounds tomorrow.”

Hoag rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “I wouldn’t do that,” he advised.

“Why not?” her half-brother demanded.

“Once they leave you’ll never locate them again,” the lawyer pointed out. “If one of them should be guilty and you get evidence later you’d never catch up with him.”

“I’d prefer to take that chance to having them on my property,” was Robert’s firm reply.

The lawyer sighed. “I suppose it is a decision you must make for yourself,” he said. And he glanced at her. “What is the latest report on Barnabas?”

She was at once alert. Carefully, she said, “I haven’t seen much of him lately. He very kindly came to pay his
respects last night. That was our only meeting since father’s murder.”

The big man opposite her lifted his eyebrows. “Of course he wasn’t at the funeral.”

“No.”

“Weird fellow,” Hoag said rising, “Your father didn’t like him. But then he wasn’t alone in that. Not many in Collinsport do have any fondness for him. They’d prefer that he left.”

Robert was on his feet to see the lawyer to the door. “I intend to have a talk with Mr. Barnabas Collins soon,” he said in a meaningful tone. “I have some things I want to settle.”

Lawyer Hoag looked interested. “Indeed.” Then he said goodnight to Roxanna and let Robert escort him to the front door. She remained seated in her chair staring into the multi-colored flames of the blazing logs.

“I meant what I said just now.”

She said, “About what?”

“T’ve covered up for Barnabas as long as I intend to. I can’t keep silent any longer. Not even to spare your feelings. When I talk to the police tomorrow I’m going to tell them I saw Barnabas leaving the house that night.”

“You thought you saw him leaving the house,” she corrected him. “You never have been sure.”

“Sure enough,” her half-brother said grimly.

“Don’t do anything you’ll regret,” she warned him, rising.

He smiled bleakly. “That might also be good advice for you.”

As evening drew near she became increasingly nervous. She had promised to meet Barnabas in the old cemetery and she wanted to get away from the house without attracting attention to herself. Robert would surely question where she was going if he saw her leaving and he would never approve of her rendezvous with the man she had come to love.

But she had to see Barnabas to warn him of the way things were developing and the suspicions Robert had of him. She also needed his advice. The fog had continued through the day and now was making darkness come earlier than usual. As soon as she finished dinner she went
up to Ariel’s room. It was her plan to stay with her younger half-sister for a little and then quietly slip down the back stairs and leave the house by a rear door.

Ariel was seated disconsolately in a rocking chair by the window. She gave her a grateful look when she entered her bedroom. “I should have gone down to dinner,” Ariel said. “But I somehow couldn’t face it.”

“Tomorrow,” Roxanna said.

Ariel sighed. “I’ll try. I’ll have to begin living normally again soon.”

“Father wouldn’t have wanted you to mourn like this.” Ariel stared ahead of her. “I can’t believe what has happened. I’m afraid to leave this room. Suppose the murderer comes back and tries to kill one of us?”

“I don’t think there’s any danger of that,” she said.

“Those awful Gypsies!” Ariel exclaimed. “One of them must have done it. They’ll do anything for money.”

“There wasn’t any money taken.”

“Because they were frightened off before they had a chance to rob us,” Ariel said, determined not to give up her theory.

“Robert plans to send them away,” Roxanna said to comfort the girl.

“Father should never had tolerated them on the estate in the first place,” Ariel lamented.

She remained with the unhappy girl for a few minutes more and then excused herself on the pretense of a headache. After which she quickly went down the shadowed hall to her own room and got her heavy cloak. Slipping it on, she went to the rear stairs and started down.

A few minutes later she stepped out the back door into the foggy evening. It was almost dark as she walked swiftly from the brick house and sought out the shortcut through the bushes to Collinwood. She wasn’t too happy about covering this lonely ground by herself but she realized it was much more discreet to meet Barnabas in the cemetery. There could be police watching their grounds and if Barnabas showed up he could be subjected to a lot of damaging questioning.

She wished she had one of the small lanterns they often used. But to have gone after one before leaving would have been risking Robert’s finding out what she was up to.
But now that darkness had settled as well it was a problem to see her way and make any time. The path was crooked and its surface uneven. Now and then she stumbled and often the bushes brushed against her cheeks. Once a stronger than usual branch hit her with such force she worried that it had cut her. But she pressed on.

The mist was close to rain. And it gave the night an eerie aspect. You could almost pick out the macabre ghost faces and hunched menacing forms in the swirling gray fog. Only now that she was alone on this deserted path did she truly realize how ragged her nerves were. And what a toll her father's murder had taken from her!

Robert was worrying her with his attitude. There was no longer any warmth between them. She supposed it was wrong to blame him since he had also suffered greatly in the ordeal of the murder. But she felt she wasn't able to understand him. In the back of her mind remained the nagging doubt as to whether he could have been the murderer of their father.

The crackling of the broken bush came from directly behind her and not too great a distance away. The comparatively mild noise made her start as if it had been the report of a bullet. She looked over her shoulder with terror in her lovely eyes. Somebody must be following her!
CHAPTER EIGHT

It was a dreadful moment—a moment in which all her fears seemed to come sharply in focus. She didn’t dare halt in her stumbling progress along the fog-shrouded path and without halting she couldn’t listen properly to tell whether she was actually being followed or not. But she had heard the snap of a dry branch as someone had stepped on it! So back there in the misty darkness there must be someone! Probably it was the same murderous fiend who had killed her father!

Her heart was beating wildly and she was straining for breath but she raced on. The pain in her side became intense and she knew that she had nearly reached the limits of her strength. In a matter of seconds she would have to stop and attempt to recover from this frantic flight. But if she halted, whoever it was might at once be upon her.

When she felt she could go on no longer—that even a dozen yards more would burst her straining heart—she caught a glimpse of the distant lights of Collinwood. She was finally at the end of the densely bushed area. But this presented a new complication. She was too distant from Collinwood for screams for help to be heard and in this open field she would be an easy target for her pursuer.

Gasping for breath, she hesitated for a fraction of a second in the open and then plunged toward a clump of bushes a short way from the path and crouched under them. The agony of her breathing was beyond her control. And she prayed that her tortured panting would not betray her. She waited with her eyes fixed on the spot where the path emerged in the open straining to discover if there had been anyone following her.

The wait seemed endless but at least her breathing became less labored. She had decided it was either her imagination that had betrayed her or her pursuer had gone back. She was about to give up her vigil and hurry forward to join Barnabas when she heard the sounds of someone approaching along the path. Panic seized her again and she crouched lower for shelter and peered through the fog.

Only a moment later a shadowy figure came into view.
It was a stout man with a cane. And even in her upset state and despite the fog she was able to make instant identification of him. It was the squire of Collinwood, Theodore Collins, who was striding across the field in his stiff fashion.

What could it mean? Was Theodore her father's murderer and her would-be murderer? It hardly seemed likely. For one thing he'd not made any effort to look around when he'd emerged from the path. There had been nothing in his manner to suggest he'd been tracking down anyone. He'd merely continued on his way.

The mere fact of his being on the path at this evening hour was a little unusual. But it did not have to be of any importance. The path was not any special property of hers. It was likely many people used it. And it was also probable that the squire of Collinwood was, like everyone else, in an upset state. That could have set him prowling in the darkness. He might even have been thinking of calling on them and at the last minute lost his nerve.

At any rate he was well on his way to Collinwood now. His stout figure had been swallowed up by the mist. For her part she was relieved and a good deal rested. She came out from under the bushes and briskly resumed her journey to the old cemetery where her father had been buried not too many hours before and where Barnabas had agreed to meet her.

The old house was in darkness when she went by it. She wondered where Hare was. She'd seen little of the bulldog-faced man lately. And in her present state of mind she was not anxious to see him again. She needed the presence and comfort of Barnabas.

Roxanna felt the bite of the cold October night after having been perspiring so freely. She tightened the cloak around her and pulled the hood up over her head. The dark cloak gave her the comforting feeling of concealment in the blackness of the night. She began to worry a little whether Barnabas might have been delayed or prevented from going to the cemetery. But she felt reasonably sure he would be there.

Then she saw the open gates of the burial ground through the thick mist, and beyond, the faint spectral outlines of gravestones. The melancholy markers of
generations of the long-dead members of the Collins clan. Her mother rested there deep in the silent security of the earth. And only this morning she had seen her father, the austere Andrew Collins so calm and peaceful in death, lowered to join his first wife. The mother of Ariel and Robert had been buried in some distant European land.

Hesitantly Roxanna made her way through the rusty gates and groped along between the gravestones until she had come to the fresh mound of her father's grave. She halted there and stared around in the mist. If Barnabas didn't appear, she doubted if she had the nerve to make the return journey to her home. And then all her fears were put to rest as she saw his tall figure a dozen feet away.

She ran to him and threw her arms around him. "Oh, Barnabas! I was afraid you hadn't come."

"I've been waiting for you," he said. "But I remained in the shadows until I was sure you were alone."

"I nearly wasn't," she told him. And she gave him an account of her panic along the path and discovering it was Theodore Collins behind her.

Barnabas said, "I doubt if you have anything to fear from him."

"It's gotten so I don't know who to trust," she worried. And she went on to tell him all that had happened—brought him up-to-date on everything. And she finished with, "I can't get that old Gypsy, Bianca, out of my mind. Do you suppose she's really able to see the future in that crystal ball? She did predict violent deaths in my future."

"Probably merely an unhappy coincidence."

"I don't know," she said. "She may have put a curse on us."

"A Gypsy's curse can be powerful," Barnabas agreed. "I have known lives twisted by such black magic. But why should old Bianca place a curse on us?"

"I have no idea," Roxanna admitted. "But she did seem very frightened of you."

Barnabas smiled sadly. "Merely proving the woman is as superstitious as the villagers."

She stared up at the handsome man in the caped coat with the fog swirling around him. "What is it about you, Barnabas? This thing they fear. There must be something
to it. Though I have never been able to understand."

His deep-set eyes fixed on her with sympathy. "One
day I'll explain," he said.

"Robert and Lawyer Hoag say you are mad."

"Let them."

"You do live a very different, aloof existence," she wor¬
rried. "But I know you are not insane. I remember too well
how you came to my aid in New York. There was nothing
of the madman about you in that. And if there had been
anything wrong with your mind Molly would have warned
me."

Barnabas nodded. "Yes. I'm sure she would have."

"Molly worships you," Roxanna said. "You know that,
don't you?"

"And I have a deep affection for Molly."

"Have you had any letters from her since coming
here?"

"We rarely correspond," he said. "I shall see her when
I return to New York."

She studied his face anxiously. "And you should leave
here soon for your own sake."

"I have no intention of deserting you."

She sighed. "I should plead with you to go. You're in
grave danger. But I'm too much of a coward. I need you
too badly. The one thing Molly warned me against was
falling in love with you. But I have."

Barnabas took her in his arms and his cold lips
touched her forehead. "You should have listened to
Molly."

"No. I'm glad I love you, Barnabas," she said with
deep sincerity. "I don't care what unhappiness it brings."

"The important thing now is your safety."

She looked up at him. "I'm concerned about you. Tell
me something. Does your cane contain a hidden sword?"

He frowned. "Why do you ask?"

"Robert says that it does. And that you used the
weapon to kill our father."

"I do have a sword in the cane," Barnabas admitted.
"But I didn't use it for murder."

"I was sure of that," she said. "But Robert is going to
the police in the morning. He's having the Gypsies put off
the estate and he's going to tell the police that he saw you
coming away from the house the night of father’s murder.”

“How can he say that?” Barnabas demanded. “I wasn’t there.”

“He claims he saw a figure and it looked like you.”

“Then he is merely making up a story to confuse the police,” Barnabas said calmly enough. “It happens I was in the village that night and spent a long while in the Blue Whale Tavern. A number of people must have seen me there.”

“I’m so glad,” she said. “I’ve been terrified.”

Barnabas looked grave. “I still might have some trouble proving I was at the tavern when the crime was committed. But I hope I can if the situation demands it.”

“Robert has changed since the murder,” she complained. “He’s a lot more like father.”

“Perhaps he always was like him but it took this crisis to bring it out,” Barnabas said.

“I don’t think so,” she worried. “Robert and Ariel and I have always been close, even though I had a different mother.”

“I sometimes forget that,” Barnabas said.

“What troubles me most,” she said solemnly, “is that Robert may be the one who killed father. And that’s why he’s so determined to throw suspicion on you.”

Barnabas looked startled. “You honestly think he could be the murderer?”

“Yes. I wish I knew.”

“I wish you did,” Barnabas said. “It is hardly safe for you to remain in that house if he should be the guilty one.”

“I don’t think he’d hurt me.”

“He would if he got the idea you suspected him,” Barnabas said. “And you were there that night. You saw him come in directly after your father was stabbed. He’s bound to realize that sooner or later you’ll see the possibility that he could have been the killer backtracking for an alibi.”

Roxanna’s eyes were wide with fear. “What will I do?”

“I’m not sure yet,” Barnabas said. He glanced towards the fog-shrouded grave of her father. “If he could talk to us he could explain it all.”

“Barnabas,” she said hesitantly.
“Yes?”

She gazed into his piercing black eyes nervously. “You won’t think me foolish, I hope. But I’d like you to take me back to that Gypsy camp.”

“Back to the Gypsies?” he demanded incredulously.

“Yes. Robert will have them driven off tomorrow. I’d like to talk to that old Bianca before they go.”

A thin smile played at the mouth of Barnabas. “And risk having another curse put on you?”

