Barnabas Collins versus The Warlock

Can Barnabas conquer the evil spirit possessing David and Amy?

Based on ABC-TV's DARK SHADOWS

Marilyn Ross
WILL THE EVIL SPIRIT THAT HAS POSSESSED DAVID AND AMY ALSO CONQUER BARNABAS COLLINS?

Maggie Evans is alarmed at the sudden changes in David Collins and Amy Jennings. The children, usually well-behaved, have turned into monsters, bent on luring Maggie to sure death. Yet when confronted, they insist that they have been visited by a shadowy stranger who ordered them to perform these malicious pranks. And they are helpless to disobey.

In desperation, Maggie asks Barnabas to help her uncover this phantom warlock. But it soon becomes apparent that Barnabas, too, is a target for some evil spirit or person at Collinwood—an evil that can only lead to the destruction of everyone at Collinwood!
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BARNABAS COLLINS

THE SECRET OF BARNABAS COLLINS

THE DEMON OF BARNABAS COLLINS

THE FOE OF BARNABAS COLLINS

THE PHANTOM AND BARNABAS COLLINS
Barnabas Collins versus The Warlock

By Marilyn Ross

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New York
CHAPTER ONE

The isolated and menacing swamp had always been a forbidden place! In a sloping field at the rear of the estate of Collinwood there was the ancient cemetery. And fringing on the cemetery was a lonely forest of tall evergreens through which several shadowed paths twisted. On the other side of the forest lay the swampland. Each spring the Port River flooded over its banks and covered the marshy ground for a week or ten days.

Then the water would drain off, leaving merely small pools and rivulets amid high areas of soft, sandy ground. A few tall trees and a host of thick bushes dotted the swamp. The sun never seemed to reach its lonely depths even on a day in midsummer. But as the heat of July and August invaded as far north as this Maine coastal area the stagnant waters of the marsh grew increasingly shallow and fetid. Vicious mosquitoes and other insects swarmed in its murky depths. There were also unseen creatures that slithered through its deep mud or lurked in the protection of its thick bushes, evident only by the rustling of their concealed motion.

There were no paths through the swamp. The people of Collinsport had always avoided it, and so, though the general coastal area had been settled for nearly two centuries, the swamp remained as primitive and menacing as it had been before the first white man had arrived. Beyond the cemetery and forest lay the terror of the unknown. Occasionally some child or foolhardy hunter plunged through the forest paths to enter the eerie world of the swamp, and an alarming number of them had never returned!

They had simply vanished in the quiet of its sullen pools and quicksands. Searching parties would set out to scour the area, and if luck was with the lost unfortu-
nates they would be found. But too often the rescuers would wade through mud and water during the day and into the night with voices raised in shouts and torches held high, only to have to give up. The grim, murky swamp remained silent and brooding, not too greedy, yet claiming its toll of victims year after year. The total was not surely known, but all agreed that it must be appallingly high.

Since Collinwood was an old estate, many legends had grown up around it. And it was inevitable that the swamp play a large part in many of the chilling stories which were told about the great sprawling mansion set high on the cliffs above the Atlantic. The black chimneys of Collinwood stretched up to the sky like thin, ghostly arms. And within its forty-odd rooms many weird events had taken place.

The threshing waters on the rocky shore beneath the cliff known as Widow's Hill had received the battered bodies of many suicides. And on stormy nights, veteran villagers by their fireplaces whispered ghostly tales of the Phantom Mariner who stalked the cliffs, as their wide-eyed grandchilden listened. It was no wonder that rumors of werewolves, vampires and the like had come to figure in the softly told stories of those who had lived long in the gray fishing village.

Over the years the Collins family had warned their children and any visitors against penetrating the forest paths to the forbidden swamp. But once in a while the warnings would be disobeyed. And on this early July night in 1969 this was the case. Maggie Evans had come to Collinwood to help Elizabeth by taking care of the children.

Attractive Maggie had felt her duties would be light with David Collins now twelve years old and Amy Jennings, sister to Christopher, nine. They were at an age when children were reasonably self-sufficient and could be reasoned with. But in the past few weeks a strange-ness had come over the two youngsters. Their dispositions seemed to change and they became brazen and unruly.

When Maggie or Elizabeth reproved them the two youngsters became sullen and resentful. Through ques-tioning, Maggie drew a weird story from them. David
insisted that he and Amy had been visited by a shadowy stranger. And from then on he’d ordered them to do things. Vicious, cruel actions they would never have indulged in before.

A certain haunted look had come into the eyes of the boy and girl that frightened Maggie. She had spoken to some of the others at Collinwood about what they’d said of the ghostly visitor who put them up to their actions. Elizabeth had questioned the children and then dismissed their fantastic tale as an excuse. Roger Collins, never easy to talk to, had simply frowned and walked away. Most of her discussion of the shocking change in the youngsters had taken place with pretty Carolyn, Elizabeth’s daughter, and near Maggie’s own age.

Carolyn was working in the gift shop of the Collinsport Hotel for the summer and only home for short intervals. She’d taken a room in the village to be near her work, but she sometimes did come out to Collinwood when she had an afternoon or evening off.

She’d had the afternoon off on this warm day. She and Maggie had sat together in the garden as they’d talked about the problems raised by David and Amy.

“I can’t make it out at all,” Maggie had protested, the brow of her lovely face furrowed. “David has always been a good boy. And Amy used to be a sweet child. Now they’re forever tormenting me and doing cruel tricks.”

Seated in a wicker chair opposite her in tan shorts and blouse, Carolyn considered what Maggie’d said and then suggested, “Mother may be right. They may be using this ghost thing as an excuse. They’ve probably heard some of those grisly tales from the help. They’re always repeating them. And it’s suggested to David and Amy a way to misbehave and not be punished.”

“You may be right,” Maggie admitted.

“Have you spoken to Mother about it again?”

“No. She’s so occupied getting the apartment ready for her visitors I’ve hated to bother her.”

“They will be coming soon,” Carolyn agreed. “Cousin Nina hasn’t been home in years. And this time she’ll have her husband, her husband’s mother and a male secretary with her party. It will fill the apartment and make the house a lively spot.”
“Indeed it will,” Maggie said. “And I suppose the children will act up worse than ever!”

Carolyn laughed. “Don’t let them get the better of you. And you might upset their ghost claim by having Dr. Eli Bremmer, Nina’s husband, look into their story. He’s coming here mostly to do psychic research. He’s one of the world’s leading authorities on spiritualism.”

“I wish he was a leading authority on children’s behavior,” Maggie said ruefully.

“How about Cousin Barnabas?”

“He’s been the only helpful one,” Maggie said, her face brightening. “Since he came to stay in the old house with his servant he’s been very nice. But then, you never see him during the day. He’s working so hard to complete that book about the family history.”

“Mother mentioned it,” Carolyn agreed, shifting in her chair. “She thinks Barnabas is charming, but she finds his mute servant, Hare, a little frightening. Do you?”

“He’s a little strange. But that is probably because of his affliction. He hears well enough but he can’t utter anything but animal-like grunts.”

“It’s going to be a busy place here at Collinwood this summer with all these visitors,” Carolyn remarked.

She nodded. “Yes. But Barnabas and Hare aren’t really any trouble. They remain in the old house. And Hare looks after all the domestic duties.”

Carolyn glanced at her watch. “It’s after six,” she said. “I must be getting back to the village. I’m to be at work at seven.”

“And I must find David and Amy,” Maggie said with a look of resignation as they rose. “It’s past their dinner time.”

She saw Carolyn off in her small car and then began a search of the cliffs and shore for the two youngsters. When she’d last seen them they’d been walking slowly towards Widow’s Hill. But they certainly weren’t there now. There wasn’t a sign of them in that area.

Her search had taken nearly half an hour. It was close to seven and she knew Elizabeth would be distressed by the children missing their dinner. Hopefully she stopped by the house to see if they might have returned in her absence.
She found Elizabeth emerging from the dining room and asked her, “The children haven’t come home, have they?”

Elizabeth, dark-haired and matronly, shook her head. “No,” she said with a worried air. “I’ve been wondering what happened and where you were.”

“Looking for them,” Maggie said unhappily. “I can’t think where they’ve gone.”

“Would they be at the old house?” Elizabeth suggested. “They’ve formed a habit of going over there and teasing Hare. And he becomes so angry I’m afraid he may harm them.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” she admitted. “I’ll go there now.”

Hurrying out of the house again, she went in the opposite direction to the cliffs, passing the outbuildings and heading along a path to what was known as the old house. It was the original Collinwood and had been replaced by the great forty-room mansion. These days it was locked and boarded up most of the time. But Elizabeth’s cousin, Barnabas, had asked permission to live in it during the summer with his servant.

Hare was a stout, broad-faced man with a stubble of black beard and grizzled graying hair. His eyes under bushy brows were glowering. His mute state seemed to bring out the worst in the children who loved to tease him and have him chase them away while he made angry grunting sounds. It was a cruel sport on their part and typical of the new mischief that had taken hold of them.

Maggie quickened her step as she neared the old house. It was still early in the evening and she doubted that Barnabas Collins would have finished his daily stint at his book. Not until that was done did he appear. But she hoped she might discover the two youngsters lingering near the ancient three-story structure.

She was only about twenty yards from it when she saw Hare’s hulking form emerge on the front steps. The sight of him out there encouraged her belief that Elizabeth’s theory might be right. She searched for some sign of the missing youngsters but didn’t see them.

Coming up to the steps, she forced a smile for the
belligerent Hare and asked, “Have you seen David and Amy?”

The frowning mute servant glared at her and shook his head, not moving from his place on the top step. He acted as if he were guarding the house.

“May I speak to your master?”

Again the burly man shook his head, this time vehemently.

Maggie was feeling increasingly ill-at-ease and unhappy. “He is not finished his work yet, I suppose,” she said. “And you’re sure you haven’t seen the children?”

Hare simply glared at her this time and made no attempt to communicate with her. She stood there indecisively, not knowing what to do next. It was then she saw the solitary figure with a spade over his shoulder making his way up the hilly field from the cemetery. She recognized him as Matt, the Collinwood handyman, and she decided he might have some information for her.

Not waiting for him to reach her, she hurried down across the field to meet the slow-moving Matt halfway. As she made her way through the tall new grass, she realized the sun had dulled and was indeed beginning to set. The thought that the children still hadn’t shown up caused her real fear.

Breathlessly she reached the man with the spade and asked, “Matt, have you seen the children?”

The stalwart handyman sneered. “Indeed, I have. They were botherin’ me all the time I was cleaning up the cemetery.”

She drew a deep breath of relief. “So that’s where they went!”

Matt was angry and anxious to tell his troubles to someone. “Missus sent me down to put the cemetery in shape for when her Cousin Nina gets here,” he sputtered. “And I just get nicely started when those two little devils show up and start tossing stones at me. I chased them out of the cemetery a couple of times before they left.”

“They left?” she echoed. “You mean they’re not still down there.”

“No.”

“Well, they didn’t come home,” she worried. “What could have happened to them?”
The handyman looked grim. "Last I seen of them they was headed for the woods."
"The woods! You know they're not supposed to go there. Why didn't you call them back?"
"I did," he said, leaning on his spade. "But they didn't pay no attention to me at all. They acted crazy just like they have been lately."
Maggie's pretty face had clouded with despair. "Then they must still be in the woods."
"I reckon," Matt agreed. Then his face took on a grim, satisfied look as he added, "Unless they took it into their fool little heads to go into the swamp."
"No!" she protested the very thought of such horror. "They might have gone into the swamp," Matt insisted. "Neither of them has a mite of sense!"
"We'll have to go look for them," she said plaintively. The handyman gazed at her stolidly. "Not me. I've worked overtime as it is."
"But you must! They're surely lost."
"They don't have to be," he argued. "And anyway, I want my meal."
She was the angry one now—angry and terrified as well. She had an urge to call him down and threaten him if he didn't agree to join her in the search, but a glance at his sour face told her this would do no good. So she said, "At least let Mrs. Collins know what's happened when you get back to the house. Tell her I've gone looking for them."
"I'll tell her," he said grudgingly.
She lingered only long enough to give him a final reproachful glance, then raced down the incline of the field to the ancient family cemetery. As she neared its rusted fence and the array of gray and white tombstones behind it, she allowed herself a faint ray of hope that David and Amy might have returned after the handyman left. They could be hiding behind one of the large stone tombs or even in the shelter of the ordinary gravestones. With this in mind she faltered in passing the cemetery and then made a decision to enter this sheltered world of the dead. As she stepped inside to stand by the first ancient, tilting stone with its weatherbeaten lettering barely visible to the eye, she called the youngsters. Her
words echoed mockingly through the shaded cemetery to the tall forbidding trees of the forest beyond.

A tiny shiver went through her as she continued deeper into the maze of neat mounds and somber tombstones. It struck her that the very air around her bore the odor of death. Her uneasy eyes searched the quiet place for the crouched heads of the two, some fleeting movement or shadow from the forest of gravestones to tell her where they were lurking. Again she shouted their names, but this time she was unable to control the tremor of fright in her voice.

She stood there a moment with her fear mounting. It was no use. Turning quickly she fought her way past the inevitable phantoms that seemed to press close to her from every cracked and tilted gravestone, from every mocking mound under which a grinning skeleton slept. As she escaped through the open gate she stumbled and gave her ankle a slight twist. She cried out as much from terror as the sharp pain.

It made her pause for a moment—but only for a moment. Then she forced herself to move on past the cemetery and approach the path through the woods, whose opening seemed like the yawning mouth of a dark cavern. The tall trees shaded the pine-needle-lined path and she was conscious that dusk would soon be at hand. But she did not dare turn back.

If she were lucky, somewhere in the murky depth of the woods she would catch up with the difficult youngsters. And the quicker she progressed along the dark, lonely trail the better her chance of reaching them. She was conscious of the sound of her own pounding heart mixed with the soft crunch of her footsteps on the uneven path. The trail twisted through the towering evergreens.

She became aware of a mournful sighing sound, like the grieving of a wistful ghost, and it took her a moment to place it as a soft wind swaying the giant trees ever so slightly. This sad moaning was now and then broken by the sharp cry of some bird or the sudden crackling of twigs underfoot as some unseen creature scurried off.

Once she glanced behind and saw that the woods had really closed in on her. She felt isolated and lost, but she forced herself to push on. She wondered if Matt had
delivered her message and whether help might be on the way. She fervently hoped so. Her ankle was not paining too badly, but it could get worse as she used it more. Also, it was getting darker all the time. This could be because she was working her way into the really dense portion of the woods, but it also marked the passage of time. Within a little while it would really get dark and she shuddered to think of finding herself in the eerie, gothic atmosphere of the forest then. She had no flashlight to help guide her when the light ebbed.

Panic made her call out the children’s names again, and the mocking echo that returned from the dim forest did little to bolster her spirits. And then, a short distance ahead on the path, she saw something white. As she came up to it she recognized it as a hankie belonging to Amy. The little girl’s initials were crocheted in red thread in one corner along with the figure of a teddy bear. So they had come this far!

This left her with no choice. Clutching the handkerchief in her perspiring hand, she continued on her lonely pursuit of the two. All at once she was aware of a subtle change in the forest around her. The trees became less full-limbed, and there were huge gray rocks here and there on either side of the path. Vines drooped from the trees and several times she had to push back their cold, slippery clusters to clear her way.

A different odor assailed her nostrils. A damp, fetid smell of decay and stagnant water. As she realized what all these signs meant a fresh chill surged through her. She must be frighteningly close to the swamp!

So the children had reached the forbidden and dangerous spot so isolated from the rest of the area. Only her fears for them conquered her own fear and allowed her to continue on. All she had heard about the eerie marsh of treacherous footing and lurking deep pools suggested that it was a place where the two youngsters might come to sudden and agonizing deaths. There were no trails in the swampland. Once you lost your way there you had to be found or you perished.

Suddenly she had left the area of towering trees and was standing on the edge of the swamp. She was alarmed to note that dusk was at hand. Her frightened eyes
searched the sullen vista of bushes, soggy ground and
torpid pools for some sign of the missing youngsters, but
there wasn’t a hint of a living thing. A kind of dull haze
seemed to cloak the stretch of lonely wasteland.

She remembered the horror stories of those lost in
the deep marshes coming on grinning skulls protruding
from the mud. The villagers claimed you could wander
in the swamp for days without escaping, providing you
lived that long. The thought of snakes and other hideous
things slithering in the mud and murky waters filled her
with revulsion.

Dare she continue on? She glanced at the hankie which
she held in her hand. To turn back now would be like
deserting the children. If she let them wander on into the
depths of the swampland and stay there through the
night, they might well never be seen again. All too many
had vanished the same way.

A distance on her right she thought she saw a move-
ment in the bushes. And the thought struck her that the
youngsters might be hiding there. She quickly picked her
steps in the spongy ground as she headed for the bushes.
At the same time she shouted their names again.
“David! Amy! Where are you? Answer me!”

The words “answer me” reverberated mockingly in
the silence of the brooding swamp. The children were
not lurking in the bushes as she’d hoped. Then, what had
moved there to attract her attention? She preferred not
to think about it. With a glance backward she tried to
get her bearings. She did not want to lose her way. So
she must carefully keep in mind where the path through
the woods was.

She turned, and skirting around the bushes came to
the edge of a dank, malevolent-appearing pool. She was
hesitating by it when there came a flutter of wings and
a shrill crying out just above her. She cringed in fear
and saw the shadow of a giant crow as it soared over her
to vanish in the distant haze, still giving out its weird,
mournful call. She was embarrassed that she’d allowed
this unexpected but ordinary happening to so upset her.
It was a clue to the state of her nerves.

She wouldn’t be able to go much further alone. In a
moment or two she had to turn back whether the children
were found or not. Darkness was only a short way off and she’d hardly have time to get back through the woods to the open field by the cemetery before it was pitch black. She called out the youngsters’ names again. It seemed so futile an exercise. Especially when she knew they could be deliberately baiting her and perhaps were even now watching her from the shelter of the woods and laughing at her.

Lately Amy and David had seemed literally possessed by some devil. She, for one, had not found their strange stories of a ghostly mentor so unbelievable. Something had happened to cause the frightening change in their personalities, to shift them from normal behavior to demons of evil.

In the growing dusk she was unable to pick her steps as carefully as before. She began groping forward, and as she pushed her way through heavy brush, one of her feet sank in the soft ground and she felt water seep into her shoe. She quickly moved to the right. The huge mosquitoes of the swamp had begun to attack her and she fought a continuous battle with them as she pushed on.

Just a few feet more to an open clearing by a sluggish stream and she must go back. She called out the youngsters names again and begged them to answer her. But there was no reply. Stepping close to the muddy water, she was on the point of wheeling around when her left foot suddenly plunged into ground softer than any she’d encountered yet.

Lurching awkwardly as her left foot found no firm base to recover her balance, she stepped out with her right to extricate herself. And this foot became at once engulfed in the same kind of wet, greedy sand. It was then that she realized the full horror of her position. She’d somehow stepped into an area of quicksand. Even as the thought flashed through her mind to fill her with sickening terror, she saw that she had sunk as far as her ankles in the greedy brown stuff.

How could she have been so stupid! Too late to think about that now. The thing to do was to free herself and get back to the comparative safety of the woods. If Matt had delivered her message to the house, surely
Elizabeth would have sent out someone to find her by now. Maggie made a desperate effort to free herself of the engulfing quicksand, her face contorting with fear as she sank deeper. Her left leg was caught up to her knee now and her right was in almost as far.

She cried out once more, but this time the scream was of her own terror. She called for help! And she went on screaming until her throat felt raw. She stopped because she knew if she went on with this uncontrolled hysteria she would lose her voice. She had to conserve her ability to shout so she could attract the searching party when it came. Or the children, if they should come by first.

Not that the youngsters could do much to extricate her from the deathtrap into which she’d so easily stumbled. It would need adult’s strength and proper methods to get her free. Apparently the ground all around her was of the same soft type. The mosquitoes seemed to be doubly vicious in their attacks and daylight was only a glimmer now.

Even though she knew it was the worst thing she could do, she threshed about, bending and stretching in the hope she might reach out and find ground firm enough to cling to. But the treacherous quicksand was on every side of her.

As the light faded she began to understand how slim her chances of rescue were. Even if help did come from Collinwood she might well sink out of sight before they reached her. Her name would join the host of others who had ventured alone into the swamp to be literally swallowed up by it. Never to be seen by mortal eye again. Not even a skeleton left to mark where she had died.

Though her throat still ached, she could not keep herself from shouting for help once more. And as she waited and strained her ears for a reply she heard a furtive movement in the dark brush only a short distance from her.

"Who is it?" she called in fear. "Please! Help me!"

But all was quiet in the bushes again, and she had the terrifying vision of some beast of prey waiting there quietly, watching for the moment when her struggling
would end. Too alert to venture on the soft ground, it was still interested enough to peer at her through the dark undergrowth with yellow malevolent eyes as she went through her final struggles, to sink with a strangled cry in the wet sand. There would be a moment when the quicksand would close over her and after that the swamp would have erased the last trace of her.

It wouldn’t matter then who came to rescue her. Her body had sunk almost to the hips and she kept on struggling. It seemed at this point that her battle against the greedy wet sand at least enabled her to hold her own against it. Yet she knew this wasn’t true. The lashings she couldn’t control were gradually sealing her fate.