“I’m not afraid of that,” she protested. “But I do feel she knows something. Something none of the rest of us have found out. I want to question her.”

“I don’t like it,” Barnabas said. “Those Gypsies are a rascally lot. One of them likely killed your father.”

“Then that is the place where we should go looking for information,” she insisted.

“People have been murdered on visits to Gypsy camps,” he warned her.

She touched his cane. “I’m sure you are capable of protecting us.”

He hesitated a moment. “Are you serious about this?”

“I can’t bear the thought that Robert may be the guilty one,” she said. “I have an idea the old woman can clear my mind about that. Or confirm that my fears are well grounded.”

Barnabas shrugged. “If you’ve made up your mind.”

“Please,” she begged him.

So that settled it. They left the quiet of the cemetery and began the walk to the woods and the Gypsy camp. Neither of them said anything along the way. She had the feeling that Barnabas was unhappy about the project but she was dedicated to it. Still she was uneasy. She hadn’t liked the sinister mood of the camp or the smelly curtained cubicle in the wagon either. But she was nagged on by an inner voice that kept whispering the secrets she wanted revealed might be known to her in the Gypsy’s crystal ball.

The fog had not abated. The grass was wet and as the night advanced it became colder. When they reached the area of the Gypsy camp they saw the fire blazing but there was no guitar playing or singing to lighten the grim atmosphere of the place.
"They must all be in the wagons," Roxanna said to Barnabas in a low voice.
"I think so," he agreed.
They were close to the campfire before the Gypsies showed themselves. Then two of the men came out the door of the red wagon to stare at them warily. Roxanna at once recognized the older of the two as the one who had been to the house.
She stepped forward and said, "We would like to consult Bianca again?"
The elderly Gypsy wearing the kerchief spat contemptuously. "Old Bianca will not look into the crystal for you. You do not believe in her magic."
Roxanna insisted, "But I do or I wouldn't be back. I'm sorry if we offended her before. I'll pay her whatever she likes."
The Gypsy had a greedy look. He said, "I will see what she says." And he vanished inside the wagon leaving the younger man to stand guard.
Barnabas said in a low voice, "I think you should abandon the idea. The woman is a fake. This can only lead to trouble."
"Let me try," she pleaded.
"She may not be willing to see you," Barnabas warned. "You heard what he said."
As Barnabas finished speaking the elderly Gypsy came out again. He gave her a stern look. "The old woman will look into the crystal for you but she does not want him to come inside."
"Why not?" Roxanna asked.
The Gypsy eyed her stonily. "Bianca says he is an evil one. In league with the devil."
"But that's ridiculous," she protested.
"Bianca will only see you if you are alone," was his firm reply.
She turned to Barnabas. "What will I do?"
He surprised her by saying, "Do as they ask. If you have any trouble call out to me and I'll be there in a moment."
Slightly frightened at the prospect of facing the sinister Bianca alone she said, "You really think I should?"
His handsome face revealed bleak amusement. "If you
are determined to enlist the Gypsy’s aid again you have no choice.”

“It’s all nonsense making this fuss about you,” she said. “I suppose it’s because you told her she was a fake.”

“Undoubtedly.”

Roxanna sighed as she still hesitated. “I suppose since we’ve come this far I may as well see her.”

He nodded. “I’ll wait near the door of the wagon.” And he told the elderly Gypsy who was still guarding the entrance to the wagon. “It’s all right. The lady will go in alone.”

The Gypsy said nothing but stood aside for her to enter. She stepped into the tiny, dark cubicle and found everything exactly as it had been before. The shawled old crone was bent over the crystal ball so that her face was almost completely obscured. Bianca did not lift her head to greet her but cupped her thin, brown hands over the crystal. The candle on the table gave off just enough light for Roxanna to take in these details.

Old Bianca made a low moaning sound and intoned, “You have come back because my prophecy was proven right.”

She stood there tensely. “Yes.”

“Bianca never lies. Her crystal never lies. I told you violent death shadowed your future. And I see more of it.”

“Who murdered my father?” Roxanna asked her with desperate urgency. “Tell me and I’ll pay you anything you ask.”

The old Gypsy gave a mirthless cackle of laughter. “Of course you would. But Bianca is not one of the police. Her business is not to bring criminals to justice.”

“Tell me!” Roxanna begged.

The ancient crone was bent over the crystal and mumbling. “I cannot see plainly,” she said. “There is only the shadow of a tall man with a sword in his hand. He is wearing a kind of cape. And now he is vanishing and in his place I see a kind of giant black bird. A bat!”

Roxanna’s head was reeling from excitement and the stuffy air of the wagon. She frowned. “There was a bat-like thing trying to get in my window the other night. The night of the murder. That was what woke me up.”
Bianca stared into her crystal. “It was the murderer! The Devil’s own can take on many forms. Beware of the disciples of Satan!”

She had the uneasy feeling the old woman was trying to cast suspicion on Barnabas. The description she’d given had matched his and she’d already referred to him as in league with the Devil.

Roxanna asked in a taut voice, “Is it Barnabas Collins you see in the crystal?”

The old woman said, “You will have to decide that for yourself. I have told you all I can.”

“What do you see in the future?” she asked. “Do you see the murderer being apprehended?”

Bianca cupped the gleaming crystal ball in her claw-like hands once more and after a moment intoned, “I see more death! More violence! You will die just as your father did! And Barnabas Collins will vanish from Collinwood.”

“No!” Roxanna said, her voice rising with fear. “I don’t believe you. Barnabas was right. You do make up stories to scare people. It was just a coincidence that my father was murdered after I was here last time.”

The ancient crone made no reply as she sat hunched over the crystal. It was clear to Roxanna the Gypsy intended to say no more. From the pocket of her cloak she drew a single bill and placing it on the table turned and quickly left the wagon.

Barnabas was just outside the door waiting for her. He gave her a questioning look. “Well?”

“Nothing,” Roxanna said wearily. “You were right. She is a little mad and makes senseless prophecies.” She had no intention of telling him the Gypsy woman had indicated him as the killer.

He took her by the arm and guided her away from the wagon and past the blazing campfire. They slowly strolled off into the darkness and fog. Barnabas said, “At least you satisfied yourself.”

“Yes. At least I did that,” she agreed.

“Probably Robert is right in his decision to send them away,” he said. “They could cause more trouble.”

“Lawyer Hoag has been against it. He thinks they should be allowed to remain here until the mystery of my
father's murder is solved. Just in case one of them might have had something to do with it."

"I suppose there are two sides to the matter," Barnabas said as he walked with his head bowed slightly. "One thing is certain. You must be more careful in the future. When we meet after dark it will be better for me to come to you."

"You are in danger as well."

"Not to the extent you are," Barnabas said. "Did the old witch make any more predictions of violence?"

She glanced at him uneasily. "You weren't listening, were you? Did you hear what she said?"

"No. But I am curious."

"She said there would be more deaths," Roxanna told him. But she didn't tell him one of the predicted deaths was hers!

Barnabas saw her back to the front door of her house. When he kissed her goodnight he omitted the ritual of allowing his lips to wander to her throat. Because of this some of the romantic wonder of their usual embrace was lost. She entered the house in a more clearheaded state than usual.

Mounting the broad stairway to go up to her bedroom she was conscious of the eerie quiet of the house. The single wall lamp was low on oil and so the wick was not burning properly. It gave a strange, uneven flame that made the atmosphere more ghostly.

She'd barely reached the landing when Robert appeared. He came down the shadowed hall to stand before her with an odd expression of concern on his pleasant face.

"Have you been out with him?" he demanded abruptly.

Roxanna stared at her half-brother. "If you mean Barnabas. Yes, I have."

Robert's face was pale and he clenched and unclenched his fists as he stood there accusingly. "Did you tell him what I said?"

"About what?"

"About seeing him and informing the police," Robert snapped.

She sighed. "I did mention it to him. But I made it clear you weren't sure you saw him."

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“You warned him!” was her half-brother’s angry reply. “Not in the way you’re suggesting,” she argued. “I’ve tried to be fair.”

Her half-brother’s stern, tormented face again bore a troubling resemblance to that of her late father’s. In a tone of grim triumph, he said, “Nothing that you said has any importance now. I know who I saw that night and I know who killed our father!”

“Not Barnabas!” she protested.

His glance was cold. “You’ll find that out soon enough.” And brushing by her he went on down the stairs.

It was an unsatisfactory reply. The whole discussion between them had been upsetting and had produced nothing. She was dismayed by the behavior of her half-brother and the change in him within such a short time. And she doubted that he was as positive about who he’d seen that night as he pretended to be.

She went on to her own room and prepared for bed. But her mind was filled with all she’d heard during the eventful evening. The ancient crone Bianca had left her in a more unsettled state than she’d admitted to Barnabas. Privately she felt some of what Bianca had said might be true. But she was also sure there was fakery involved. She had no desire to return to consult her again.

Standing before the mirror in the soft candlelight she stared at her reflection in its surface. She saw some of Ariel’s lovely features in her own. And yet there was a distinct difference in the contour of their faces. Ariel’s beauty was of a sullen variety while she had a frank, wholesome look. This was heightened by her blonde complexion and fair hair in contrast to Ariel’s brunette coloring.

It was surprising that she should suddenly be thinking of her half-sister. And she began to wonder what had stirred these thoughts in her mind to make her stand there indulging in comparisons. All at once she realized she was actually considering Ariel as a possible murderess. The dark girl had a quick, sullen temper and had often been in argument with her father. She had always felt their parent had favored Roxanna as the daughter of his beloved first wife.

This had been nonsense, but Ariel had believed it. And
the murder weapon had been some sort of knife or dagger which could be a woman’s weapon as easily as a man’s. Also, there was the strong reaction Ariel had shown on learning of her father’s murder. She’d not been able to resume a normal pattern of life since. Yet she’d slept all through the talk and confusion downstairs the night of the murder. All these things made Roxanna wonder about her half-sister.

Could that be the reason Robert was so distraught? He had learned that Ariel was the guilty one. It would indeed be a severe shock for the young man to learn that his sister was the killer. The fact he’d believed he’d seen the figure of a man fleeing from the house needn’t have any meaning. He might really have seen no one, allowed a shadow to confuse him in the misty night.

And Bianca’s insistence that a man wearing a cape had been the murderer could also be taken with a grain of salt. The old crone hated Barnabas because he’d branded her as a charlatan and had even refused to allow him to enter the wagon that second time. It could be expected that she’d try and point an accusing finger at him.

The more Roxanna thought about all this the more worried she became. She wondered whether Ariel was asleep. If she wasn’t there were a few questions she’d like to ask her. As she stood there debating, a door slammed below. She thought it was the front door. And it gave her a nasty start since it seemed so much like the sound of that other slammed door the night her father was killed.

After hesitating a moment she slowly went over and opened the door of her own room leading to the hallway. All was silent again. She stepped out into the darkness. Her heart began to beat more rapidly so that she could almost hear its nervous pounding. Very slowly she made her way along the carpet strip which ran the length of the hall until she reached the door of Ariel’s room.

She tapped on the door gently. There was no reply. After waiting a moment she rapped more loudly. And when Ariel did not respond to this she began to feel alarmed. So much so that she tried the door handle. It turned easily and she was able to open the door.

Ariel’s room was also in darkness and it took her a moment to discover that her half-sister’s bed was empty. It
had been turned down but there was no one in it. Roxanna quickly took in the rest of the room and even opened the closet doors. Ariel was not there!

It was a strange and bewildering development and not a pleasant one in the light of what she’d so lately been thinking. What could possibly take Ariel from her bed at this hour? Where could she be? Frowning, Roxanna went over to the window of her sister’s room and looked out.

As her eyes grew accustomed to the misty blackness of the night outside she was able to make out the slim figure of Robert, standing a little distance from the house. He seemed to be deliberating something. And as she watched he began to walk in the direction of the cliffs. At the same time there was the harsh cry of a night bird and she thought she saw the flutter of wings almost directly above him.
Roxanna sat on the side of her half-sister's bed and waited to see if she would return to her room. She felt Ariel could not have strayed out of the house. And yet there wasn't a sign of her. It was a puzzling situation and she worried about what it might mean. The sight of Robert walking off in the fog had also caused her some concern.

Things were no longer the same with her father gone. Andrew Collins had kept a stern control over all those in the house. There were many times when she'd resented this. But it had at least offered the comfort of knowing everything was in order. Now they were all on their own to do as they pleased. It was a new experience and she wasn't sure they'd adjusted to it as yet.

At last she became weary of waiting and decided to return to her own room. She was walking down the dark hallway when she heard the front door open and close. at once she continued on to the head of the stairs to see who it might be. And it was Ariel!

She was standing just inside the door staring straight ahead of her as if she was in a kind of trance. She was wearing a long white coat which set off her black hair now streaming loosely about her shoulders. After a moment she moved towards the stairs and began to ascend them. But she still had the air of a sleepwalker.

Roxanna stared at her with frightened eyes as she came slowly up to the landing. She saw that the girl's face was abnormally pale and her lovely green eyes were wide and dazed. She waited until Ariel had reached the top of the stairs before attempting to speak to her.

Then she said, "Ariel, where have you been?"

She suddenly seemed to come out of her trance and swaying a trifle gave a small startled cry. And then she said, "How did I get here?"

"You came into the house and up the stairs," she said. "You seemed to be in some kind of hypnosis." They stood together on the shadowy landing with only the unsatisfactory wall lamp to cast its faint glow, barely illuminating their faces. Then Ariel turned and for the first time Rox-
anna saw the red mark on her half-sister’s throat and the few spatters of blood down the front of the white coat. It hit her with startling impact. She could only think of Barnabas and those icy lips on her own throat.

Ariel appeared not to notice her shock. She said, “I can’t seem to remember anything of the last few minutes.”

“You were outside,” Roxanna prompted her.

“Yes,” the dark girl nodded. “Reid Sterling came late to see me. I put this coat on over my night clothes and went down to speak to him. He was in a very upset state and kept asking about you.”

“What did you tell him?”

“That you were out somewhere.”

“What did he say then?”

Ariel frowned and shook her head as if trying to clear her thoughts. “It’s hard to recall it all. He rambled on about father’s murder and suggested that Barnabas had something to do with it. He talked wildly.”

“So it seems.” Roxanna somehow kept herself under control as she let her half-sister explain in her own fashion. She was growing increasingly more worried about where Barnabas fitted in it all. She couldn’t close her eyes to that mark on Ariel’s throat. The too familiar mark!

“When he decided to leave I went out with him,” Ariel went on, her pretty face shadowed by her recollections. “I stood on the steps as he drove away in his carriage. And then I heard my name called softly from the darkness. I couldn’t believe it at first. But someone in the mist called out to me again.”

“You should have gone inside at once,” Roxanna told her.

“I didn’t. I strained to see who it was and I couldn’t. Then I went down the steps and cut across the lawn a little.” She paused. “I’m not sure what happened next. Someone suddenly took hold of me. I screamed and fainted. When I came to I was stretched out on the grass near the edge of the cliff. My mind was completely confused so that all I could think of was getting back here.”

“And you weren’t bothered on the way back?”

“No. Though I don’t remember any of it, not even letting myself into the house, until you spoke to me just now.”

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Roxanna sighed. "Thank Heavens you’re safe."

Ariel looked at her with frightened eyes. "What does it mean? Who could it have been that attacked me?"

"I don’t know," she said wearily. Though she was certain in her mind it had been Barnabas. And all the accusations she’d heard about him came crowding into her thoughts to torment her. All the gossip of Barnabas being a vampire like his ancestor and dependent on a nightly supply of fresh blood for his survival.

Ariel said, "It must have been the murderer. The same one who killed father!

"You weren’t harmed," Roxanna pointed out. No need to mention the mark on her half-sister’s throat. It would vanish before morning and Ariel didn’t appear to be aware of it. Nor did she seem to have noticed the scattered specks of blood on her coat front.

"I might have been," Ariel insisted. "I’m sure whoever it was intended to kill me and was frightened off by someone coming by."

"I wouldn’t worry myself trying to make guesses about it," she said. "In the morning you can tell Robert and get his opinion."

"Why can’t I wake him and tell him now?" Ariel asked in a worried tone. "He should be told."

"Robert isn’t in the house at the moment," Roxanna said. "I heard him leave some time ago."

Ariel gave a weary sigh. "He shouldn’t do that after what has happened. Go out and leave us alone without a word. I sometimes think this house has a curse on it!"

Roxanna was startled by the other girl’s bitter words. She said, "The best thing you can do is go to your room and try and get a sound night’s sleep."

"I feel so weak and strange," Ariel worried.

"Sleep will cure that," Roxanna assured her. And she gently led her along the corridor to her own room.

She remained with Ariel long enough to see her in bed with her eyes closed. Then she softly left the room and closed the door after her. Back in her own room she paced the floor while she tried to sort out the happenings of the trying night. Ariel’s story and the mark on her throat had placed a new light on everything.

She still refused to believe that Barnabas had anything
to do with her father’s death. But she was positive he’d attacked Ariel after saying goodnight to her. It must have happened in the short period between the time she’d left him at the door and her going to Ariel’s room and finding it empty. She would have to confront Barnabas with the facts and demand an explanation. And she hoped he would have one. But the questioning would need to be deferred until the dusk of another night.

With this all sorted out in her mind she finally went to bed. But her rest was troubled by frightening dreams in which Barnabas, the weird old Gypsy fortuneteller and her late father were all principal actors. Her dreams were as jumbled as the reality she’d lately known. Short macabre scenes without any true beginning or end flashed through her mind. She woke in the morning feeling as if she hadn’t slept at all.

It was a pleasant November morning, though chilly when the sun vanished behind occasional cloud formations. Roxanna had her breakfast alone and then saw that Ariel’s was sent up to her room. She went to the study to see if Robert was there and ask him to talk to Ariel. But the study was empty. She then checked with the servants and none of them had seen him.

Roxanna hurried upstairs to inspect his room. He had not slept there. The bed had been turned down by the maid but not used. By this time she was becoming panicky. She remembered her last sight of him as he’d vanished in the direction of the cliffs with the heavy fog shrouding him from view. And there had been the eerie cry of that night bird which had hovered over his path. Had it been an unhappy omen?

Fear gripped her as she made her way downstairs. She had avoided telling Ariel of her upsetting discovery. She knew her brunette half-sister was in a bad enough state. Even though the strain on her was great she’d keep it to herself until she knew more. Downstairs she took a cloak from the rack in the hall and started out, planning to walk in the direction in which she’d last seen Robert.

But as she opened the door to leave she was faced by a caller on the front steps. It was Theodore Collins. He was wearing a tweed hat and matching coat and carrying his cane. He stood there the epitome of portly dignity with a
grim look on his florid, puffed face.

“I have come to see Robert,” he announced stiffly.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “He’s not here.”

Theodore Collins looked annoyed. He shifted his weight and leaned on his cane. “Where can I find him?”

“I couldn’t say at the moment,” she said impatiently.

The old man looked at her with disbelief. “I see,” he said in a bleak tone. “Will you tell him that I called and I would like to discuss a business matter with him at the earliest opportunity.”

“I will,” she promised.

The squire of Collinwood tipped his hat politely though his expression indicated that he thought she’d been lying to him. Then he turned and slowly made his way down the steps. She forced herself to stand there until he had begun the walk back to his own place. Then she rushed down the steps and across the lawn in the direction Robert had taken the foggy night before.

It was only a matter of a few minutes until she was standing on the edge of the cliff. So far she’d seen no sign of Robert or any indication that he had come that way. The tide was out and she let her eyes wander over the exposed stretch of beach. And then, almost by accident, she saw the crumpled body. It was huddled near the bottom of the cliff, so close she’d nearly overlooked it.

Something between a moan and a gasp emerged from her lips. She raised the back of her hand to her mouth and stood there aghast. Then bleak hope made her gain some faint control of herself and she sought out a steep path that would take her down to the beach. She wasn’t wearing shoes proper for this type of walking and so she stumbled over and over again, nearly twisting her ankle once. At last she reached the foot of the cliff.

She dodged between the great boulders until she came to the place where Robert’s body lay huddled. A single glance at close range told her what common sense should have made clear above. Robert was dead! His face showed an expression of fear and his eyes were wide and staring. With another tiny moan she turned away from the sickening sight and staggered back to the path.

Somehow she found her way back to the house and spread the word about the tragedy. She sent a servant to
the village to telephone the Ellsworth Chief of Police. Her father had refused to have a phone in the house. Then she went upstairs to tell Ariel the tragic news. For a time she was too stunned to realize the enormity of a second tragedy visiting their family group so soon after the first one.

Ariel took things better this time. She insisted on coming downstairs with her when the Chief of Police arrived to conduct the investigation. The word had gotten around the village and both Reid Sterling and Lawyer Artemus Hoag had driven out from Collinsport to join the group of curious who had gathered on the cliff.

Then Hoag and Reid came to the house to offer their sympathy. The Chief of the Ellsworth Police looked glum and perplexed as he told her and Ariel the details about Robert's death in the presence of the two male friends of the family.

"Your brother was stabbed the same as your father," the Chief said. "Then whoever killed him pushed him over the cliff for good measure."

"It's as senseless as the first killing," Roxanna said.

The Chief nodded. "I'll warrant you that," he said. "Looks like the work of some crazy person. You two girls will have to be extra cautious from now on. Might be to your advantage to move into town or perhaps Theodore Collins would put you up at Collinwood. He has plenty of room."

Ariel spoke up in a surprisingly firm tone. "No, Chief, we're not going over there. Theodore Collins has always been our avowed enemy. Neither father nor Robert would approve of such a move."

Roxanna felt she should back up her sister in this, but she didn't want to make it seem they were carrying on a feud with the squire of Collinwood. She said, "I think Ariel is right. But Theodore has been much more friendly to us lately. In fact he was at the door this morning to see Robert before I found out what had happened."

The Chief gave Hoag a significant glance. And he then asked her, "Has he been over here any other time?"

She hesitated, biting her lower lip in her nervousness. Then she said, "I don't think it is important. But I do believe he was over here last night. I saw him on the path
that joins this property with his. But I don’t know that he called on the house. Though he was coming from this direction.”

The Chief seemed to brighten and show interest. “I’ll make it my business to have a talk with Mr. Theodore Collins,” he said dryly. “Could be he’ll have a few facts to give us.”

“Were there any clues at all?” Ariel asked in her still surprising show of level-headedness.

The Chief sighed. “Just one. Robert had a button clutched in his right hand. Looks as if he struggled with whoever it was to keep from being pushed off the cliff. And when he went he tore the button off and took it with him.” To support his story the Chief dug out a black cloth-covered button from his pocket and held it out for them all to see.

Lawyer Hoag cleared his throat. “At least that’s something. It’s plainly from a man’s overcoat. You may be able to trace the murderer by it.”

The Chief glared at the button in his hand. “I wouldn’t count on it. But it’s better than nothing.”

Reid Sterling had stepped forward to study the button more closely and a strange look had come over his youthful, pleasant face. In a quiet voice, he told the Chief, “This may be more valuable than you think.”

“I hope so,” the older man said and stuffed it in his side pocket again. “That’s about all. Except to caution you ladies.”

Hoag said, “I think you should go to the Gypsy camp at once and see if anyone there has an old coat with buttons like that. Robert was going to have them driven off the place today.”

The Chief nodded. “That’s where I’m going next.”

“If you don’t mind,” Hoag said, “I’ll go along with you. I may be of some assistance in the questioning.”

“If you like,” the Chief said, in a tone that indicated he didn’t care.

The two older men went, leaving Reid Sterling with her and Ariel. She wished he would go as well since she didn’t feel up to conversation. Lawyer Hoag’s reference to Robert’s intention of putting the Gypsies off his land had brought a painful reminder. Robert had also intended to
disclose his suspicions of Barnabas to the police. Only last night he claimed that he knew who had murdered his father. Was this knowledge the reason he’d been so suddenly murdered?

Ariel got up. “I have a splitting headache,” she said. “If you two will excuse me I’m going to my room.” She gave Reid a nod and at the door of the living room turned to tell Roxanna, “Don’t hesitate to come up if there is any important news.”

When she had gone Reid Sterling gave Roxanna a wise look. “Ariel is taking this second murder a lot better than she did the first one.”

She sighed. “Yes. I’d say she’s being terribly brave.”

“I’m not sure I’ve ever understood Ariel,” the young man said. “Last night she was in a strange, subdued mood.”

“She’s always been temperamental,” Roxanna said. In the shock of the discovery of Robert’s murder she had said nothing to the police about the attack on Ariel. And surprisingly Ariel, despite her coolness, had not said anything concerning it either. In view of all the complications perhaps it was better that way. She could deal with Barnabas directly.

Reid stood in silence for a moment. Then he said, “I could have told the police something about that button but I didn’t for your sake.”

Her eyebrows raised. “For my sake?”

“That’s right,” he said gravely.

“I’d say that deserves an explanation.”

His eyes met hers. “I’m positive that button came off the caped coat your friend Barnabas wears. I recognized it right off.”

She felt a stab of fear. “You must be wrong.”

“I don’t think I am,” Reid Sterling said firmly. “And if the button is off his coat then that solves the mystery of the murderer.”

“You can’t jump to that conclusion,” she protested.

“The police would,” he promised.

“What are you going to do about it?” she asked.

The young man who had courted her so long shrugged. “I said I wanted to make it easy for you and I do. I won’t
say anything to the police if you’ll warn Barnabas he’s in trouble and get him to leave right away.”

Roxanna gave him a sharp look. “Aren’t you being extremely generous to a possible double murderer?”

“I think Barnabas is mad,” he said. “And it would be a terrible disgrace for all your family if the truth should come out. I’d be willing to have him out of the way and things the same as they were for us again.”

“I’m not sure that will be possible even if you’re right,” she said sadly.

Reid came to her and touched her arm gently. “I’m willing to take my chances,” he said.

“I’ll have to think about this,” she said. “It may be I’ll decide you should give your information to the Chief.”

“I’ll do whatever you say,” he promised.

“And now I wish you’d go,” she told him. “I feel wretched. I need time and quiet to try and think some of this out.”

“I understand,” Reid said sympathetically. He hesitated. “If you do warn Barnabas, be careful. You shouldn’t go to him alone. Either make him come here or take Ariel or somebody with you. Hoag would probably be glad to go along. I’d offer but it would likely only put Barnabas in a bad mood and complicate things.”

“I’ll arrange something,” she said vaguely.

“Remember, I love you,” Reid said as he touched his lips to her cheek.

She saw him to the door. And when he was gone she wondered at this new turn of events. She had thought, or at least hoped, Reid would transfer his affections to Ariel but it seemed that hadn’t worked out. Reid was as much in love with her as ever. And she was in love with Barnabas!