She now felt she would never see Collinwood nor the children again. The curse that seemed to eternally hang over the bleak old house on the cliffs had finally come to rest on her. She had come to this through David and Amy. The malevolent spirit which had taken possession of the two youngsters had snared her into the swampland.

It was almost dark as she made another vain struggle to extricate herself and felt the greedy sand tighten about her waist. And then from not far above her there came the heavy flutter of wings once more. She gazed up with frightened eyes to see what looked like the outline of a giant bat as it came sweeping towards her. She uttered a piercing scream!

CHAPTER TWO

Maggie raised her hands protectively over her face as it seemed the swooping, loathsome creature must surely strike her. As she steeled herself for its dread onslaught the bat all at once was gone. And from the brush she heard the sound of footsteps. Her heart gave a great leap of hope and she cried out for help again.

“Maggie!” From the near darkness her name was
called in a resonant masculine voice which she at once recognized.

"Barnabas!" she shouted back. "Barnabas! Help me! I'm caught in the sand!"

"Just a moment," Barnabas Collins replied from close at hand, and she was able to place him as being only a half-dozen feet away.

"Take care," she said. "Or you'll be caught too!"

"I have a heavy tree branch," Barnabas told her. "I'm going to hold it out so you can grasp it. I'm sure it's heavy enough to drag you out of the sands."

A moment later a flashlight shone in her face and then focused on the offered tree branch. As it came close she quickly grasped it. She was now waist-deep in the greedy mud and sinking a little each moment. The branch was rough but she found a place where she could hold on tightly.

"Are you ready?" Barnabas asked.

"Yes."

Immediately he began to exert his strength on the other end of the long branch and she felt the tug on her body and the suction of the sand. At first she didn't move at all. Then as Barnabas continued in his rescue attempt she was suddenly yanked free of the quicksand and he quickly pulled her to safety.

When she was on firmer ground he helped her to her feet. He held the flashlight on her and asked, "Are you all right?"

Still breathless from exhaustion and panic, she nodded. "Yes. I think so. My clothes are a mess, though."

"You should be willing to settle for that," Barnabas said dryly.

For the first time she took a good look at him standing there in the cool, faint glow of the flashlight so that his head and shoulders stood out. With the cold night air, land fog had begun to rise in the swamp and his tall frame seemed to emerge from the gray mist in ghostly fashion. He stood there in his caped coat with his black silver-headed cane in one hand. A look of concern showed on his sad, somewhat cadaverous face with its high cheekbones and his thick black hair sweeping in careless disarray across his high, intelligent forehead.
She had always secretly hero-worshipped this charming man and now she saw him in a trulyheroic light. His hypnotic eyes were fixed on her and his intent expression served to emphasize that he was truly a handsome man.

“Please don’t think me ungrateful,” she hurried to say. “I’d have died here alone if you hadn’t arrived.”

Barnabas frowned. “What made you come to this cursed marsh?”

She gave a tiny shiver as she glanced around her at the eerie place in which they stood. “The children, David and Amy! They came here. They may still be here.”

The man in the black Inverness coat raised his eyebrows. “They may have been here, but they’re certainly not here now. As I passed the cemetery a short while ago I saw them walking up the field towards Collinwood.”

“Those children!” she gasped indignantly. “They led me on a wild chase and then tricked me by doubling back. Didn’t they know I’d come on here and risk my life?”

Barnabas said, “Apparently they were not as troubled about your welfare as you were about theirs.”

“They’ve become regular little fiends! Neither Elizabeth nor I know what to make of them. Since they’ve started those wild stories about being visited by some phantom man they’ve done nothing but lie and misbehave!”

Barnabas was looking at her thoughtfully. “Have you considered that they may not be lying about this phantom visitor?”

“It’s merely an excuse for their wickedness,” she said. “I wouldn’t be too positive of that,” Barnabas warned her. “They have changed greatly and there may be a psychic explanation of what has happened. Collinwood is known for its phantoms.”

“So I’ve heard,” she said, shivering again against the cold and dampness.

“We must start back,” Barnabas told her. “Do you feel well enough for the long walk?”
“Yes. Anything to get away from this awful place. Can you find our way back?”
“I think so,” Barnabas said quietly. “I have a remarkable ability to make my way around in the darkness.”
“You seldom show yourself in the daytime,” she recalled. “You work much too hard.”

Barnabas had linked his cane over the arm holding the flashlight. He placed his other arm around her and carefully guided her back through the maze of the misty swamp. The flashlight’s beam reflected against the rising fog to create weird effects and make it seem they were taking a journey through a completely strange world. And in their isolation it was as if they were the first intruders on some unfriendly planet.

Maggie remembered her first meeting with Barnabas Collins. It had been in the living room at Collinwood, and she’d been struck at once by his likeness to an ancient portrait of one of the first of the Collins men to live in Collinsport. He’d promptly explained that the painting was of a direct ancestor of his who’d lived nearly two hundred years before and who had founded the British branch of the family. “His name was Barnabas as well,” he’d told her with some pride.

From then on Maggie had been fascinated by both the portrait and the well-spoken English cousin of Elizabeth’s who so resembled it. And she had been surprised to learn that the original Barnabas Collins had suffered some sort of unhappy love affair and been forced to leave the Maine coastal town under a shadow. She had not been able to learn the true story of this, though Elizabeth had told her of a startling legend that had come down through the years.

“You could not have been scared of the real Barnabas,” Maggie had said.

“Some of the villagers claimed the first Barnabas Collins was a vampire,” she’d told Maggie.

She’d been thunderstruck at the attractive Elizabeth’s statement. “A vampire? You mean some sort of ghost?”

“In a sense,” Elizabeth had said. “Vampires are known as the walking dead. They survive by drinking human blood. And it is supposedly their custom to send their victims into a hypnotic trance while they pounce on their throats to drain them of the vital red liquid.”

“How horrible!”
Elizabeth had smiled wanly. “The simple villagers thrived on such folklore. They liked their stories scary and bloodthirsty. It served them well as tales of entertainment when they gathered by their open fireplaces on winter nights.”

“But you do not believe there was ever any truth in the legend?”

“Hardly, though strange things have happened at Collinwood. Mostly they were incidents that can be explained. And I hardly see our present visitor from England as a descendant of a vampire, do you?”

Maggie had smiled at the preposterous idea. “Certainly not. He is so nice.”

“Charming,” Elizabeth had agreed. “Though there is a melancholy about him. Perhaps the melancholy commonly found in a historian. I’m sure that the history on which he is working means more to him than anything else. He is a truly dedicated man, and he will no doubt explore the dark legends of Collinwood in completing his book.”

“No doubt,” Maggie had agreed.

In the weeks that had followed she’d taken opportunity of every chance offered to know the tall, handsome Barnabas better. And he seemed to like her. Unfortunately the abrupt change in the natures of David and Amy had left her with less time to enjoy his company. The diabolical behavior of the children had disconcerted her.

Their reaching the path through the woods and leaving the dank swamp behind interrupted her reverie. Barnabas still had his arm protectively around her and she no longer felt fear. Though she would not soon forget the ordeal of the swamp.

As they followed the woods path, she said, “Just before you came I was threatened by an immense bat.”

“Were you?”

“Yes. It came from nowhere and swooped down towards me. But when my terror had reached its peak it simply seemed to vanish.”

“Bats are much maligned creatures,” Barnabas commented. “I doubt that it would have harmed you.”

“But why did it come at me in that fashion?”
“Don’t upset yourself trying to recall the moment and explain it,” was his advice. “You are safe now and that is the only thing that matters.”

“Oh course you’re right.” She gave his sober, handsome profile a quick glance. “I didn’t think to ask you before. What took you to the swamp?”

He smiled thinly. “As you know I enjoy taking long walks in the night.”

“I often think you must be very lonely.”

“I have my thoughts to keep me company,” he said. “Sometimes I hardly am aware where my feet are leading me. I ramble on blindly. That is what happened tonight. Before I knew it I had reached the marsh.”

“Fortunately for me,” she said with a sigh.

He gave her a warning look. “I would not go there again. Especially at night.”

“You may be sure I won’t,” she said with a wan smile. “I can’t get over the evil way in which those children led me on.”

In a remarkably short time they had completed their journey through the woods and were passing the ancient private cemetery. There was no sign of the mist there and a pale, silvery moon offered enough light so that Barnabas no longer needed to use the flashlight. The moonbeams fell on the forest of phantom gravestones behind the cemetery’s iron fence giving an eerie effect.

Unconsciously she pressed close to Barnabas. She needed the assurance of the tall, firm body. Soon they had reached the top of the hill and the old house in which Barnabas lived stood out darkly on their right.

She stared at the blank windows. “You’d say the house was deserted.”

“Hare is a strange fellow,” Barnabas said. “He seems to enjoy the darkness. Often he wanders about the entire night without so much as a lamp or even a candle.”

“Elizabeth should have had electricity put in the old house,” she said.

“It has been used so seldom,” he said. “Probably won’t be used much again after I leave. So it would be hardly worth it.”

“I suppose not,” she admitted.

After they had left the outbuildings behind, the lights
of Collinwood showed against the night. Maggie was quick to note that the wing in which the large guest apartment was located was ablaze with light. This together with the sight of a large black limousine parked by the front door suggested that Elizabeth's cousin had arrived with her husband.

A hint of excitement in her voice, she told Barnabas, "I believe Elizabeth's cousin, Nina, and her party must be here. Have you ever met her?"

"No," Barnabas said. "But I know her branch of the family. They lived on the other side of Collinsport until they moved to Boston some years ago. But I believe Nina spent all her youth here. She is younger than Elizabeth."

"I've heard that." With dismay, she added, "I should try the back entrance. I'm such a sight with all this caked mud on me."

"I disagree," he said. "I think you should make a proper entrance whether you shock them all or not. If the children are to be reprimanded you must show the danger they put you in."

It was the opposite of what she would ordinarily have done but because Barnabas could be persuasive to a startling degree and she was in deep debt to him for her rescue, she said, "Very well. If you think that best."

"I believe Nina is married to a Dr. Bremmer," Barnabas commented as they approached the front steps.

"Yes. He has come to do some psychic research."

"So I understand," Barnabas said in such a dispirited tone, as if coming from the depths of his being, that she turned in surprise to stare at him. His handsome features had taken on an almost gaunt look.

She said, "You sound as if you don't approve?"

His smile for her was melancholy. "Any spirits hovering about Collinwood are apt to be those of my ancestors. I'm not sure that I do want them disturbed."

"I can understand what you mean," she said, though not entirely certain that she did.

Barnabas accompanied her inside. When they entered the reception hall they were presented with an interesting tableaux. Elizabeth, regal in a dark gown with a single strand of pearls around her lovely throat, was directly
addressing a much younger woman in a modish two-piece suit. Behind this woman stood a spare, slightly stooped man with a bald head, sunken eyes and yellowish skin. And nearer the stairway in the background waited a prim, bookish young man of medium size wearing horn-rimmed glasses. His dark hair had receded just far enough in the middle of his forehead to give the impression that his face was longer than it really was.

The moment the group saw Maggie and Barnabas they focused all their attention on them. Maggie quickly explained what had happened and Elizabeth listened with obvious alarm. She told Maggie the children were safely in bed upstairs and apologized for their wicked prank. Then she went about making the necessary introductions.

Maggie was astonished to find Nina Bremmer much younger and more attractive than she’d expected. She was blonde with the aristocratic features so common to the Collins family. When she shook hands with Maggie, she said with a friendly smile, “I know that swamp only too well. A girlfriend and I were lost in there for almost a day.”

Dr. Eli Bremmer shuffled forward, seeming old enough to be his wife’s grandfather. He touched a thin hand with Maggie’s and she thought his faded black suit and everything about him suggested that he’d lost contact with everyday life in his search for the dead. He had to be at least twenty to thirty years older than his wife. She remembered Elizabeth telling her that Dr. Bremmer was very wealthy and so had been able to dedicate his life to his odd field of research. Perhaps it was this immense wealth which had helped win him a young and lovely wife.

After shaking hands with her the elderly doctor gave his attention to Barnabas. “Elizabeth said you were visiting here,” the doctor said. “How fortunate. I shall learn all about the London branch of the family from you.” As he released Barnabas’ hand the sunken eyes showed a curious gleam. “Your hand is strangely cold, Mr. Collins, do you suffer from a circulatory problem?”

A shadow flashed across Barnabas’ face. He said, “We have just finished a long, cool walk.”
Dr. Bremmer smiled grimly. "Of course. I had forgotten."

Nina Bremmer seemed attracted to Barnabas. She told him, "I've always admired the portrait of the first Barnabas Collins. And you're the image of him!"

"So I've been told," Barnabas said politely.

"I urged my husband to come here," Nina went on. "I said to him, 'If you are looking for ghosts there isn't a likelier place to find them than Collinwood.'"

Elizabeth spoke up. "I'm afraid you exaggerated."

"Not at all," Nina said. "And now I want you to meet Noel Hart. He is my husband's secretary and also interested in the spirit world."

The young man shook hands with Maggie.

"I'm sorry you had such a frightening experience," he said sympathetically.

She smiled thinly. "My existence here seems daily to be including more of them," she said.

Noel Hart went on to shake hands with Barnabas and speak with him politely for a few moments. At the same time Dr. Bremmer addressed himself to Elizabeth.

"If I may," the old man said, "I'd like to discuss the experiences Miss Evans and your Cousin Barnabas had tonight. But first I would like to freshen up a little. And that would also give Miss Evans a chance to change from her muddy clothes."

"I'll show you to your rooms," Elizabeth said. "And please do stay a little so the doctor can talk with you, Barnabas," she said to him.

Maggie lingered behind a moment when Elizabeth led the three others up to their apartment on the second floor. She turned to Barnabas and made a small resigned gesture with her right hand.

"It seems we're to be interviewed," she said with a bleak smile.

Barnabas frowned. "As I told you, I'm not sure I approve of all this. I should move on."

"Please stay!" she begged him. "I don't want to face that Dr. Bremmer alone."

Barnabas' face showed an expression of sour amusement. "Very well. I'll remain."
He was still there when she came down from washing and changing into other clothes. He was standing in the subdued lighting of the living room near the portrait which he so resembled, a little aloof from the others. In the area by the fireplace Elizabeth, Nina and Noel Hart were seated in a semicircle. Dr. Bremmer stood facing them, his back to the fireplace, like a schoolmaster.

He beckoned to Maggie with a clawlike hand as she slowly stepped into the living room. "Please come and sit down here," he said.

With a look at Barnabas to show her reluctance to become party to the old doctor's experiments she did as she was asked. Taking her place in an easy chair next to Noel Hart, she was aware of him staring at her. She nodded to him and realized that the eyes behind his thick glasses had an almost sinister gleam.

Dr. Bremmer coughed to get her attention, and she gazed up at his unhealthy, yellowish old face. Again she felt it a pity that Nina's youth and beauty should be wasted on this man, even if he had wealth.

Dr. Bremmer's pinched face had taken on a pleased look.

"When my wife insisted that I come here," he began, "I felt it was more for her own pleasure than to help with my work." He gave Nina an indulgent glance. "But now I realize how wrong I was. Nina knew so much more about this place than I guessed."

Nina laughed pleasantly and told everyone, "Eli suspected my sole purpose in coming here was to enjoy Collinsport and renew my friendships with many of the people with whom I grew up."

Her husband raised a thin restraining hand. "Well, that suspicion has been laid to rest. Almost from the very moment our car turned into the private roadway leading to this house I was alert to the influence of the spirits."

Elizabeth was sitting very straight and not looking entirely pleased. "It's fortunate my brother, Roger, is away for a few days. He would not let you say such things without a challenge. He resents the subject of ghosts being discussed here."

The old doctor eyed her coldly. "I will be glad to
accept his challenge when he returns, since I believe I can prove there are evil spirits at work in this house—and around it, for that matter.”

Nina asked, “Why do you say that?”

“Because I feel them here,” Dr. Bremmer said. “In this very room, in fact.” And he glanced across the shadowed room to the spot where a silent Barnabas was impassively listening to all he said.

Nina leaned forward to ask her husband’s secretary, “What do you think, Noel?”

He shrugged. “There is surely a strange atmosphere here.”

Elizabeth entered the conversation again, saying, “The children have been misbehaving lately, and they’ve told wild stories about some phantom who nagged them on to mischief. Could what you feel have anything to do with the wicked influence on the children?”

Maggie sat tensely, anxious to hear what the old doctor might say in answer. She was sickened by the change in David and Amy and wanted to bring the matter up herself, but Elizabeth had done it for her.

Dr. Bremmer’s sunken eyes held a zealot’s bright gleam, once he was launched on his favorite subject. He said, “It may well be that their stories are not all that wild. Children frequently have more sensitivity to the world of the unknown than most of us. It is quite possible they may have been visited by some phantom.”

Elizabeth gasped. “You terrify me!”

“What kind of phantom?” The words came quietly from Barnabas, who still stood a distance away from all of them in the shadows.

The doctor’s yellow face showed firm resolution. “A warlock, sir!”

“A warlock?” Elizabeth echoed in question.

Dr. Bremmer nodded vigorously. “The male equivalent of a witch, Mrs. Stoddard. And just as powerful in their evil. I believe you are dealing with the spirit of one of these creatures in the category of Louis Gaufridi or Gilles de Rais. Did the children describe the phantom?”

“Yes,” Maggie said. “They spoke of a man with long hair and a black mustache dressed in funny clothes.”

“That sounds as if my theory is right,” Dr. Bremmer
said in his rasping voice. “Funny clothes would describe
the garb of any other era as seen through children’s eyes.
And the long hair and black mustache also suggest a
long-ago character.”

“Or a hippie,” Noel Hart said, contributing his share
to the discussion. “There are always a lot of them around
these summer places. Perhaps it could be one of them
the children saw.”

Elizabeth flashed him a grateful look. “I’d say that
was much more likely.”

Nina Bremmer was displeased with the suggestion. “I
don’t agree,” she said. “I’m much more inclined to en-
dorse Eli’s theory. I’ve heard of warlocks. They can be
malevolent and cunning.”

Barnabas addressed himself to the doctor again. “I
think you’d be well advised not to intrude in such mat-
ters, Doctor.”

Dr. Bremmer’s eyes settled on Barnabas in anno-
ynce. “I am not in need of advice regarding the psychic,”
he snapped. “In fact, I propose to hold a seance here
and now in an effort to find out the evil presence threat-
ening the children and all this household.”

Nina turned to Elizabeth. “I hope you don’t object.”

“I don’t mind,” Elizabeth said, “though I must declare
frankly I have no belief in such things.”

That began a general discussion among them, con-
cerning the value of seances. Barnabas continued to stand
a distance away without entering the conversation, while
Dr. Bremmer had his secretary bring over a small table
around which they could all gather. Placing the table
in front of them he urged them to move in closer. Then
he sat down in a plain chair he’d gotten for himself.

As he seated himself at the head of the small gathering
he asked Barnabas, “Are you not going to join us?”

“Thank you, no,” Barnabas said determinedly.

Dr. Bremmer looked slightly displeased, then sug-
gested, “In that case, I shall ask you to tend the lights.
Would you kindly put them out, please?”

Maggie gave Barnabas a glance of appeal and thought
she was able to see a hint of reassurance in his eyes. She
placed her hands on the table at the doctor’s direction,
as did the other three.
The moment the lights were extinguished, Dr. Bremmer began to murmur in a weird monotone, “Black-luggie, hammer-head, Rowan-tree, and red thread; put the warlocks to their speed!” His voice trailed off and there was a heavy silence in the great dark room.

Maggie was tormented by cold chills. They surged through her as the doctor became silent. Somehow she was certain a ghostly presence was filtering into the darkness around them. There was death in the room. She was certain of it!

Dr. Bremmer began a weird chant, using words that made no sense to her, and finally in a high-pitched fashion, he asked, “Who is the evil one? Reveal the truth about the warlock!”

One of the chairs at the table scraped in the darkness, and Maggie felt the weight of a body leaning against her arm. She gave a small, frightened cry.

“Sorry!” It was Noel Hart who whispered an apology and the pressure of his body vanished from her arm.

Dr. Bremmer moaned, and a strange voice emerged from him—a voice entirely different from his own. A thin, crackling voice that might have been a century or more old.

“You have asked me about the warlock?” said the new voice.

“Yes, tell us!” It was Nina Bremmer who spoke in the darkness, tension plain in her tone.

“The warlock!” the voice repeated. And there came a dry rustle of laughter which set Maggie’s nerves on edge.

“The warlock’s skull rests in the swamp,” the weird voice went on. “You will not find it, nor will you find the gold.”

“What gold?” Nina asked tensely. It appeared she had been used to playing the role of interrogator during such sessions.

“My gold,” the voice said triumphantly. “My gold, which none shall have but me!”

“Who are you?” Nina asked.

“Phineas,” emerged in the crackling voice slowly. “I am Phineas Collins.”

“Tell us about the warlock? Is it you?”

But Nina received no reply to her question. Instead
a piercing scream of fear cut through the darkness. And the crackling voice took on a frantic note as it cried out, "No, no more! There is another spirit present! A dead man threatens me!"