The terrifying thing was that evidence was piling up against the handsome man from New York at every turn. The way things looked now he had not only attacked her half-sister the previous night but he had probably also murdered her father and Robert. The business about the coat button was the most alarming of all. The hours until dusk would drag slowly. But she knew that Hare would never let her get by him to see Barnabas earlier.
Roxanna took only a little broth for dinner. Then she went up to Ariel's room to discover Ariel in bed.

"I'm going out," she said. "I felt I should tell you."

Ariel's black eyes showed an odd gleam in them.

"You're going to see Barnabas?"

"Yes."

"You know what the Chief said. That we should be extra careful. You'll be taking a risk going over there."

"I must talk to him."

"Take the carriage and a driver," Ariel insisted. "Don't try to walk by the shortcut path."

Roxanna frowned. "That seems needless. I could be with Barnabas a long while. I don't want to keep the horse and driver waiting."

"I consider that less important than your safety," Ariel said. "Unless you do as I suggest I'll get up and dress and go with you myself."

"There's no need of that," Roxanna said hastily. "I'll order the carriage if it will make you feel better."

"It will," her half-sister said. "And be sure and come by and say goodnight when you return. No matter how late it is."

"You mustn't worry," Roxanna said, touched by Ariel's concern. She bent over and kissed the dark girl on the cheek.

Ariel gave her a tender look. "Remember we have only each other now," she said.

"I will," Roxanna promised.

As soon as she went downstairs again she had the carriage ordered. The stable man brought it around front about ten minutes later looking surprised. As he helped her into the neat black rig, he asked, "Will you be going to the village, miss?"

"No," she said. "Just over to Collinwood. The old house. I'll want you to wait awhile for me."

"Yes, miss," the man said, looking even more perplexed, as he closed the carriage door.

The drive to the old house was a short one. It was dark by the time they got there. Yet while the windows of Collinwood had showed lights on several floors the house in which Barnabas was staying was in blackness. Its closed
shutters gave it a forbidding look even in daytime. At night it had a menacing appearance.

“I hope I won’t be long,” she told the driver. “Better put a blanket on the horse and bundle yourself up. It’s cold tonight.”

“Yes, miss,” he said, glancing up at the stars. “A true November night with the fog all gone.”

She left him to cross to the front door of the house. She mounted the steps and knocked on the door. She wondered what she’d do if Barnabas should not be there. What if he’d vanished? Would she take his disappearance as a mute admission of his crimes? She wasn’t sure.

Then the door creaked open and she saw Hare. The manservant made one of his harsh grunting sounds and motioned her to enter. It took some courage on her part since the inside of the house appeared to be in complete darkness. But she had no choice since she was determined to talk with Barnabas.

Hare guided her down the narrow corridor and then she saw faint light emanating from the double doors of the living room on the left. He halted by the living room doors and pointed inside.

Somewhat timidly she went by him to enter the elegant room. There was a log fire blazing in the fireplace and Barnabas was sitting in a chair before it with his face covered by his hands. He presented a picture of utter dejection and increased her fears without a word being spoken. He seemed unaware of her presence.

Roxanna went directly to him and touched a hand to his shoulder. “Barnabas,” she said in a quiet voice.

He lowered his hands and looked up at her. Unhappiness had added to the gauntness of his handsome face. He said, “I wondered when you’d come.”

“You know what has happened.”

Barnabas got up and stood facing her. “Yes,” he said solemnly. “I can’t tell you how badly I feel about Robert’s murder.”

She looked at him with perplexed eyes. “There’s so much to explain,” she said. “You must know that.”

“Once I asked you to have faith in me,” he said. “I’ll ask you again. Everything depends on that.”
"I want to believe you," she said earnestly. "But you've told me so little! And there's been such ugly gossip! Now it has become more than gossip. I'm faced with facts."

His eyes were burning with despair. "You're talking about Ariel," he said. "And what I did to her last night."

"Then you do admit it," she said, not knowing exactly how this admission affected her.

"Yes. I did succumb to an old weakness. You must have seen the mark on her throat."

"Yes," she said in a strained voice.

"You have seen it many times on your own throat."

"I know. And I have wondered why your kiss caused it."

"It's something I haven't wanted to discuss with you," Barnabas said heavily.

"I'm afraid we must talk about it now."

"I did Ariel no harm."

"I realize that," she said. "Ariel doesn't even know who attacked her or why she felt so strange after recovering from her fainting spell. But I have to hear the truth from you. The truth about your kisses."

The gaunt handsome face showed a bitter smile.

"Aren't you willing to accept the rumors they spread in the village?"

"No. I need the truth from you."

"If you have faith in me that shouldn't be necessary," Barnabas said studying her closely.

"I love you," she said brokenly. "And love transcends faith. But I feel you owe me the truth. That you should want to tell it to me."

"I do. I have been sitting here trying to decide if it will be fair to you."

"Anything is better than being in the dark. Especially now that you may be accused of the murders!"

His eyebrows lifted. "Accused of the murders?"

"Yes. There's a clue this time. The police don't know yet that it points to you."

Barnabas stared at her. "How do you know?"

"I was told."

"What kind of clue?" His voice had taken on a sharp edge.

"A button," she said. "A button torn from your coat."
“What about the button?”

“It was found in Robert’s hand,” she said in a taut voice. At the same time her eyes searched the caped coat of Barnabas and she saw that one of the coat buttons was surely missing!
CHAPTER TEN

Barnabas followed her glance and touched the place on his dark caped coat where the button was missing. He gave her a grim look. “Yes,” he said, “it’s true I have lost a button but I can’t imagine how it got in Robert’s hand unless someone put it there.”

She listened to his words delivered in an even tone. The tone of a man spelling out facts. And she wanted to believe him. She asked, “Why did you say that?”

“I lost the button a few nights ago,” he told her.

They stood there tensely facing each other in the shadowed atmosphere of the candlelit room. She said, “Where?”

“In Sterling’s General Store. I caught it on the edge of one of the counters and it came off and rolled out of sight. I tried to find it since it was covered with cloth matching my coat and I didn’t want to lose it. But I couldn’t locate it.”

Roxanna frowned. “That’s strange!”

“What?”

“It was Reid who told me the button belonged to you. He seemed to know all about it.”

Barnabas gave her a wise look. “Then it would seem he knows more than he revealed. He may also know how it got into Robert’s hand.”

Her mouth gaped open. “You’re not suggesting Reid killed Robert?”

“I’m not trying to accuse him,” Barnabas said quietly. “I’m merely pointing out that I lost the button in his father’s store. Someone must have found it, knowing it belonged to me, and deliberately placed it in Robert’s hand after murdering him.”

“Was he in the store when you lost the button?”

“The store was crowded that night. I can’t say for sure but he was likely there.”

Roxanna gave a deep sigh. “Any one of a number of people might have found it after you left. And whoever placed it in Robert’s hand did so deliberately to involve you.”
“It’s a wonder the police haven’t been here to question me.”

“Reid hasn’t given them the information yet. They’re down at the Gypsy camp now seeing if they can connect the button with any of them. Reid has offered to say nothing if you’ll leave at once.” Her tone was bitter.

Barnabas smiled wryly. “I call that generous.”

“Not really,” she said. “He wants to be rid of you. He’s terribly jealous of us. You must have guessed that.”

“I know,” Barnabas said in a quiet voice. “How long has he agreed to remain silent?”

“Until I give him your decision,” she said. “I warned him that I didn’t think we’d want to accept his terms. That the police should be told and you’d remain to face the charge.”

“I’ll be a prime suspect in the murders.”

“I know you didn’t do them,” she said in an upset voice. “And surely you should have no trouble proving your innocence.”

“There could be complications,” Barnabas said. “What will I do?”

He shrugged. “Have we any choice? We shouldn’t allow ourselves to be blackmailed by that young man. Information should not be kept from the police. Let him tell them what he likes and I’ll fight the charges with the truth and hope I’m able to clear myself.”

A warm rush of confidence in the tall, handsome man filled her. She went to him and pressed tightly against him. “Oh, Barnabas, these last twenty-four hours have been awful!”

His arms were around her comforting her. “I know how you must feel. But one day you’ll remember this only as an unhappy nightmare. It won’t even seem important to you. The main thing now is to protect yourself. The murderer who killed your father and half-brother seems determined to wipe out your family for some reason. Both you and Ariel may be in grave danger.”

“We realize that,” she said. “I came over in the carriage tonight. It’s waiting for me.”

“Good,” Barnabas said. And he touched his cold lips to her forehead. And as she looked up at him tenderly he kissed her on her lips. But the kiss was brief, almost as if
he were fighting against his feelings for her. And with an expression of great sadness in his deep-set eyes he let her go.

She said, "Is something wrong?"

He nodded. "Yes. We have still to face the most important problem. I haven't explained about Ariel yet."

In her relief that he wasn't afraid to stand up to charges of the murders she'd almost forgot the other puzzling business. Now it came rushing back to assume a formidable threat in her mind.

"No, you haven't," she agreed.

Barnabas moved away from her to stare into the blazing logs in the fireplace. His back partly to her, he spoke in a weary voice. "I have wanted to spare you this. From the moment we first met in that dark New York street I've had a special feeling for you."

"So have I for you," she said, moving a step towards him.

He kept studying the fire forlornly, avoiding her eyes. "Molly warned you not to fall in love with me because she knows my secret."

"I don't care. I am in love with you," Roxanna said firmly. "Nothing else has equal importance."

He gave her a troubled glance. "I'm not the person you think I am."

"In what way?"

"Perhaps it will be easier to show you," he said. "I'll take you to the cellar room where my daylight hours are spent."

He picked up a candelabrum from a nearby mahogany sideboard and held it to light them along the dark hall to the cellar. As they walked in silence she was aware of a weird cold, clammy feeling in the stale air of the ancient house. She supposed it had to do with it being shut up so long. But it made her terribly uneasy.

Barnabas halted in the corridor to open a door that led down the steps to the cellar. He waited for her to go first and then followed close on her heels. The steps were narrow and extremely steep. Only the light from the candles broke the blackness of this underground region of the old house. The damp coldness she'd experienced in the hall upstairs was even more noticeable in these dark depths.
Panic began to stir in her again. She had the conviction that she was on the brink of some horror. And she fought a desire to plead with Barnabas to take her back. It would be so much easier not to know. To go on as they were. But common sense dictated that she must see it through. Things were far too complicated for shirking the truth any longer.

Barnabas had kept referring to a secret. It was time she knew that secret for the good of both of them. They would be faced with fresh ordeals in the next several days if Barnabas was charged with the murders. And she felt sure he would be. Once Reid Sterling had informed the police who the button belonged to they would concentrate on Barnabas. There was so much suspicion of him already he would make an ideal scapegoat.

They seemed to be walking endlessly in the darkness and now she was trembling a little. She glanced up at Barnabas as he marched along the earthen floor beside her and saw his handsome face was set in a stern expression and he was gazing straight ahead. The moldy odor of things stored too long in the darkness assailed her nostrils and made her think how much this deep cellar must resemble the grave.

At last they had gone the length of the cellar and now Barnabas with the glowing candelabrum still held high stopped before another heavy door. It had a latch on it and a place to fit a padlock. But it was not locked at this moment. He lifted the latch and pushed the door open. It gave way with a melancholy creaking to reveal a large shadowed room.

"I will go first," Barnabas said and stepped inside.

Roxanna was bewildered by her surroundings. Why would this handsome man spend his daylight hours in this dark, secluded room? And then as he swung the candelabrum around, her eyes caught the casket on its stand. The casket she had seen removed from his lodgings in New York and which had been placed on a wagon when they arrived in Collinsport.

She gasped and with frightened eyes turned to him and asked, "Why have you brought me down here to see this?"

The candlelight reflected on the gaunt face of the man she had come to love. "To reveal the truth," he said in his
deep, resonant voice. "This is where I sleep in the day."

She stared at the open coffin in horror. "In it?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"In view of the rumors and the legend of my ancestor, the first Barnabas Collins, I would have expected you to guess by now," he said, his deep-set eyes fixed on her.

She stood there in the damp, cold shadows sick with concern. "Perhaps it's something I haven't wanted to face. That I have deliberately tried not to think about."

"I don't want you to be revolted by what I'm going to tell you," he said solemnly. "But I am the original Barnabas Collins. I am more than a century old. And I have lived under a witch's curse for all that time. Suffered as one of the living dead. What those people refer to as vampires."

She listened in disbelief. "But you seem so normal!"

"I take pride that I am in most ways," Barnabas said. "But I have lived this way too long and suffered too much. The curse of a woman named Angelique has haunted me down through the years."

Her eyes sought out the casket again and she studied its ornate pattern, the gray satin lining and the heavy brass handles with a feeling of horror. "You spend your days there like one of the dead?"

"In the hours of daylight I am one of the dead," he said simply.

"And then?"

"From dusk to sunrise I am free to live a reasonably normal life. But I pay a dreadful price for the privilege. I must have human blood to survive. The fresh, warm blood of young maidens serves best." As he spoke a strange look came over his face.

Roxanna stared at him. "But you do not kill in your thirst for blood?"

"No, I do not," Barnabas said in his quiet fashion. "But there are others suffering from the vampire curse who do. And so all of us are grouped by the superstitious as monsters!"

"So you have lived on my blood," she said. "And last night it was Ariel who satisfied your needs."

"Yes," he admitted with a frown. "I had hoped that I
would not require blood last night. But the desire came to me in an overwhelming fashion as it sometimes does. I'm ashamed that I took advantage of her.”

“She need never know.”