CHAPTER THREE

The bloodcurdling screams made Maggie jump up from her place at the seance table. There was a general confusion and upset cries in the darkness. Then someone called to Barnabas to turn the lights on again and he did. Everyone was on their feet except Dr. Bremmer, who still remained slumped in his chair with his eyes closed and his head bent to one side.

His wife went forward to him and gave support to the lolling head, crying, "Eli!"

Barnabas Collins came closer to study the still unconscious man. He presented an impressive figure in his black caped coat, as he leaned on his cane and watched for the doctor to emerge from his strange state.

It happened in a moment. The sunken eyes opened and he stared around him in bewilderment. Then he said, "What went on?"

Barnabas told him, "You apparently conjured up the spirit of one of our ancestors, a Phineas Collins. He seemed to have some information about a warlock. But just as he was on the point of revealing it he screamed that the force of some dead man in the room was holding him back. That was the end."

Nina Bremmer nodded, an excited look on her face. "We almost had the name of the warlock when you fainted," she told her husband.

Elizabeth was looking pale and upset. "I'm not in favor of such experiments," she said.

Noel Hart turned to her with his owl-like eyes studying her. "Aren't you anxious to discover what has taken hold of your children?"
"I believe they are merely going through a difficult stage and it has nothing to do with such things as warlocks," the mistress of Collinwood said firmly.

"I must disagree," Dr. Bremmer said, rising. "I have never heard of a clearer case where children were possessed by demons. I beg you to let me continue with my experiments."

Elizabeth shrugged. "I merely offered my opinion. I have no intention of trying to stop your investigations, since I know it was your hope to track down ghosts which brought you here."

The old doctor's yellowish, wrinkled face smiled. "Thank you," he said, and turned his attention to Barnabas. "I should like to have your full cooperation as well, Mr. Collins. For some reason I have the feeling you are also hostile to my delving into the spirit world."

Barnabas had a mocking expression on his handsome face. "I bear you no hostility," he said. "But I do suggest that the spirits are better left alone."

"Let me be the judge of that," Dr. Bremmer said. "Since you are the historian of the family I hear, perhaps you may be able to tell us if there actually was a Phineas Collins and when he lived at Collinwood."

Maggie joined the others in watching Barnabas. He hesitated a moment and then said, "There was a Phineas Collins, according to the records. He lived in the old house in the late 1820s. He was a miserly man who became so obsessed with riches that he hoarded a cask full of gold coins and buried them on the estate."

Dr. Bremmer was interested. "Was the location mentioned?"

"Yes," Barnabas said with grim amusement visible on his handsome face. "He buried the treasure in the swamp. He knew how superstitious the villagers were and counted on them not venturing to search for it there. To mark it for himself he placed a pole in the ground above it and a skull atop the pole."

The old doctor nodded excitedly. "Double protection against a possible thief, of course," he said. "And what was the outcome of it all?"

"When the spring floods came the pole was uprooted from its marking place and swept away. After the waters
subsided Phineas went to the swamp to see if his treasure was safe. When he found the marker gone he became almost insane. The area had changed with the flood and he had only a vague notion of where the gold might be."

"Did he attempt to discover it?" Dr. Eli Bremmer asked.

"Yes," Barnabas said. "But without success. The closest he came to it was finding the skull in a clump of bushes. He died a year or so later without locating the gold. It was never found. It is still out there in the swamp."

Nina smiled in admiration of the account. "What a perfectly thrilling story, Mr. Collins," she said.

Barnabas returned her smile and told her husband, "However, I think you are on the wrong track if you believe Phineas to be your warlock."

Dr. Bremmer studied Barnabas with a shrewd expression. "You sound very sure of that, Mr. Collins."

"I feel sure of it," Barnabas said. "The story goes that Phineas discovered a complete skeleton in one of the dark cellar rooms of the old house. And that it was the skull of this skeleton he used as a marker. He had no idea where the skeleton came from, according to the written account. But he later insisted that it had been cursed and that was why he'd lost the treasure."

"You say the skull was found," the old doctor said in his rasping way. "Have you any idea what became of it?"

Barnabas gave him one of his superior looks. "Yes, I do have," he said. "It was kept in the family as a conversation piece. It is still at the old house. I found it in a wooden box in a closet."

"May I examine the skull, Mr. Collins?" the doctor asked.

"Whatever for?" his wife said, her face indicating that the idea did not appeal to her.

"I have my reasons," Bremmer told his wife patiently. Then he turned to Barnabas again and asked, "Might I go over to the old house with you now and see the skull?"

"I'm afraid not," Barnabas said. "I have some other things to attend to this evening."

"In the morning, then?" the old doctor suggested.
Barnabas shook his head. "No. I work during the daytime and I insist on there being no interruptions. But I'll bring the skull here to you tomorrow evening if you wish."

Dr. Bremmer's sunken eyes held a greedy light. "Yes, I would like that. Please do bring it to me."

"Very well," Barnabas said in his suave manner. "Though I can't see that it will assist you in your search for a warlock."

"Leave that to me, Mr. Collins," the doctor said. "Leave that to me."

Barnabas politely bade them all goodnight, and Maggie saw him to the front door. She still was shaken from her dreadful experience and she wanted to let him know again how thankful she was for his aid.

She stood in the doorway with him. "If you hadn't arrived when you did I'd be back there deep beneath the quicksand with the lost treasure of Phineas."

He smiled at her gently. "Don't dwell upon it. And don't let those children lead you into any more traps."

"I won't," she promised. "What do you think of Dr. Bremmer? Isn't he a strange man?"

Barnabas nodded. "He is, indeed. I only fear he may stir up more phantoms here than he can control. And that would be disastrous for everyone."

With that rather cryptic statement delivered he said goodnight and walked off into the darkness.

There had been something in his manner she did not fully understand. A certain brooding sadness when he'd spoken of the doctor's dabbling in phantoms. It was clear that Barnabas did not approve of the doctor's purpose in coming to Collinwood.

In spite of her ordeal in the swamp she slept well, probably because she had been a great deal more weary than she'd suspected. In any event, her head had barely touched the pillow when she slipped into a dreamless sleep. When she awoke the morning sunshine flooded the room. She got up and prepared herself for the day ahead.

When she went downstairs to the dining room she found Nina Bremmer and Noel Hart at the table. Noel rose as she joined them.
Nina’s face was bright as she said, “You don’t know what it means to me to be back in Collinsport. This village will always be home to me.”

Maggie sipped the orange juice which had been set out for her and asked, “Do you still have many friends here?”

“Not really,” the doctor’s wife said. “So many, like myself, have moved away, but there are a few.”

“Is the doctor feeling well this morning?” she inquired politely.

Nina laughed. “Indeed he is. He’s already had breakfast and is out walking about the estate. He’s especially interested in Widow’s Hill and the family cemetery.”

Noel nodded. “He has asked me to spend several days making transcriptions of the lettering on the stones. The doctor attaches a great deal of importance to details.”

“You mustn’t mind his interest in the supernatural,” Nina warned Maggie. “It is a healthy interest, really. And he may do you all a lot of good if he is able to rid you of this warlock, or whatever it is that has had such a bad effect on the children.”

Maggie was embarrassed at the introduction of the supernatural into their talk. She said quickly, “I wonder where the children are this morning?”

“In the rose garden when I saw them last,” was Noel’s prompt reply.

“They get up and out early,” Maggie agreed.

Nina spoke up again, “What a thoroughly fascinating man that Barnabas Collins is,” she said. “If I were single again I’d surely be interested in him.”

Maggie couldn’t help feeling resentful of the assured young beauty who would probably be quick to rid herself of the gaunt Dr. Bremmer if she could do so without losing his money.

Maggie said, “I don’t think Barnabas is interested in a wife at the moment. He is so dedicated to completing his history of the family.”

Nina smiled wisely. “He is a man, my dear. And if I were in a position to attract his attention, I’d not have any trouble doing so.”

Noel cleared his throat as if in warning to the wife of his employer, then he touched his napkin to his lips and
said, "I'm going out for a walk also. Would you care to join me, Nina? I think it must be terribly scenic along the cliffs." He glanced at Maggie for confirmation.

Quietly she agreed. "Yes. There is a lot to be seen from the cliffs."

Within a few minutes they both excused themselves and left Maggie to finish her breakfast alone. As she finally sat drinking her coffee she made up her mind that Nina Bremmer was something of a flirt and not to be trusted. In spite of her continuous references to the doctor Maggie did not believe the blonde woman was all that loyal to him.

She had wanted to chat with Elizabeth for a few minutes, but her concern about the youngsters and what they might be doing got the best of her. With a strong curiosity she went directly out to the rose garden. She was able to hear them arguing before she rounded a tall hedge and discovered them.

David and Amy were facing each other indignantly and using all the vehemence which might be expected from a twelve-year-old and a nine-year-old. David stepped back with a sullen look on his young face when he saw her, and Amy's still babyish features took on a look of cunning that wasn't pleasant.

"Well!" Maggie said. "So you're at it again."

"She ruined my kite!" David complained.

"I did not," Amy shouted back. "It was no good anyway. It was ready to fall apart!"

"And that's what you made it do," David told her. Maggie raised a hand for silence. "Now, just a moment, both of you. I'd like to take you to task for the mean trick you played on me last night."

David looked guilty. "We didn't do anything!"

"No," Amy said, at once siding with him, the argument of before put aside. "We were in bed before you came home."

"Because you two deliberately led me to the swamp," Maggie told them.

"We wouldn't do that, Maggie," David said, but his crafty smile showed that they had done it—and not by accident.
Maggie stared at the children. "Why do you two have to behave so badly?"

"We don't!" David said casually. And in an aside to Amy he informed her, "I'm going to the beach!" And he ran off.

Maggie watched him go with a resigned expression. "I might have known he'd run away rather than admit the truth." She glanced at a nervous Amy and said, "What excuse do you have for last night?"

The little girl's eyes were wide with uneasiness. She looked as if she was just waiting for a chance to bolt after David. "We didn't want to do it," she protested. "He made us."

She frowned. "David made you?"

"No," Amy said. "The phantom. The one with the mustache and the funny clothes."

The utter sincerity of the child's tone caused a chill of fear to streak down Maggie's spine. Could such things be? They certainly didn't seem possible standing here in the warm sunlight. Last night there had been a moment during the seance when she'd almost been convinced that a ghost was present. But the circumstances had been so different.

Kneeling so she could face Amy at her level, Maggie spoke to the little girl seriously. "It's a sin to tell such lies, Amy. And there's no need for them. Now, be truthful with me. There is no phantom man, is there?"

Fear showed on her face. "Yes," she maintained stoutly. "He comes to us from the bushes. At first he's like a shadow and then he's real. And he tells us what we must do."

"And last evening he told you and David to lure me into the swamp?"

"Yes," Amy whispered, frightened. "And had you drop your good hankie on the path to be sure I went on."