“Perhaps it was a good thing after all,” Barnabas suggested. “It brought me to the point of breaking the truth to you. I keep coming back to Collinwood and hoping that one day I will find a means to break the curse. That I will discover the way back to a normal life and a normal death. If I could manage that I wouldn’t hesitate to declare my love for you.”

Roxanna was looking at him with fresh understanding. “You needn’t hesitate to declare it now,” she said gently.

A look of infinite sadness crossed the handsome face. “Surely you haven’t understood me. All my contemporaries are buried in the old cemetery. That is why I go there so often. I’m drawn to that realm of rotted caskets, dry dust and gray-white skeletons.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“I couldn’t tie you to such horror,” he protested. “You are young and lovely and of another age.”

“I might be dead or worse if you hadn’t come to my rescue,” she reminded him.

“I did that gladly as any man would have,” Barnabas said. “You owe me nothing.”

“I don’t feel in your debt,” she said. “I happen to have fallen in love with you.”

“Knowing everything?” he demanded in astonishment.

“Especially because I know your sad history,” she said. “I’m sure you can be saved. We’ll find a way. And until then we’ll go on as we have been.”

Barnabas smiled at her in wonder. “You’re a remarkably courageous girl but I can only allow so much sacrifice.”

“Let me be the judge of that,” Roxanna said. “And let us not refer to any of this again. At least not until the crisis of the murders are over. What will you do if the police come for you in the day? You’d be helpless here in your coffin.”

“Hare will take care of that,” he said. “He is completely trustworthy. He keeps this room padlocked until I awake at dusk. The police will not know I’m in here. And
if they approach me in the evening I'll be able to deal with them."

She shuddered. "Please take me back upstairs."

When they were in the living room again she found herself in a better state of mind. Even though the secret Barnabas had revealed was a shocking one she at least was no longer in doubt. She felt that she at once understood him and his motives better. And she was certain that no matter what Reid Sterling said Barnabas was not a murderer. He had replaced the candelabrum on the sideboard and now he offered her a glass of wine. "I think you need that," he said. "You look very white."

She took the wine and sipped it. "I must go back to the house. It isn't fair to leave Ariel alone."

"I would go with you," he said. "But since you have the carriage there is no need."

"I'll be perfectly safe," she assured him.

Barnabas said, "So now we wait and see what happens next?"

"I suppose so," she agreed. "I believe one of the Gypsies is the murderer. Bianca made her predictions because she knew what was going to happen."

Barnabas was grim. "The old crone may have some special powers. I must admit she did show fear of me. Hinted that I was tainted with the supernatural. And I am."

"That was because you crossed her and said she was a fake," was her comment. "I don't think she sensed you were a vampire."

"It's hard to say," Barnabas admitted.

"If one of the Gypsies isn't guilty it has to be somebody else who has easy access to the place and knows it. It's strange but Theodore Collins has been over to our house twice in the last two days. After him not ever coming near us before."

"I wonder, why?"

"So do I. He's elderly and pompous but he carries a cane. And it wouldn't come as a surprise to learn that it was a sword cane the same as yours."

Barnabas stared at her. "Are you hinting you think he could be the murderer?"
"I'm so confused I don't know what to think," she admitted.

"Be cautious and wait," Barnabas said. "The chances are the murderer will eventually reveal himself."

"I hope so," she said. "And now I'd better leave."

"I'll see you to the carriage," he said.

As they left the old house for the chill November night outside she hesitated on the steps to ask him, "When will I see you again?"

"Tomorrow night if nothing happens to prevent me from coming," Barnabas said. "I'll call at your house."

She gave him a pleading look. "Barnabas, please be careful!"

"I will," he said.

They went on down the steps to the waiting carriage. The driver seemed glad to see her as he scrambled down from his seat and opened the carriage door. "Home, miss?" he inquired.

"Yes," she said.

After a last goodbye for Barnabas she seated herself in the carriage and was driven by Collinwood again along the narrow road to her own house. Seated in the dark interior of the carriage she had the first opportunity since she'd talked with Barnabas to sort out her thoughts. It was clear Barnabas was in a desperate plight. Even if he managed to clear himself in regard to the murders he still faced the hazards of his affliction.

So the portrait she'd once studied in the hallway of Collinwood was actually his. It shouldn't have surprised her since his resemblance was so strong. Yet it was hard to think of the handsome Barnabas as someone over a hundred years old. And really he wasn't. You couldn't count the time he'd spent as a vampire as regular years of life. He'd been only partially alive as he'd explained.

No doubt he'd had many young women fall in love with him over the years. That was to be expected. But she was sure none of them had cared for him more than she did. Probably some of them had learned about the curse that had turned him into a wanderer of the night and tried to find some way to lift the evil from him. Obviously none of them had succeeded thus far. But she would not let that
make her give up hope. She would contact experts in the field of the supernatural and seek their advice until Barnabas was saved. She vowed it!

In the meantime she would have to guard his secret. Ariel had not guessed that it was Barnabas who’d seized her in the dark and she would not tell her. She only hoped that he wouldn’t be overwhelmed by a desire for blood when she wasn’t there to offer her own and be forced to go out and seek a victim in the village. This thought troubled her most of all. It was so risky for him!

The carriage came to a halt in front of her place and she left it and went inside. The undertaker had brought Robert’s body while she was away. And she went in through the living room door to stand briefly beside the plain gray casket. Robert now looked asleep and his features showed none of the horror that had marked them when she’d discovered his body on the beach. The undertaker had done his work well.

There was an eerie silence about the room in which the dead man rested. It seemed to her the house had been shadowed by a strange, tense atmosphere since the first murder. There was a brooding menace in its murky rooms and corridors she could not explain. The lamp that hung from the fixture in the center of the ceiling was inadequate to provide light in the large living room. But she supposed the servants felt she would not want the room too brightly lighted. And of course they were right.

After spending a few minutes by the casket she remembered her promise to go to Ariel’s room and speak with her before going to bed. She started out of the room for the stairs but before she reached them she was halted by a loud knocking on the front door. The sound came so suddenly it startled her. A look of fear crossed her pretty face as she hesitated before going to answer it.

The knocking was repeated again. And still she held back from going over and opening the door. It was getting late and she couldn’t imagine who would be intruding on the household at this hour during their time of bereavement. The thought that it might be the murderer sent icy fingers along her spine.

But in the end she moved cautiously to the door and with her hand on its heavy brass knob leaned an ear
against it as she asked, "Who is it?"

"Reid," came the muffled reply from the other side.

Her fear evaporated and she quickly opened the heavy oak door. She gave the young man a relieved look as she let him step into the hall. "I couldn’t think who it was. You terrified me."

Reid Sterling looked embarrassed. "I didn’t mean to. But I’ve been worried about our talk today." He paused and gave her a significant look. "I suppose you’ve been to see Barnabas Collins."

"Yes, I have."

"What did he have to say?"

"He admitted to losing a button from his coat," she said. "But he claims it came off and rolled under a counter in your father’s store. He wasn’t able to locate it."

The brown-haired youth smiled bitterly. "I might have expected him to come up with something convincing like that. But it won’t help him any unless there were witnesses who saw it happen."

Roxanna was fairly positive there had been none. That Barnabas would have to ask the authorities to take his word for it. But she didn’t want to give Reid the satisfaction of admitting this.

She said, "I didn’t ask if anyone saw it happen."

"I take it he’s not leaving then," Reid said in a sullen tone.

"Why should he if he’s innocent?"

"And you encouraged him to stay."

She shrugged. "I think he is doing the right thing."

"That’s all I wanted to know," Reid said with a grim expression. "I’ll get in touch with the police in Ellsworth tomorrow morning."

"Aren’t you being needlessly vengeful?" she asked.

Reid glanced towards the open doors of the living room and her half-brother’s casket beyond. He said, "You can ask that with Robert’s murdered body in there?"

"I don’t believe it was Barnabas who killed him," she said stoutly.

"I do."

"Then you’ll have to act as you think best," she said. "I don’t want to talk about it any longer. I need to go up to bed."
Reid came close to her, his youthful face distorted by concern. "What’s happened to you, Roxanna? You’re not being sensible about this. I don’t want to hurt you but you’re forcing me to do it. I love you."

She sighed. "I know how you feel, Reid. I’m sorry but this is something on which we’ll never agree." And she turned and crossed to the stairs. As she started up them he came and called after her.

"Roxanna, may I go in and remain with Robert for a few minutes?" he asked. "I’d like to pay my respects privately."

Touched, she halted and turned to look down at his troubled young face. "Of course," she said. "Thank you, Reid. You can let yourself out when you are ready to leave."

"I will," he said. "You’re certain there’s no hope of Barnabas changing his mind and leaving Collinsport?"

"Not at this time."

"I’m sorry," he said, his face taking on a stern, determined look once more. And he turned and walked into the living room.

Wearily she went on upstairs. The scene with Reid had come at a time when she was ill-prepared for it. The hours at the old house with Barnabas and the revelations he’d offered had exhausted her. Reid’s coming and demanding a showdown at this late hour had been simply too much. Though she liked the young man she felt he was impulsive and rather heartless.

When she reached Ariel’s room a thin line of soft light showed from under the door. This was a sign she was still awake. She tapped gently on the door and then went in. Ariel was propped up in bed, several pillows at her back and a novel in her hands. A bedside lamp had been turned up high to provide light for her reading.

Seeing Roxanna, she put the book aside and asked, "How did your evening go?"

"Very well. Barnabas and I had a long talk."

"You know that Robert’s body arrived while you were out?"

"Yes. I went in to see him before I came up here."

"How handsome he looks in death."

"It’s heart-breaking," Roxanna admitted.
Ariel looked down as if she were about to lose control and burst into tears. "Who could have been so wicked as to kill father and Robert? And why?"

"If we knew that we'd know everything," Roxanna said.

Ariel swallowed hard and in a choked voice said, "The funeral is to be tomorrow afternoon. It only seems a day ago we buried father."

"It hasn't been long."

Ariel lifted frightened eyes to her. "Do you suppose we'll be next? Does the murderer want to erase the entire family?"

"I hope not. Though I believe whoever is responsible must be insane."

"I'm too nervous to sleep," Ariel fretted. "I may be better now that you're home again."

Roxanna nodded. "It's important you get some sleep. We have a hard day ahead of us tomorrow."

"I know," her half-sister said. Then she gave her a searching glance. "Can't we sell this place to Theodore Collins now that it's all ours? He's always wanted it and the lumber land. I can't bear to think of going on living here."

For the first time Roxanna realized that the handling of the property was now the responsibility of her and Ariel. They were both rich with her father and Robert no longer alive to share the family fortune. And Ariel was offering a sound suggestion. The lumber business was not a suitable one for them to try operating.

She said, "I'm inclined to agree with you. This house is suddenly making me feel goose-fleshy. Ghosts seem to crowd the halls and rooms. All at once it's a place of haunted creatures. We can settle our plans after the funeral."

"Yes," Ariel said. "Hoag will be on hand to advise us. I don't want to remain here a moment longer than I need to."

Roxanna said goodnight to her and then started for her own room. She was on the point of turning out the night light that hung in a bracket near the first landing when she heard the moaning sound from down below. The house had been so silent she'd assumed that Reid had left while
she was talking to Ariel. And now this moan came to indicate there was somebody down there.

Alarmed she slowly made her way down the broad stairs. The first thing she noticed was that the living room was in darkness. Someone had put the single light out, leaving Robert's casket completely in the shadows. Perhaps Reid had done it before he left to be helpful. She hesitated in the doorway of the dark room listening to hear if the sound came again and thinking she might have imagined it in her upset state.

And then to dispute this there came another tormented groan. And her hair fairly stood on end as she gazed with horrified eyes at the casket in the realization the groan had come from over there!
CHAPTER ELEVEN

The eerie groan which had come from the direction of the coffin froze Roxanna where she stood. The wild thought that it might be Robert rousing from some death-like trance crossed her mind. At once she dismissed this as impossible. She had seen him stabbed and broken on the beach. The aura of death about him had been unmistakable. This sound came from some other source.

And then at the far end of the room she saw a figure move in the shadows. And as her frightened eyes fixed on the moving phantom she recognized the caped-coat of Barnabas. It was his tall, familiar figure she was seeing. And it had been Barnabas who'd been groaning so piteously. At once she was filled with panic that he'd been wounded and had come to her for aid and refuge.

"Barnabas!" she said tensely and rushed into the blackness of the living room.

And then, too late, she saw that while the figure wore a coat similar to that of Barnabas it was not him. The man standing there before her had a black mask covering his entire face and in his hand was a sword which was pointed menacingly at her.

With a frightened cry she stumbled back and somehow dodged the evil thrust of it. In moving around she had allowed the phantom creature to get between the door and her. She was trapped! She screamed as he came lunging at her again with the sword. This time in her effort to save herself she fell back against the side of Robert's coffin. She heard the heavy breathing of the masked killer and screamed once more.

This time there was an answering scream. It came from Ariel who had suddenly appeared in the murky hallway to stare at the frenzied scene through the double doors. The advent of Ariel had an immediate and unexpected effect on the killer. He whirled around, abandoning his pursuit of Roxanna, and raced out towards the terrified Ariel. She screamed again as he gave a vicious lunge at her with the sword but somehow missed. Then he ran on to the front door and made his escape into the darkness leaving the door open behind him.
Roxanna turned to Ariel who looked as if she might collapse. "Did you get a good look at him?"
Ariel nodded, her big green eyes still wide with fear. "Yes," she said huskily.
"Could you tell who it was?"
Ariel gazed at her in consternation. "You mean you didn't recognize him? It was Barnabas."
"Oh, no!" Roxanna cried out. This was the worst possible turn of events. In her panic Ariel had merely glimpsed the familiar caped-coat and at once assumed it was Barnabas. She said, "It wasn’t Barnabas. I saw him well enough to know that. This man was wearing a black mask."
"He was dressed like Barnabas," Ariel insisted. "And his size."
"It was someone deliberately masquerading as Barnabas to put the blame on him," Roxanna told her.
"I don't know," Ariel murmured, still unconvinced. "I had a better chance to study him than you," she insisted.
"Who could it be then?"
She took a deep breath as she stood in the murky hallway staring out into the cold darkness. "I don't know," she said. And then a sudden thought struck her and she turned to Ariel with a tense look. "I left Reid Sterling down here alone when I went up to say goodnight to you. He was going to leave on his own and see the door was locked after him."
"So?"
Roxanna stared at her half-sister. "Suppose he didn't leave but only pretended to. Then he came back in later wearing a coat of the exact cut as the one Barnabas has. And he put a mask over his face and waited for me holding a sword from a sword-stick of the same type Barnabas carries. It could have been Reid who tried to kill me."
"Not Reid!" Ariel protested.
"It could have been," she said firmly. "He's about the same size as Barnabas."
"But Reid is in love with you. Why should he want to kill you?" Ariel asked hopefully.
"Because I told him I was in love with Barnabas. And I
refused to send Barnabas away."
"I still think you’re wrong," Ariel replied.

By this time an old manservant had come shuffling in and closed the door after him. "Would there be anything I can do for you ladies?" he asked quizzically.

Roxanna looked at him bleakly. "I suppose not," she said in a resigned tone. And as the servant went back down the hall with the candle she turned to her half-sister and in a gentler voice, told her, "We’d better go up and get some sleep."

Ariel nodded. Then she stared into the living room at Robert’s casket. "What do you suppose he thinks of all this?"

"I’m sure I don’t know," she said. "Poor Robert!" Ariel sighed. And then she let Roxanna lead her up the stairs. Part way up, she said, "I can’t go back to my room alone. Let me sleep with you."

"If you like," Roxanna said, not adverse to company herself.

In Roxanna’s room Ariel stood by the dresser and frowned. "Why are you so determined Barnabas isn’t the murderer? He’s such an eccentric man in spite of his charm. Everyone thinks he must be a little crazy."

"I know better," she said quietly.

Ariel stared at her in surprise. "You seem so very sure about him."

"I am," Roxanna told her. "And no matter what accusations are made against him I want you to promise you won’t repeat what happened here tonight to anyone."

Ariel was clearly bewildered. "But someone tried to murder us. If our screaming hadn’t roused the servants and scared him off he likely would have."

"I don’t want to talk about it yet," Roxanna insisted. "By keeping quiet it may be we’ll learn the identity of the killer sooner."

Ariel gave her a knowing look. "You’re sure you’re not keeping silent merely to protect Barnabas?"

It was a telling point and she hardly knew how to make a reply. But she maintained an assured front. "This has nothing to do with Barnabas," she said. "For the sake of Robert and father I beg you not to say anything."
“Very well,” Ariel said sullenly. “But I think you’re wrong.”

Roxanna didn’t care what she thought as long as she promised silence. But it was bound to be an uneasy silence. Under pressure she knew she couldn’t rely on Ariel. Especially if Reid stirred the Chief into action against the handsome dark-haired man.

The following morning there was a strong wind blowing. The sky was dark with the promise of rain and the tall trees surrounding the house bent before the force of the near hurricane. Some of the shutters had worked loose over the years and they clattered and strained in an alarming way as the wind howled around the chimneys and eaves.

It was the dismal kind of day one might expect to mark Robert’s funeral. Roxanna felt it was a show of bleak grief put on by nature to lament her half-brother’s passing. Ariel had fallen into a state of nervous melancholy again and been unable to come downstairs. Roxanna had strong doubts whether her half-sister would manage to make her way with the funeral party to the old cemetery. She’d been absent at her father’s funeral and it looked very much as if she’d not be present for Robert’s.

Rain began to fall around eleven. She stood in the living room near Robert’s casket and gazed out at the gathering storm. It would surely be unpleasant at the cemetery. But she knew the old vicar wouldn’t postpone the ceremony unless his carriage was blown off the road. And wild as the storm was, it didn’t seem likely to become that intense.

Her first caller came around noon. It was Lawyer Artemus Hoag’s familiar neat black rig that showed in the roadway before the house. He turned the carriage over to the stable man, who led it around back with his head bent to the wind as Lawyer Hoag hurried to the front door.

Roxanna let him in. “What a terrible day it’s becoming,” she said.

The bronzed man removed his raincape and black top hat. “Indeed, you’re right,” he said in his precise way. “Only the fact that I wanted to be at the graveside of Robert made me venture out of the village.”

“It is very good of you,” she said.
The big man frowned. "It is my duty. I have a strong feeling of guilt about Robert's death."

"Oh?"

"Yes," Hoag went on. "I have an idea that both Barnabas Collins and those Gypsies are in some way responsible for the murders. It could be they are linked in some unholy pact. The villagers regard Barnabas as in league with the devil. And the Gypsies have always been looked on as Satan's chosen."

"I don't think there is any link between Barnabas Collins and the Gypsies," she protested.

The lawyer eyed her mildly. "Of course you would be likely to know. You have been as close to Barnabas as anyone. If you remember, that was my idea. As it was also my idea to let the Gypsies remain here after your father's murder. I feel I was wrong in both cases."

"You shouldn't," she said. "You did what seemed right to you, I'm sure."

"Oh, I did," the lawyer said. "But we humans are so prone to error. Look how I failed you in sending you into the custody of that wicked Mrs. Makham in New York."

"Again you did what you felt was best. It couldn't be expected that you'd know the change in her character."

"But I should have been more cautious before suggesting her," Lawyer Hoag argued. "Just as I should have been more careful in my recommendations to your father and Robert. I hope you'll not think I've failed so miserably that you and Ariel will dismiss me as your attorney."

"We have no thought of that," Roxanna assured him. "And we'll need your trained help, as both Ariel and I feel we would like to sell the property and the lumber land. We'll probably move to the city."

He nodded. "I can understand how you feel. Yet I would make no hasty moves."

"I think our minds are made up," she said. "Would you like to go in and see Robert?"

"Yes," Hoag said. "I do want to pay my final respects."

And he went on into the living room to stand by the casket. He'd not been there more than a few minutes when another carriage arrived and this time it was the portly Theodore Collins who emerged from it and stalked up to
the door. When she opened it to his peremptory knocking he removed his hat and bowed stiffly.

“I have come for the funeral,” he said.

“How kind of you on such a stormy day,” Roxanna said.

The squire of Collinwood frowned as she helped him remove his soaked tweed overcoat and took his dripping hat. “One does one’s duty despite the weather,” he said with dignity.

“You have true strength of character,” she said. She glanced towards the living room. “You know Hoag, of course.”

“Since we’ve lived in the same village for a half-century or more I should,” was his dry reply.

“Perhaps you’d like to go in and join him,” she suggested.

Theodore Collins bowed to her silently, and with dignity marched into the living room to begin a conversation with Lawyer Hoag beside Robert’s casket. She watched after him and found herself trying to compare the squire’s stocky figure with that of the killer who had broken into the house last night. Theodore had broad enough shoulders to resemble those of the masked invader but she thought he was at least six inches shorter. Still, she could have made an error in his height. The tension and the darkness of last night had made everything seem grotesque.

It was becoming increasingly clear she would have to bear the burden of the funeral for both herself and her half-sister. Ariel had broken again under the strain. Others arrived for the procession that would soon head for the old graveyard. The rain was coming down heavily by the time the vicar, Reid Sterling and the Chief of Police from Ellsworth arrived. Reid Sterling was almost formal and surely aloof in his manner towards her. And he at once left her to join the group of men in the living room. No wives or female friends of Roxanna and Ariel had appeared. The day was much too stormy.

The Chief of Police paused a moment to say, “May I return here after the service and have a word with you?”

“If you like,” she said casually. She had to be calm, she knew. She was sure Reid had already told his exaggerated
story to the Chief. Now the Chief wanted to go over it with her before taking action against Barnabas.

When she had a moment she went upstairs with the vicar. They visited Ariel in her room. The dark girl was weeping. "I can't go to the cemetery," she sobbed. "I simply can't."

The vicar and Roxanna exchanged knowing glances and then he assured Ariel it would be quite all right for her not to attend. Roxanna had very little memory of the events that followed. At least not until they all had braved the wind and the rain to stand in the open by Robert's grave while the vicar hastily went through the burial service. She had chosen to stand with Lawyer Hoag. And when she lifted her eyes after the end of the service she received a shock.

Standing a little distance from her, partly shielded by a big monument was the elderly Gypsy with the kerchief on his head. He was coatless in spite of the inclement weather. And to her surprise he made a gesture to her to come to him. She made no sign that she'd seen him but as soon as she could she drifted away from the others to seek him out.

"What do you want?" she asked him.

The Gypsy looked furtive. "I have a message."

"What sort of message?"

"Bianca wants to talk with you."

She frowned. "What about?"

"She has seen something in the crystal. Something you should know. If you will come to the camp tonight she will tell you." The elderly Gypsy eyed her craftily to see what she would say.

Roxanna hesitated. "I don't know," she said. "I'll think about it."

"Old Bianca has second sight," the Gypsy reminded her. "You would be wise to come." And with that he turned and quickly vanished among the forest of tombstones.

"Who was that?" It was Hoag who had come up behind her and was now questioning her.

She turned swiftly to the bronzed, older man and made a small gesture. "One of the Gypsies. He called me over here."
The lawyer looked both astonished and alarmed. "What could one of that trashy lot have to say to you?"

"Nothing really," she improvised. "Just a lot of mumbo-jumbo about evil spirits haunting our house."

Hoag frowned. "You shouldn't have paid any attention to him. It's one of their tricks to blackmail people by pretending to put the evil eye on them. If he bothers you again let me know."

"I will," she promised, satisfied that she'd managed the situation well enough.

"I'll see you back to the house," Hoag said. "And then in a few days I'll come and discuss the estate with you and Ariel. There are many things that need to be explained. This sorry afternoon is no time to attempt it."

Roxanna allowed him to take her to her carriage. The wind and rain was still heavy and she clung to her broad-brimmed hat so as not to lose it. Lawyer Hoag let her out at the house and then drove on to the village. She'd no more than removed her wet coat and hat when the Chief of Police from Ellsworth arrived. He had one of his men with him and she showed them into the living room.

When they were ready to sit down she suggested, "Wouldn't you like some warm tea or coffee after the rain and cold of the cemetery?"

"Thank you, no," the Chief said with an uncomfortable expression on his lined face.

"Perhaps a glass of sherry for each of you, then?" she said. "It was so kind of you to attend Robert's funeral."

The Chief cleared his throat awkwardly. "Nothing, thank you," he said. "The truth is, we didn't come for the funeral alone. We have some official business here and at Collinwood."

"Oh?" She stared at him and pretended ignorance. But she knew what he was about to bring up and she was rigid with inner tension.

The middle-aged man waved towards a high-backed chair near her. "It might be easier if you'd sit down."

"Very well," she said, as she sank into the chair with her questioning eyes still fixed on him and his younger assistant.

"It's about this Barnabas Collins," the Chief said.

"Yes."
"Information has come to us that the button found in your half-brother's hand came from the coat of Barnabas Collins."

She carefully arched her brows. "How can you be sure?"

"Someone recognized the button," the Chief said with a frown. "This makes it look very much as if this Barnabas Collins is our murderer."

Roxanna showed surprise. "Surely that's a very quick judgment," she reproved the Chief. "You're making it much too easy. You'll need to do a lot more investigating before such a charge makes sense."

"We aim to," the Chief said, his face shadowing with annoyance. "But so far we haven't been able to locate this fellow."

Roxanna was exulting inwardly over the Chief's obvious frustration but she cloaked her feelings with polite interest. "Oh?"

The middle-aged man frowned. "I've tried to reason with that servant of his and all I get is odd grunting sounds and the door slammed in my face."

"Barnabas never sees anyone in the daytime."

"I represent the law," the Chief said angrily. "I'm not going to be put off with those tricks. The rumor is this Barnabas Collins is a little crazy. And he's certainly acting it."

Roxanna said, "I know Barnabas well and I'm positive he didn't have anything to do with the murders."

"You could be shielding the killer of your father and half-brother," the Chief accused her.

"No," she said firmly. "Barnabas is not that sort of man."

"Murderers are hard to recognize," he warned. "A lot of people have had nasty surprises."

"I'm not afraid in this case."

The Chief shifted uneasily from one foot to another. "Do you think if you went over there with us this Barnabas might see us? I'd like to get this business settled."

"My going along wouldn't make any difference in his rules regarding a refusal to see strangers in the daytime," she said. "You will do best to return after dusk and talk to him."

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"I have other police business besides Mr. Barnabas Collins," the Chief said with mild anger.

"I realize that," she said. "And I would like to help you. But that is my best advice. He'll cooperate with you if you call on him at the proper hour."

The Chief took a deep breath. "That's all you have to say on the subject?"

"I'm afraid so," she said, rising.

She saw the two men to the door. As they left she noticed that the wind had subsided, though it was still raining fairly heavily. Wondering what action the frustrated Chief of Police would take next, she closed the heavy oak door and turned to go upstairs. Only then did she see Ariel standing half-way down the broad stairway and realize that her half-sister must have been eavesdropping on her conversation with the police.