The little girl nodded awkwardly. "He always tells us what to do and then he fades away into the bushes again."

Maggie was startled at the child's insistence on the facts of the weird story. It seemed impossible she could be playing a game of pretend so well. Yet it was the sort
of thing she and her wily chum, David, could have plotted together.

"I don't know what to say," Maggie said sorrowfully. "All I want to do is be a friend to you and David, and you won't let me. You do these awful things. One day soon you're going to get into serious trouble."

Amy had been gradually stepping back a little at a time and now she bolted out, "David's waiting for me!" Turning, she ran off in the same direction he'd gone.

Maggie stood up again with a troubled expression on her face. When she'd accepted the position as governess of the children there had been no hint of anything like this. It had all developed so suddenly.

At the moment she was thoroughly discouraged. She didn't like to trouble Elizabeth with her worries about the children, because she knew that the mistress of Collinwood had enough problems. Also, Elizabeth was not one to take much stock in phantoms. As for David's father, Roger was often away and difficult to contact. And he had no true interest in his growing son at all.

All this nagging her, Maggie walked slowly out of the garden and along the gravel roadway that led to the main highway and Collinsport. From here she had a clear view of the grounds and the blue Atlantic beyond. She saw Dr. Bremmer slowly strolling along the cliff path, and far across the field a good distance from the doctor, his wife and secretary were walking together. Maggie wondered about them and if the lovely Nina might be cheating on her husband. She might be doing Elizabeth's attractive cousin an injustice, but she believed her capable of deceiving the odd Dr. Bremmer.

In the midst of these thoughts she was alerted to the approach of a light gray sedan. Not many cars showed up at Collinwood during a day, so she stood watching the arrival of this one and thinking it to be vaguely familiar. As it came close she saw it was the police chief's car and the good-looking Chief James Baxter was at the wheel.

He brought the car to a halt when he came up to her and with the engine still running greeted her through the open window. "Enjoying the fine day, Maggie?" he asked.
She forced a smile. "Trying to," she said. She liked the genial Chief. He was in his late thirties and with two others composed the entire law force of the area. He knew nearly everyone in town on a first name basis and he was in turn greeted in the same way.

Jim Baxter's lean tanned face regarded her with interest. "I don't suppose you wander around here alone much after dark," he ventured.

She thought his question odd. "No," she said. "I might step out into the garden on a warm moon lit night or stroll across the lawn. That's all."

Jim sighed. "I wouldn't stroll far if I were you."

"Why not?"

The police chief looked embarrassed. "I don't want to throw a scare into you, Maggie," he said. "But some funny things have been happening in the village and out along this road lately."

Her alarm grew. She was thinking about the phantom of David and Amy. She said, "What sort of things?"

The police chief slid back his peaked cap to reveal his frown, then put the cap back on again. He gave her a resigned look. "Well, it's all pretty confused," he admitted. "But two or three young girls have been coming in to the office with stories about being attacked. They all describe what happened pretty much the same way. Some kind of dark phantom comes out of the shadows and grabs them. While he covers their mouths with his hand he hypnotizes them. They black out and when they come to they feel sick and dizzy. And, get this, there are some kind of funny marks like bite marks on their throats."

Maggie stared at him. "That's a fantastic story!"

He nodded gloomily as he sat there behind the wheel. "Don't I know it? My guess is there is some kind of mild lunatic loose in the area. We get a lot of summer visitors, you know, and I've met a few who didn't strike me as too solid in the head. So just keep close to the house when you're taking those moonlight strolls."

"I'll remember," she said. She was on the point of bringing up the story of the phantom the children had insisted they'd seen, but even though it might be the same demented person, she hesitated to reveal the story.
It would mean involving the youngsters with the police and she was positive that would annoy and upset Elizabeth. So she decided on silence.

Chief Jim Baxter was smiling again. "That's not the reason I came out here though I felt I ought to mention it. Fact is, I hear you had some visitors last night."

"We did," she admitted. "Elizabeth's cousin Nina and her husband and his secretary came to stay for a few weeks."

"Great," the lean-faced man said. "I heard it mentioned in town. And I came right out because Nina and I are old friends. We went to high school together before she was sent to college. Then her folks moved away. I look forward to welcoming her back."

Maggie felt a deep wave of relief. So that's all there was to it. With a smile she pointed to the field beyond the house where Nina and Noel were standing at the moment. "There she is," she said. "She's with her husband's secretary."

Jim nodded. "Guess I'll drive me over there and say hello."

"I'm sure she'll be glad to see you."

He squinted at her in the sunlight. "Folks in town said she was married to some real old guy? Is that so?"

Maggie hesitated. "Well, he is a good deal older than her."

"What do you know! Never thought a pretty girl like Nina would marry some doddering old gent. But it's a strange world! See you later, Maggie." With a cheery wave the pleasant police chief drove off to join Nina and Noel.

Turning towards the cliff, Maggie saw that Dr. Bremmer had noticed the car and was standing on the path staring after it. She decided it might be helpful if she went over and told the old man what was going on. It took her a few minutes to cover the wide expanse of lawn between herself and the old doctor. By the time she reached his side, Chief Jim Baxter was out of his car talking to Nina and Noel.

Dr. Bremmer stared across the wide distance separating them from the others and in a querulous voice asked
Maggie, "Who is that in the car? The one who is talking to my wife?"

"It's Police Chief James Baxter," she told him. "He heard about you arriving and he wanted to say hello to Mrs. Bremmer. It seems they attended school together here."

The sallow, wrinkled face at once registered disinterest. "I expected we'd be bothered by some of her old acquaintances but not so soon."

"Would you like to meet him?" she suggested.

The thin, stooped man raised a scrawny hand irritably. "No. I have no interest in him. I'd rather talk to you."

Maggie smiled. "I can't promise to be all that interesting," she warned him.

His eyes fixed on her. "At least you know the place and the people who live here."

"Yes, of course."

He peered at her strangely. "You must realize there is something not easily explained going on here. A supernatural something!"

At once on the defensive, she told him, "I can't venture an opinion on that."

The doctor pointed down to the beach below where David and Amy were playing near the edge of the waves. "You've been looking after the children and you know they have come under some demonic influence."

"I'm not at all sure," she protested.

"You should be!"

"Children are inventive. They make up stories."

Dr. Bremmer's thin lips curled in a derisive smile. "They haven't made up this one. You were at the seance last night. You heard the voice of Phineas Collins coming from my lips. And he claimed this place was cursed by the presence of a warlock's spirit."

"I wasn't able to make out everything you said," she alibied. She felt he was trying to pin her down to something and she was frightened. From the shore below the relentless pounding of the waves sounded like a dirge. Occasionally the shrill voices of David and Amy raised above it. Were the two children really possessed?

"You've at least been told what I said," he informed her brusquely. "But there was another presence in that
room beyond the spirit of Phineas. A supernatural presence that stifled him and brought about the end of the seance. I must find that other ghostly creature and destroy it before I can successfully complete my investigations here.”

Maggie found herself saying, “Wouldn’t you be wise to heed Barnabas’ advice and let all these things rest.”

His eyes gleamed. “You are a friend of this Barnabas?”

She swallowed hard. “Yes,” she admitted in a small voice. “I guess you might call us that.”

“What sort of man is he?”

“He’s very nice,” she said. An auto horn sounded and she turned to see that Chief Jim Baxter was driving back toward town. His horn had been a friendly farewell to her. She raised a hand to wave in return and wished she could escape from the insistent and unpleasant old doctor.

Dr. Bremmer gave a brief glance in the direction of the departing car, but made no reference to it. Instead he turned all his attention on her again and said, “So Barnabas is a nice man. That’s not much help, I’m afraid. Not very descriptive at all. I’d be much more interested to hear why he shuts himself up all day and only shows himself after sundown.”

“He’s writing a book.”

“A great many men write books,” Dr. Eli Bremmer told her. “I don’t think many of them shut themselves off from the world every day.”

She felt faint standing there on the edge of the cliff with his incisive voice literally slashing at her. He was vindictive and he hoped to cause Barnabas some harm because he’d derided the seance the night before. Because he’d not cooperated, the old doctor wanted to strike back at him.

“You’ll have to ask Barnabas about such things,” she said.

“But then I doubt that Barnabas will answer,” the old man said with sarcasm. “I understand he has a kind of bodyguard. A surly mute who will let no one in the house during the day.”

“Barnabas wants privacy.”

“And certainly he is getting it. Let us hope his book will be a true masterpiece to justify such actions.” He
paused and his pinched face took on a wicked smile. "I find this Barnabas Collins a very strange fellow in other ways. His coat, for instance. Don't you think it different? The kind of clothing popular many years ago."

"The old styles are coming in," Maggie said, defending Barnabas. "And I say he looks very well in them."

"I suppose that is explainable since he hails from London," Dr. Bremmer admitted. "It is the home of Carnaby Street and all that kind of fashion, but there are other things about him. His hands for instance."

She frowned. "They seem quite normal to me."

Dr. Bremmer's smile was taunting. "Then you cannot have held hands with him or certainly not for long, my dear. When I shook hands with him last night I found his was icy cold. As if he had no circulation at all."

The doctor paused meaningfully. "In fact, I might call it the hand of a dead man."

Maggie's eyes were frightened but she somehow forced herself to say, "He explained that. We'd been walking in the cold."

Dr. Bremmer responded too innocently for comfort. "So he did," he said. "I'd quite forgotten."

Maggie knew she had to get away. She told him, "I must get back to the house. Elizabeth will be wondering where I am."

The old doctor nodded absently. "I've been thinking of this Barnabas and that other Barnabas," he said. "You know, the first one. He left here and fled to England."

"I've heard it mentioned."

"Indeed you must have," he said with another of his cunning smiles. "After he left Collinwood, that other Barnabas, it was whispered he'd become a vampire."

"I wouldn't know."

"No. Of course not. Still, I must discuss it with the present Barnabas. I'm sure it might be extremely interesting."

She left him without saying anything, but as she walked rapidly back to the grim dark mansion she was sick with misgivings. She didn't understand what the wily old doctor was hinting, but she felt positive he was plotting some kind of evil against Barnabas.
CHAPTER FOUR

The unsettling conversation with Dr. Bremmer haunted Maggie for the balance of the day. Not until then had she realized how devoted she was to Barnabas Collins, and she was afraid that the sour old doctor was determined to cause him trouble. It was unfortunate that Nina had chosen to come back to Collinwood at a time when Barnabas was there.

Maggie continued to be baffled by this marriage between the youthful and still pretty Nina and the dried-up elderly doctor. Yet Nina appeared to be devoted to her husband. She also spent a great deal of her time with the much younger Noel Hart. Maggie wondered if there was a romance between the two.