She approached the foot of the stairs, saying, "I didn't know you were there."

"So I gathered," Ariel said with a cold look as she stood there with a hand on the railing.

"I'm glad you're feeling better," Roxanna said, trying to manage a difficult situation. "It was fortunate you didn't attempt going to the cemetery. It stormed heavily during the service."

Ariel was gazing at her angrily. "You didn't try to help the police. You were protecting Barnabas."

"I was trying to be fair."

"You didn't tell them any of the things you should have," Ariel went on in an upset fashion. "Not about my being attacked the other night or what happened in this very house last night."

"We'd agreed to say nothing about that," Roxanna reminded her.

"You made me agree!" Ariel said in near hysteria. "Well, I warn you unless the murderer is found I won't go on being silent. If Barnabas Collins is guilty he'll have to pay."

She gave a deep sigh. "Let's not quarrel about it now."

Ariel made no answer but turned and quickly went back upstairs again. Roxanna had expected a reaction of this sort from the younger girl. But she had hoped it wouldn't
come so soon. Her overhearing the police had brought on the complication early.

She kept discreetly to herself for the balance of the day. The rain ended around six. But a heavy fog remained to make it miserable. Ariel had her dinner sent up to her and Roxanna dined in the big, gloomy dining room alone. The loss of her father and Robert was brought home to her strongly as she had her meal in forbidding silence. As dusk settled she was also worrying about Barnabas.

There seemed no doubt that he'd be questioned by the police before the night was over. She could only hope he'd be able to defend himself to them. What would happen if they should insist on taking him into custody? How would he survive? The secret of his shadowed existence would surely be revealed!

She had promised herself not to attempt grappling with the problem of the vampire curse suffered by Barnabas until the mystery of the killings had been solved. But it was such a bizarre matter that she couldn't entirely put it out of her mind. No wonder Ariel and the others were so unfair to Barnabas. He seemed weird to them since they didn't know his affliction.

By the time eight o'clock had arrived she was extremely concerned. Barnabas had promised to visit her and he should have come by now. The servants had lighted the lamps in the hallway and living room. She paced restlessly up and down the richly carpeted floor of the elegant big room hoping each minute to hear Barnabas at the door.

But not until almost nine did he come. When she heard his knock she fairly raced to the door and let him in. He entered looking his assured self with an apologetic smile on his handsome face.

"I'm sorry I'm so late," he said. "I suppose you've been worried."

"That's putting it mildly," she told him. "Was it the police kept you?"

"Yes."

"I was worried about what they might do. I feared they might arrest you."

He nodded, "I believe they were considering it but I managed to talk them out of it. At least for a while."
She looked at his coat. "I see you have had the button replaced," she said.

"Yes," he gave his attention to the middle button of the coat with its dark cloth covering. "I had Hare take care of it while I was sleeping. He did an excellent job."

"What was the last word of the police?"

"They’re coming back to question me some more tomorrow evening," Barnabas said. "I assume in the meantime they’re going to try and find additional evidence to charge against me."

Her eyes were troubled. "I’m terribly afraid for you, Barnabas."

"You needn’t be," he said. "Tell me what has gone on since last night."

And she did. Finishing with the few words she’d had with the Gypsy in the cemetery. She said, "He promised Bianca had information for me about the killer. That she would tell me if I came to her."

Barnabas was doubtful. "It sounds like a trick."

"Yes," she agreed. "Lawyer Hoag warned me against going to the Gypsy camp again. Yet I’m curious and feel I should go."

He stared at her. "Do you really mean that?"

"Yes. I’d like to know what she has to say."

Barnabas spread his hands in a gesture of resignation. "If that’s the way you feel, I’ll take you to the camp."

Roxanna knew it was what she wanted. But she remained nervous about the perils of the venture. "Do you think it will be safe?"

"As safe as it was before. There’s always some risk."

"It would be worth it if the old woman really has anything to tell us."

"Which I rather doubt," Barnabas said with a twisted smile.

"Let us go," was her final decision.

A short time later they passed the old cemetery on the way to the Gypsy camp. They moved across the fog-shrouded field like two phantoms in the night. Roxanna tried to justify the excursion on the grounds that it might result in her learning the name of the murderer. But she knew they were only too apt to be disappointed and might even be walking into some kind of trap.
CHAPTER TWELVE

They approached the Gypsy campfire. The thick fog made its blaze seem white and cold. Roxanna’s heart was pounding furiously as Barnabas walked silently beside her. Some instinct within her warned her that they were in grave danger. It had nothing to do with reason but was some primitive alarm system that was sending forth urgent danger signals.

She gave Barnabas a troubled side glance. “Perhaps we shouldn’t have come.”
“Too late to debate that now.”
“We could turn back.”
He gave her a grim smile. “Knowing you, I’d say we won’t.”

And of course he was right. The curiosity which had driven her on this far was bound to take her all the way. Again the atmosphere of the camp was quiet and sullen. No flamenco music greeted them. When they came close to the camp the elderly Gypsy who had brought her the message detached himself from a group seated about the blazing fire and came to them.

He spoke directly to Roxanna. “So you have come.”
“Yes.”
“You are a wise girl,” the Gypsy said with a knowing smile.
“I have only a few minutes,” she warned him.
“It will not take long,” he said. “Old Bianca is in her wagon.” And he turned to Barnabas to add, “She will not see you.”

“I’ll wait outside for the lady,” Barnabas said easily.

The Gypsy looked none too happy. “As you like,” he said. And to Roxanna, “Come with me.”

She followed him over to the wagon and inside. The hot, fetid atmosphere of the draped cubicle where the old woman sat hunched over her crystal ball had not changed. A single candle lit the scene, casting weird shadows of their bodies on the draped cloth walls.

The elderly Gypsy man gave Roxanna a significant glance before leaving her alone with the old fortuneteller.
This time Bianca did not raise her eyes from the crystal. But staring into its brilliant, fluid depths she intoned, "So you have returned!"

"At your request."

Bianca gave a high-pitched cackle of mirthless laughter. "You would have come anyway. Bianca has a secret you are seeking. So you would have come!"

The uneasiness Roxanna had known on the way to the camp was increasing. The humid atmosphere of the small cubicle was making her head reel and she felt there was an ominous note of triumph in the old crone’s words. Bianca was far too pleased with herself.

Firmly, she said, "If you have anything to tell me please do it and get it over with. I have someone waiting for me."

The shawled head of the ancient Gypsy woman was bent low over the crystal ball. Her claw-like hands cupped it in a loving fashion. "Yes, the one in league with Satan. He is near. I can feel his presence."

"Go on, please!"

"You would know who killed your father and half-brother?"

"Naturally."

"I have seen the answer in the crystal."

"Well?" Roxanna asked sharply.

"I must have money," the old woman said in a greedy tone. "Bianca cannot predict your future unless she receives proper reward."

"Will this do?" she asked with contempt and she placed a ten dollar bill on the table near the candle.

Bianca reached out and grasped it like an ancient vulture. After she’d transferred the bill to some secret place in her ragged garment she stared into the crystal once more.

"He is here in the crystal," the old Gypsy said in her sing-song way. "I can see him. The murderer!"

Despite her attempt to keep calm Roxanna found herself in an upset state. She leaned forward. "Who is it?"

"It is blurred," the crafty Bianca protested.

"Tell me!"

"I can only tell you where you’ll find him."

"Where?"
"Tomorrow night on Widows' Hill. He will come by there at the hour of nine. If you go alone and wait you will meet him."

Roxanna was at once angry. "What kind of an answer is that?" she demanded. "You've tricked me and taken my money for nothing. Barnabas was right. You are a charlatan!"

The crone raised a skinny brown hand. "You are condemning me before you have proven me wrong. If you will not carry out my instructions how can you hope to gain from my advice?"

"You told me a lot of nonsense!"

The old woman was staring into the crystal and not at all bothered by Roxanna's outburst. In a quiet voice, she said, "Do what I said. Be at Widows' Hill tomorrow at nine. And remember to go alone."

"I came here and wasted my time!" Roxanna said bitterly.

She turned and quickly left the unpleasant atmosphere of the wagon. With a forlorn look at Barnabas, she said, "Let us get away from here at once."

As they walked off into the fog, he asked, "What happened?"

"You were right. It was a trick to get money from me."
"You knew it was liable to be that," he reminded her.
"I hoped for something better."
"What exactly did she say?"
"That if I went to Widows' Hill tomorrow night at nine I would meet the murderer. Oh, yes, and I'd only meet him if I went alone."

Barnabas halted in the middle of the foggy field. He stared down at her in the mist-shrouded darkness. "Doesn't that sound like a trap to you?"

"I didn't think of it that way," she admitted. "I could only see she was telling me a tall story after taking my money."

"It's more than that," he said earnestly. "I believe she is deliberately sending you to Widows' Hill to be the next victim of the murderer."

She stared at him with eyes wide with fear. "You think she is in league with the killer?"

"Why not? The murders began after the Gypsies ar-
rived. The murderer is likely a member of her group.”

“But why?”

“The motive?” Barnabas asked. “I haven’t been able to think that out yet. But most murders are done because of jealousy or a wish for profit. I think it’s a matter of profit in this instance.”

“If I were killed it would leave Ariel alone,” she said. “And an easy victim for blackmail,” was his comment. “I say you should go to Widows’ Hill tomorrow night and see what happens. I’ll be there with you to protect you.”

“But she insisted I must go alone!”

“We won’t worry about that,” Barnabas said. “I have ways of concealing myself. No one will be aware I’m there until the moment when I want to reveal my presence.”

“Is it worth the gamble?”

“It’s bound to be,” Barnabas said. “I’m sure we’re close to the killer now.”

“I wonder,” she said, as they resumed walking.

But she knew she would do as he advised. She had no real choice. With Ariel ready at any minute to hurl accusations of Barnabas being the killer and Reid Sterling having given evidence against him to the police she must grasp at any straw. It seemed to her the crone Bianca had been playing a game to extract money from her. Yet there always was an outside chance that something could come of it. That was the chance she would take.

Barnabas saw her back to the door of the house but refused to go inside. “I have other things to do,” he told her. “I’m going to the village for a little.”

She stared at him with worried eyes. “You’re not going to expose yourself to danger?”

“No,” he promised. “Don’t think about it.”

“But I do,” she said. She was worried that the thirst for blood was taking over in him again. That he was heading for the village in search of some young woman to quench his parched body. He must know she was ready to offer freely her own blood. But he had been reluctant to turn to her lately. Since the moment he’d revealed his secret to her.

“When will we meet tomorrow night?” she asked.

“Not until you go to Widows’ Hill,” he said. “It will work best if you walk there alone. But don’t be afraid.
You may not see me but I’ll be close to you.”

“I am afraid,” she said with a tiny shiver. “I don’t know whether I want to keep the rendezvous or not.”

“You must,” he said. “In the meanwhile take every possible precaution as you’re still in grave danger.”

She frowned. “Now I’m not even able to talk to Ariel. She’s angry with me because she believes you’re the murderer and I’m protecting you.”

“One of the reasons why you must do what old Bianca said tomorrow night.”

She sighed. “Anything to stop them accusing you.”

The handsome Barnabas smiled grimly. “I’ve been accused of worse things and survived.”

She stared up at him earnestly. “I don’t know what I’d do it anything happened to you, Barnabas. Have you any idea how much I love you?”

“You’ve opened a new life to me as well,” he said in a gentle tone. And he drew her close to him for a long kiss. She had become accustomed to the coldness of his lips. Now that she knew the meaning of their icy state, it made no difference to her. She was happy in his embrace.

They said final goodnights a few minutes later and she went inside. Again the eerie quiet of the old house gave her a feeling of fear. She went up the broad stairway and sought the security of her own room. She had hesitated at the door of Ariel’s room and then decided against going in. She couldn’t be sure that she was welcome.

The night passed uneventfully. She awoke after having had a reasonably good sleep. The storm of the previous day had passed and the sun was shining again. When she went down to breakfast she had a pleasant surprise. Ariel was already seated at the table.

Noting her surprise, Ariel smiled at her. “You didn’t expect to see me here?”

“No.” Roxanna sat down next to her half-sister.

Ariel gave her a warm side glance. “I want to apologize,” she said. “I know I was wrong quarreling with you yesterday. Robert had hardly been buried when I had that scene with you.”

“We were both upset,” she said, busying herself with her napkin.

“No,” Ariel insisted. “It was more my fault than yours.
And I want you to know I’m sorry.”

Roxanna patted Ariel’s arm affectionately. “There’s no need to say anything more about it.”

“Not as long as you understand.”

“I do,” Roxanna assured her.

Ariel gazed down at her coffee cup. “I won’t say that I think Barnabas is innocent. But I won’t fight about it.”

“That’s fair enough,” she said, satisfied for a small truce.

“Whether it is or not that’s the way it has to be. If you are able to prove Barnabas didn’t kill father and Robert I’ll be delighted. But until you do I’ll remain suspicious of him.”

“I’m sure new evidence will turn up to clear him.”

Ariel gave her a meaningful look. “The Chief of Police didn’t seem to think so.”

“He doesn’t know all the facts,” Roxanna said quietly. Her half-sister gave her a bleak smile. “Let’s hope not,” she said.

And that was that. They began to talk of other things. Ariel was full of plans to sell the property and anxious to discuss this with Lawyer Hoag. She said, “We can’t get along with it too soon as far as I’m concerned.”

“He said he’d drop by in a few days,” Roxanna told her.

“You know how slow he can be when he likes,” the other girl warned. “I say we should drive in to the village and see him at this office if he doesn’t come out tomorrow.”

This was decided between them. After breakfast Roxanna decided to take a walk in the brisk morning sunshine. Ariel, who was not such an outdoor type, declined to join her, so she started off alone. The November sun was weak but it was a pleasant day if you were well-clothed.

Roxanna had gone as far as the cliff path when she heard the rumble of hoofbeats. She turned around to find Reid had ridden up behind her. He looked very smart in his brown riding habit as he got down off his horse and led it over to her.

“I wondered if you’d be out this morning,” he said.
“The air is wonderfully bracing,” she told him. And at the same time she patted the soft muzzle of his horse. The animal nosed against her, showing that he enjoyed the treatment and she laughed.

Reid looked at her in wonder. “I think that’s great!”

“What?” she asked in mild surprise.

His eyes met hers. “That you can laugh. After all that has happened in the last few weeks it’s amazing.”

Her lovely face shadowed. “I don’t believe either father or Robert would want me to devote all my days to sorrow.”

“Of course not,” the young man agreed.

“I still want to see their murderer brought to justice,” she said solemnly. “I’m not forgetting.”

He looked down at his riding boots rather shamefacedly. “I felt I had to tell the Chief about Barnabas.”

“I know.”

“I don’t want you to think I did it only to be spiteful,” he said with deep earnestness.

She gave his round, tanned face a searching look. “I prefer to believe you’re not that sort of person.”

“I’m not!”

“Still you have made it difficult for Barnabas and for me.”

“I’m sorry.”

She smiled thinly. “It seems to me I’m hearing a great many people say that lately. But they still go ahead and do whatever they intend to do.”

“I must get back to the village,” he said, deliberately changing the subject she was sure. “How is Ariel?”

“Better today. You should stop by and see her some time.”

He shook his head. “No good. I’m not in love with her and I’m not able to make a good pretence that I am.”

“She could use a friend,” Roxanna said. “We both can.”

The brown-haired young man gave her an earnest look. “You know my feelings for you,” he said. “Too bad it’s only Barnabas you can see these days.” And with that he swung up into the saddle again and rode away. He turned to wave goodbye once as he neared the narrow road.
He left her in a mixed-up state. She still liked him a good deal but compared to Barnabas she found him incredibly immature. That wasn't surprising considering the maturity and experience of the handsome cousin from New York. It was too bad. She was certain Barnabas had spoiled her for any of these young men.

The day went by with incredible swiftness. November days were always short and this one seemed shorter than usual. Because of the warm, pleasant day, land fog appeared with the dusk. And as the time drew near for her to go to Widows' Hill she became more and more uneasy. She and Ariel went into the living room to have their after-dinner coffee and her half-sister noticed that she was not herself.


“I didn't realize,” she said. “I have to go out and I guess it's on my mind.”

“Out where?”

“To meet Barnabas,” she said. “I won't be long.”

Ariel frowned. “I don't like you going out at night alone so soon after what's happened.”

“He's meeting me just outside the house,” she said. “There's nothing to worry about.”

But when she got her cloak to leave she wasn't all that sure. She bade Ariel a hasty goodnight and stepped outside. It was a fine night and had turned cold. The land fog hadn't cloaked everything as the sea fog did but it was showing in certain places, shrouding pockets of the estate in a weird fashion. She had to go across to Collinwood and take the cliff path from there. Only the assurance given her by Barnabas that he would be close to her all the way gave her the courage to brave the lonely path to Collinwood.

The land fog appeared suddenly in unexpected patches and showed weird shapes. Grisly phantoms seemed to stalk her from its gray mystery. It gave the surroundings a strange, ghostly look. Trembling a little, she drew the cloak around her more tightly against the cold and her fright. After what seemed an age she reached the open fields of Collinwood and sought out the cliff path that led directly to Widows' Hill.
But the land fog persisted, making the visibility wretched. Far below on her left the waves pounded in their monotonous and relentless fashion. Old Bianca had insisted the murderer would come to the high point of land known as Widows' Hill around nine o'clock. How could the Gypsy be so sure? Would she send the killer there? Was this to be a rendezvous with death?

Roxanna stared ahead at the static patches of fog. The gray formations stalked her way like weird monsters, sometimes she could see the mist taking the form of a skeleton hand and reaching out for her. She began to wonder if this was to be her last walk. If she'd ever return from it. Barnabas had told her not to be afraid. She was finding that difficult.

At last she reached the isolated high point along the cliff. From this spot she could see the Collinsport Point lighthouse on her right with its moving beam sweeping the dark sky from time to time. And far off on her left was the village. The great mansion of Collinwood with its lighted windows was not more than five minutes walk away. She was grateful for the sight of it as she stood there alone and trembling, waiting to discover if the Gypsy's prophecy would come true.

There was no sign of anyone in the area. But the land fog did cut off any distant vision. She let her eyes wander to the restless ocean below and the drop down to the rocky beach was awesome. A ripple of fear went through her as she realized what a vulnerable target she would make should the murderer show himself.

And then she froze in sheer terror as she heard a stealthy footstep behind her. There was someone just a few feet distant from her. Someone who had used the land fog to advantage to stalk her without her being aware they were near. Silence came again except for the mournful wash of the waves against the shore below. She stood there tensely hardly daring to breathe. But nothing happened!

Because she could stand the suspense no longer she wheeled around and glimpsed that familiar figure standing there appraising her. For a moment she thought it was Barnabas. He wore the same caped coat and was about
the same size. And he carried a similar black walking stick with a silver head. He was meant to be mistaken for Barnabas but she could tell this was an imposter.

"Roxanna!" Her name came in a hissed whisper from the masked man.

She stared at the black mask and the mad light in the eyes that showed through it. "Who are you?" she gasped.

"No matter," the reply came in the same weird whisper. And with a quick movement he unsheathed a sword from the walking stick and held it in his right hand pointed directly at her.

Roxanna backed away but he followed her closely. And as the point of the sword came menacingly near she was certain she was to become the third murder victim. Her eyes despairingly sought out some sign of Barnabas. But it seemed he must have failed her.

They were playing out this weird cat and mouse game in a patch of the gray land fog now. The masked man viciously lunged at her with the sword and she stumbled back with a frightened cry expecting to feel the cold steel drive through her. But it didn't!

From out of the fog the welcome figure of Barnabas appeared. Barnabas with sword in hand ready to deal with the masked killer. The murderer, at once aware of the new presence, turned quickly to protect himself. In a second the two men were engaged in desperate sword play there on the edge of the cliff. She drew back to watch the frantic contest. It took only a short time to see that Barnabas was the better swordsman. The masked man was faltering and making wild lunges while Barnabas showed no sign of weariness. Then in a movement so quick as to be almost imperceptible Barnabas plunged his sword through the side of his masked opponent.

The man dressed to be the double of Barnabas let out a loud cry of pain and collapsed, almost toppling over the edge of the high cliff. Barnabas quickly dropped his sword and went over and dragged the limp body of the masked man across the grass and away from the precarious spot where he had fallen.

Roxanna came close as Barnabas bent over the wounded man and removed the black mask. To her utter
amazement it was the face of Lawyer Artemus Hoag she saw revealed.

"Oh, no!" she cried.

Barnabas looked up at her grimly. "Lawyer Hoag," he said. "There's your murderer. Bianca did not lie about that even if she did send you here to be killed."

"Why?" she asked, stunned.

Before Barnabas could reply, the lawyer stirred a little and his eyes opened. Staring up at them, he moaned, "Tell her! Let her know!" And then he lapsed into unconsciousness or death.

Barnabas was still kneeling beside the man and she was standing there watching when she became aware of a figure coming up to them with a lantern in hand. She glanced to see who it was and recognized the newcomer as being the squire of Collinwood, Theodore Collins!

The stocky man came up with the lantern in one hand and his cane in the other to study the scene with consternation. He frowned and demanded of Barnabas, "What infernal mischief are you up to now, Cousin Barnabas?"

Barnabas stood up facing the squire of Collinwood. "Hoag is wounded badly," he said. "Will you have him taken to the house and see he gets medical attention."

The florid face of the squire was a study in astonishment. "What is this all about?"

"Hoag murdered Andrew Collins and his son," Barnabas said crisply. "I haven't time to go into details now. Roxanna and I have to see someone at the Gypsy camp."

Then Barnabas put his sword stick together and hastily grasping her by the arm led her away in the direction of Collinwood. By this time she was completely confused.

"Where are we going?" she asked, as they moved rapidly through the darkness and fog.

"To see Bianca," Barnabas said grimly, not interrupting his stride. "I have an idea one of the Gypsies was spying on us and she'll have news of what has happened before we get there."

"She was in league with Lawyer Hoag, of course," she said.

"No question of that," Barnabas said grimly.

When they approached the Gypsy campfire there was a
frenzy of activity under way. It took them only a moment to see that the Gypsies were hastily preparing to harness their horses and move the wagons. Barnabas left her to hurry ahead and approach the group. Roxanna followed quickly after him.

Barnabas found old Bianca shrilly urging the men to hurry in their preparations to leave. Roxanna watched with fascinated terror as Barnabas seized the old crone and with a swift gesture whipped the shawl from her head. Bianca fought fiercely for an elderly woman and in the glow from the campfire Roxanna had a good look at her. And in a split-second she understood the link between Bianca and Lawyer Hoag. Despite the heavy make-up to darken her skin, the woman’s hair was black. And she recognized her as being the evil Sybil Makham! Sybil Makham who had threatened her and who was supposed to have died in the fire in New York!

The Gypsies went on with their hasty preparations to leave and made no attempt to help Sybil Makham. It was obvious that she was not one of them but had engaged them to help in her masquerade. Barnabas made the sullen woman return to Collinwood, where Lawyer Hoag had been taken.

Roxanna did not get the full details until later that evening. Lawyer Hoag had been removed to an upstairs bedroom at Collinwood where he hovered between life and death. The Chief of Police from Ellsworth had arrived and had allowed Sybil Makham to remain with the severely wounded lawyer. The Chief had posted a guard outside the door. The two would be charged with the murders.

In the Collinwood living room Barnabas told an audience consisting of Squire Theodore Collins, Roxanna and the Chief the motive for the murders as he’d pieced them together.

“Sybil Makham is really the second wife of Andrew Collins who was supposed to have died in Europe. She didn’t die but ran off with the adventurer William Oakes. That was why Andrew returned an embittered man, he kept the secret down through the years. But there had been an affair between Sybil Makham and Hoag while she lived here in Collinsport as Andrew’s wife. Later she got

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in touch with him from New York. And it was through her the plan was devised to have Roxanna go to New York and vanish."

Roxanna asked, "But why?"

"Because you stood in the way of Ariel and Robert inheriting Andrew's full fortune," Barnabas said. "When the scheme to do away with you in New York failed, Sybil and Hoag hit on another scheme. She came here disguised as the Gypsy Bianca. Getting Andrew out of the way and blaming it on me was their first step. But Robert saw through the masquerade and was going to tell the police. So Hoag murdered him to keep him quiet and Sybil approved even though he was her son. Their next move was to murder Roxanna and have me blamed for all the crimes. Then Ariel would inherit the fortune though innocent of complicity in the plot. Hoag and Sybil were sure they could make her bow to their will. And Hoag would have control of the fortune. He planned to move to New York and live there in luxury with Sybil. Luckily the plot failed!"

Later Roxanna and Barnabas said goodnight on the steps of her home. In the quiet and privacy of this familiar spot her mind turned from the murders to new problems. "Now we must try and find a cure for you," she told Barnabas. "All our efforts must be directed towards that."

Barnabas smiled faintly. "It seems to me you have endured enough for the present without taking on my burden. We'll talk about it later." And he gave her a long, gentle goodnight kiss.

It was the last kiss from him she ever had. He left Collinsport that night.

As Elizabeth finished her account, Maggie gave a deep sigh. "Did she never hear from Barnabas again?"

"Yes, just once," Elizabeth said. "He sent her a package with the cameo I've promised Carolyn she may have. He told her that while he loved her he had no hopes of being cured. He advised her to marry Reid Sterling."

"Did she?" Carolyn asked eagerly.

Elizabeth smiled. "Yes. You know the Sterling house on the main road. That's where her son and his family
live. He has the same law practice once owned by Lawyer Hoag. After Hoag’s death from the wound, his family sold the practice.”

“What about Sybil and her daughter Ariel?” Maggie asked.

“Sybil served a prison sentence for her part in the crimes. Ariel took her share of the estate in cash and went to live in New York. Sybil died in prison and Ariel still lives in New York and is active in charity work, though she never married.”

Maggie shook her head. “It’s sort of sad, all of it. Was that Barnabas Collins truly a vampire or just suffering from some mental illness?”

Elizabeth looked wise. “I have no idea. Perhaps we could ask the present Barnabas when he comes to visit us again.”
Warned by a gypsy witch that violent death will surround her, Roxanna Collins turns to her distant cousin, Barnabas, for help.

But Barnabas is also in trouble. For when Roxanna's father and brother are murdered, suspicion centers on Barnabas. Even Roxanna, who feels she is under some strange spell, soon begins to doubt the man she has come to love.

To save his life, Barnabas must prove to the police—and to Roxanna—that he is innocent. And he must find the key to the madness and mystery surrounding Collinwood before Roxanna becomes the next victim in a nightmare of evil.

BARNABAS COLLINS AND THE GYPSY WITCH is the fifteenth in a series of thrilling novels based on ABC-TV's suspense drama, DARK SHADOWS.