The children behaved in a more normal fashion during the day and she was grateful for this. And she determined to visit the old house and see Barnabas before he made his appearance at Collinwood that evening. She considered it her duty to report the conversation that had taken place between the elderly doctor and her. It was only fair to give Barnabas this small warning.

As dusk approached she excused herself from the others, who had gathered in the living room, and hurried out of the house. A beautiful red sunset cut across the ocean in reflection as she took the path through the yard towards the first Collinwood. As she drew near the ancient structure she saw Barnabas and Hare on the steps together.

Hare gave her a scowl and went inside as she joined Barnabas on the steps. She smiled ruefully and said, “I’d judge your servant isn’t too fond of me.”

Barnabas, handsome as always in his black caped-coat, showed mild amusement. “Hare is suspicious of everyone. That is what makes him valuable to me. He protects my privacy perfectly.”
“I can well imagine,” she said.
“How pleasant to have you come by,” Barnabas said.
“I’d invite you inside, but I was about to make my way
to the main house.” He held up what looked like a neat
leather hat box. “I have the trophy Dr. Bremmer was
so anxious to look at.”
Maggie studied the shiny hat box with uneasy eyes.
“The skull is in there? The skull that Phineas Collins
used as a marker?”
“Yes,” Barnabas said with grim satisfaction. “The
very skull. Though I must say I don’t know what he can
want with it.”
She gave the courtly Barnabas a worried glance. “I’m
afraid of Dr. Bremmer,” she said. “Afraid he may try
to hurt you in some way.”
Barnabas’ full, dark eyebrows lifted a trifle. “Hurt
me? In what way?”
“I think he resents your attitude towards his research
into the spirit world.”
“I am against it.”
“And he knows it,” Maggie said. “Since psychic re-
search is an obsession with him, he regards you as his
enemy.”
“That is possible.”
“He stopped me on the path by the cliffs today and
said a lot of things,” she went on. “Things I feel you
should know.”
“Tell me about it as we walk towards Collinwood,”
Barnabas said, starting down the steps. They walked
slowly, side by side, and she gave him the full details
of what the doctor had said.
“He kept harping on the fact your ancestor had been
accused of being a vampire,” she concluded.
“I’m glad you told me,” Barnabas said. “At least I
have an idea of what is going on in his mind.”
She looked up at him. “Please be careful,” she begged
him.
He smiled at her in his sad way. “I appreciate your
concern, Maggie. Believe me, I do.”
“You saved my life last night,” she reminded him.
“But even if that had never happened I’ve grown to like
you anyway.”

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“And I am fond of you, Maggie,” he said gently. “It is strange, isn’t it, how suddenly the swamp seems to be playing a leading and sinister role in the affairs of Collinwood?”

She frowned. “It’s always been a place I avoided. I think most people fear the swamp.”

“And with good reason,” Barnabas said. “This skull I’m carrying is a link with that dark isolated place which Bremmer hopes to use in his effort to track down an evil spirit. The warlock he is so convinced threatens us.”

“What about the warlock?”

“Male witches have been known to exist here. I suppose it is not impossible the spirit of one still shadows the place. But I do not think the good Dr. Bremmer is equal to dealing with such a phantom creature. So I would consider my advice to let the spirits alone to be sound guidance.”

“The children still stick to their story about a phantom dominating them.”

“It could be true.”

“And this morning I talked with the police chief and he claimed there have been weird attacks made on some young women of the village. They have little remembrance of what happens, other than that a tall, dark man springs at them from the shadows and they are left weak and dazed with odd marks on their throats.”

It was almost dark, so she could not clearly see the expression on Barnabas’ face as she related this story, but when he answered her, his voice was taut.

“Were these young women seriously hurt in any way?”

“Aside from being frightened and the strange marks on their throats, no,” she said. “The chief thinks it is some lunatic at large. Probably one of the summer visitors. And I wondered if it mightn’t be the same insane person who has created the mischief with the children.”

“Anything is possible,” Barnabas said. “But I wouldn’t worry yourself about it. I’d call it the concern of the police.”

“He told me about it to warn me,” she said. “He suggested I shouldn’t wander too far from the house after nightfall.”
“That is always wise,” the man at her side said. “Though I doubt that you are in any danger.”

She halted a moment to ask him, “What makes you say that?”

Barnabas stood facing her, the darkness hiding their expressions. He told her, “It is merely a feeling of mine.” And with his free arm he drew her close and touched his lips to her forehead. It startled her to realize how cold they were. She remembered Dr. Bremmer’s pointed remarks about the coldness of the Englishman’s hand. Like a dead man’s hand! She banished the thought from her mind and put it down to her imagination.

With a tiny shiver, she said, “I hope that awful old man doesn’t make us devote all our evening to spiritualism again.”

“You had better be prepared for something of the sort,” Barnabas said as they moved on through the darkness towards the lights of Collinwood. “He is bound to make a lot of this skull.”

This prediction by Barnabas proved to be all too correct. Less than twenty minutes later Dr. Bremmer stood at a table in the living room with the skull placed nakedly on the top of it. The doctor’s smile was almost perfectly reflected in the grin of the skull, and his sunken eyes were as shadowed in their sockets as the black staring eye holes in the macabre object.

All of them were seated, an audience for the doctor, with the exception of Barnabas, who kept a distance away from the group as he had on the night before. Dr. Bremmer had seemed temporarily appeased by the sight of the skull. And he hadn’t shown any of his aggression towards Barnabas as yet. But Maggie, seated around the table with the others, wondered how long the truce between the two would last.

The doctor was delighted as he informed them, “I wanted this skull because I hope through it to find out the identity of the warlock. I believe this skull belonged to the male witch who is threatening Collinwood and its people in this modern day.”

Nina protested. “I find it too horrible to look at, Eli. Can’t you replace it in its box and hold the seance without it?”

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He shook his head and his scrawny hand caressed the skull. "No. It is vital that we use it. Phineas Collins claimed he did not know whose skull it was. But I think differently."

"How can that be important?" Elizabeth spoke up. Her tone was impatient and Maggie had an idea the dark woman was regretting the presence of her visitors. "It could break the spell of the warlock and save the children," Dr. Bremmer said.

"Not to mention saving the village from being harassed by the phantom," Noel Hart said. He turned to direct his next remark to Barnabas. "There have been attacks on some young women of the village, haven't there, Mr. Collins? Ghostly attacks."

Barnabas looked coldly disapproving. "You and the doctor claim to be the experts regarding the spirit world," he said.

Hostility flamed up in Dr. Bremmer's eyes as he told Barnabas, "But you can't be such an innocent in these things as you profess. As a historian you must have encountered many of the legends about this place."

"Legends may or may not have a basis in truth," Barnabas said in his quiet fashion. "You must agree with me in that, Doctor."

Dr. Bremmer's face was dark with anger. "It is not a point I wish to debate with you at this time," he snapped. "I want to go ahead with my seance."

The stage for the seance was set the same as before with them all gathered around the table and the grinning skull on it. Maggie tried to avert her eyes from the macabre thing as Dr. Bremmer droned on for what seemed an endless time. Then the lights were extinguished and a hush fell over the darkened room. She could hear the doctor's breathing become labored, and later small sighing moans escaped from his lips. Her hands gripped the edge of the table and she realized she was trembling.

Suddenly a burst of harsh laughter came from the doctor. A moment after a different, robust voice cried out, "All you members of the Collins clan gathered here, take warning! It is Asaph Clay who warns you!"

Noel Hart spoke up, "Were you a friend of Phineas Collins?"
The ghostly laughter came again. "A friend? Now, that's a funny one! 'Twas Phineas who murdered me, Asaph Clay, after I'd served him long and loyal. I, who captained the vessels dealing in his black traffic! I, who knew his guilty secrets too well! When I demanded my fair share of his dirty profits he struck me down! Split my skull and hid my body in the cellar!"

"Why have you come through to us?" Noel questioned again.

From the shadows the harsh voice replied, "To tell you it was my skull was placed on the pole. My good bones which were used to mark the treasure in the swamp! And the same skull lies before you on the table now."

"We are friendly to your cause," Noel Hart said. "Why should you warn us? Warn us against what?"

"That I am the warlock who threatens you," the harsh voice of Asaph Clay continued. "I shall visit vengeance on every Collins until the last one is dust! Or less than dust, like Barnabas!"

Maggie gasped at the mention of Barnabas. She had been caught up in the eerie atmosphere of the seance to the point where she was aware of nothing but the ghostly voice. Hearing Barnabas spoken of, she quickly reverted to the present. The doctor had stopped talking and there were only the hushed whispers of the others in the darkness now.

Noel Hart spoke up, "It's over. The spirit has left him. We should turn on the lights."

The lights came on and Maggie quickly glanced over where Barnabas stood by the switch. He gazed at her with seeming calm. She turned to the others at the table and saw that they were suffering various degrees of shock. Noel had already gotten up and was urgently attempting to bring the elderly doctor out of his trance.

Elizabeth's face was chalk-white. "I shall take no more part in these gatherings," she announced, standing.

Nina rose with her. "I don't think you should feel like that, Elizabeth," she reproved her. "Eli is merely trying to help you."

"Help me?" Elizabeth said incredulously. "I call it
madness.” And with that she turned and quickly left the room.

Nina looked over at Maggie with a shocked air. “I think Elizabeth is being much too sensitive,” she protested.

Maggie said nothing. She was inclined to agree with Elizabeth. Let the old doctor conduct his experiments in private if he liked. But it was not fair to expose them all to these frightening happenings.

Noel had brought the doctor out of his trance and was now filling him in with the details of what had gone on. The two were talking in low, tense voices.

Maggie went across the room to join Barnabas. Frowning, she said, “I suspect it all to be some kind of trick. Otherwise why should he bring your name into it?”

To her surprise Barnabas shook his head. “No. I’d guess you are wrong in that.”

Before she could make any answer they were interrupted when Dr. Bremmer came over to join them with a thin smile on his face.

“What do you make of Asaph Clay?” the doctor wanted to know.

“The name has a familiar ring,” he said. “I shall look through my journals and see if I can find some mention of such a person.”

“Do that, Mr. Collins,” Dr. Bremmer said too pleasantly.

Noel spoke with a frown on his long face. “At the very end of the seance mention was made of you as being less than dust. What do you say to that?”

Barnabas smiled coldly. “I’d say you were becoming extremely mixed up. The reference was obviously to my ancestor, the original Barnabas Collins. Even Dr. Bremmer must be willing to grant that.”

The doctor’s eyes gleamed mockingly. “I’d be willing to go along with that theory for the time being.”

Noel looked annoyed at this. Turning to his employer he asked, “What could Asaph Clay mean by referring to the original Barnabas Collins as less than dust? He surely has been dust for nearly two centuries.”

Dr. Bremmer spoke softly, “But you are forgetting the mystery in which the departure of that first Barnabas
was cloaked. That there were hints of his becoming a vampire. Surely less than dust!” He wheeled around to Barnabas. “Isn’t that so, Mr. Collins?”

“It would seem to fit,” Barnabas said carefully.

Nina came over to them and said, “It’s time we all went to bed and forgot about such things. We’ve done little here so far but anger Elizabeth.”

So the strange assembly broke up. Maggie was still of the opinion that Barnabas was being made a target for the malice of Dr. Bremmer and Noel Hart. But Barnabas appeared not at all worried. She saw him to the steps where they said goodnight.

“I don’t like the way that seance went,” she said again. Barnabas shrugged. “You mustn’t take them too seriously.”

“I wish they’d leave,” she said.

“That’s not likely with the doctor finding this such a fertile place for ghosts,” Barnabas said.

“Do you believe there could be such a thing as a warlock?”

“They are spoken of in the records of the family,” Barnabas said. “We could well be dealing with the spirit of one.”

“I’m inclined to go along with Elizabeth,” she said. “I think it is all nonsense.”

Barnabas smiled. “I admire your spirit.”

She was still worried about him as she went upstairs to her own room, and she prepared for bed in a disturbed frame of mind. It was another moonlight night so when she turned off the lamp by her bedside she went across to her window for a final glimpse of the silver ocean. While she was standing there she let her eyes wander to the lawns with their neat hedges, and she was surprised to see Nina walking across one of the far expanses of neatly cut grass. Elizabeth’s lovely cousin was alone!

Maggie frowned as she watched her moving slowly, apparently enjoying the moonlight. She thought of the phantom who’d been making attacks on women in lonely places in the area and wished she had warned Nina. She hoped the unsuspecting woman wouldn’t wander any
further afield. Tomorrow she would tactfully mention the danger to her.

Then Maggie gave a small gasp and touched a hand to her cheek. For a short distance away from Nina, emerging from the shadows of the hedge was a male figure. Maggie had never seen him before, but from the description given her by Chief Jim Baxter, she took him to be the phantom attacker. The tall figure with long black hair and mustache came warily out in the full glow of the moon to stolidly confront Nina!

Impulsively Maggie hurled up the window sash and leaning her head out cried, “Mrs. Bremmer, take care!”

Nina seemed to freeze in her tracks, the menacing figure directly before her. She turned to stare up at Maggie’s window, her face white and full of fear. Unsure of what might happen next, anxious to rescue the attractive woman from her plight, Maggie flung on her dressing gown and rushed out of her room and down the main stairway to the front door. She wasted no time in trying to rouse others, feeling that her first duty was to race to Nina’s side.

When she reached the steps and the cool night air she saw that Nina was still standing there in the same place—but there was a difference! She was alone! With a feeling of relief, positive that her call had frightened the marauder off, she ran out across the wet grass to join the woman.

Racing up to her, she gasped, “He ran off!”

Nina stared at her with baffled eyes. “You called me from the window.”

“Yes. I had to warn you against that man who came out from the shadow of the hedge.”

“What man?” Nina looked at her blankly.

Maggie had recovered from her exertions now. “You must have seen him,” she said incredulously. “He came out across the lawn and stood facing you.”

Nina asked, “Was that when you called out?”

“Yes.”

The woman’s pleasant face showed fear. “But there was no one.”

“What?”

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"No man came at me out of the shadows," Nina insisted. "No one came to stand before me."

"But I saw him clearly," Maggie protested in a faltering voice. "I'm sure I did."

"Could it have been some kind of illusion? It's so hard to see clearly in this light."

"No. I even noticed that he had long hair, almost to his shoulders. And a black mustache."

Nina looked puzzled. "I would have noticed such a person. And I didn't."

"But he was only a few feet from you!"

"I saw no one," Nina said. "Though I did hear your cry from the window and thought something was wrong inside. I was terrified."

Maggie couldn't doubt the attractive woman's sincerity and yet she could not deny what she had seen. There could only be one explanation. This was gradually dawning on her. And whether from the cold air or her horror at the realization, she began to tremble.

Nina touched her arm and asked anxiously, "What is it? What is wrong?"

"The man I saw," she stammered, "he must have been a ghost."

Nina's eyebrows raised and her mouth fell open. "Of course!" she gasped. "The warlock! He threatened us all tonight!"

"I can't believe it!" Maggie said, distressed.

"You must believe it," Nina said emphatically. "This is something for Eli to delve into." Linking her arm with Maggie's, she headed back towards the house.

Maggie found it hard to accept that she had actually seen a phantom. Her sleep was restless that night, haunted by visions of the menacing figure with the drooped mustache and long black hair.

She had no desire to discuss the eerie incident with the malevolent Dr. Bremmer, although she was sure that his wife would talk to him about it in detail. Later, she would tell Barnabas what had happened and get his opinion. She was confident he would give her his best advice.
It was another warm summer day and she spent some time with the children playing lawn croquet. When they tired of that she gave them permission to bring out one of their large jigsaw puzzles and spread it out on an iron table in the rose garden to work at. Meanwhile she sat on the side sun porch reading the Bangor paper. Her back was to the wall of windows overlooking the lawn.

So she was taken by surprise when a fairly large stone came through the window, splintering the glass and barely missing her. She jumped up with a cry of alarm. One of the large sections of glass had been destroyed and she’d only just escaped being injured. There was no sign of anyone on the lawn. She hadn’t expected there would be.

Bending down she found the round, gray stone which had done the damage. As she got up again Elizabeth came out into the sun porch. The dark woman stared at the damaged window and then at Maggie.

“How did that happen?”

Maggie showed her the rock. “Someone threw this.” Elizabeth looked alarmed. “You might have been badly hurt.”

“It apparently was meant to hit me,” she agreed.

“Not David and Amy again!”

“I doubt if Amy would have the strength,” she said.

“It seems to narrow down to David.”

“Let’s find him!” Elizabeth said, her mouth setting in a hard line.

They went out to the rose garden where Maggie had left the two children and found Amy lingering over the jigsaw puzzle alone. Under questioning, the little girl was evasive and sullen. Finally she told them that the phantom man had come to them and taken David away with him. Elizabeth and Maggie exchanged dubious glances at this thin story and went in search of David. They found him in the stables watching Matt repairing a lawn mower. The boy looked scared when Elizabeth ordered him to come outside.

In the yard she questioned the youngster, “Why did you throw this rock through the window at Maggie?” She held up the rock.

David’s eyes showed fear. “I didn’t do it,” he said uneasily.
“No one else could have,” his mother reproved him. “The phantom did it,” David said, his entire young frame tense. “He wanted me to do it and I refused. Then he threw the rock himself and disappeared.”

Elizabeth regarded him angrily. “You ask us to believe that?”

Maggie watched as the boy’s face took on that blank, ugly look she had become all too familiar with. The look which meant that beyond that moment there would be no further reasoning with him.

“I’ll have a tale to tell your father when he gets home.” Elizabeth said, “You’ll pay for all the deviltry you’ve been up to. Now, go to your room and stay there until I come and tell you that you may leave.”

David offered a glance of boyish defiance, and without saying a word slouched off towards the back door. He vanished inside, not once looking back.

Elizabeth gave Maggie a despairing look. “I can’t understand it. I can’t believe what is going on.”

“Perhaps his father will have some suggestion,” Maggie said.

Her employer looked at her bleakly. “I wouldn’t count on that.”

Maggie knew this was all too true. She should be hating David at this moment for the danger he’d placed her in, but she couldn’t bring herself to. She felt there was more to all this than just two naughty children telling lies.

She was on the sun porch cleaning up the mess of glass when Nina came out to join her. The attractive woman was wearing a print dress that set off her youthful figure. She at once questioned Maggie about the damage and when she heard the story looked impressed.

“You see,” she said. “It has to be the warlock. He’s seized on the children as well. I told Eli about your experience last night and he says there is no doubt you saw a ghost.”

“I’m not ready to believe that yet,” Maggie said grimly as she rose with the dustpan of glass in one hand and the whisk in the other.

“But there can be no other explanation,” Nina in-
sisted. “You listened to the threat against the family at the seance last night.”

“I’m not sure I believe in seances either.”

Nina’s smile was mocking. “I’m afraid you will before this ends,” was her warning.

Maggie left her to get rid of the mess of broken glass. When she came back to the sun porch the woman had gone. It struck Maggie that the advent of the Bremmers and Noel Hart with their firm belief in the supernatural was about the worst thing that could happen to all of them living at Collinwood. The newcomers were clouding a situation that was already obscure enough.

She left the porch to walk down the hallway. As she passed the study she saw Dr. Bremmer in there. When he saw her, he hailed her and asked her to come inside.

As she stood hesitantly before the broad desk he said, “I have heard about your experience with the supernatural last night from my wife.”

“I don’t claim it had anything to do with the supernatural.”

He frowned. “But obviously it must have. Nina didn’t see this figure which alarmed you so.”

“There may be an explanation,” she maintained, although actually she had no idea what it might be.

“My wife told me you had a very clear picture of the figure you saw. You described the man in detail.”

“Yes,” she said.

He nodded. “As I remember you told her the man had long black hair and a drooping mustache?”

“Yes,” she said again, having the feeling he was leading her into a trap and not certain what it was.

“And you recall the voice threatening us in the seance belonged to a piratical character called Asaph Clay who lived a hundred and fifty years ago?”

“What has that to do with what I saw on the lawn?” she asked.

“A great deal, Miss Evans,” he said with a gloating smile. “I have searched through some ancient volumes here and come up with a pencil sketch of one Asaph Clay. There can be no doubt it is our man.” He lifted up a thick volume which had been opened. “There you will see his likeness.” He held it out for her.
Maggie glanced at the crude reproduction of a pen sketch and her heart skipped a beat, for the figure presented there as Asaph Clay had the identical long black hair and drooping mustache as the phantom figure she'd seen on the lawn last night!

CHAPTER FIVE

Dr. Bremmer leaned close to her as she stared at the sketch in shocked silence. "Of course you must find him familiar," he observed with relish. "This man is identical to the one you described as threatening my wife last night."

"The beard and hair are the same," she said, drawing back from the book, her face ashen. "But I can't say it was the same person."

"I think we can safely decide it was the phantom warlock, Asaph Clay," the old doctor said, placing the heavy volume back on the desk. "There is a large library here. I intend to go through all of it. There may be some things Barnabas Collins has missed in his research."

"Your wife claimed she saw no one," Maggie said. "So I may have been mistaken."

He shook his head. "You saw the phantom. My wife did not, because that is the way the specter willed it. Such incidents are not unusual. The psychic societies often hear accounts of visitations where some see the ghost and others do not."

"So you are convinced it was the ghost of Asaph Clay," she said.

"Yes," he said. "And there could well be other supernatural beings at large here in Collinwood. The voice in the seance spoke of Barnabas Collins, the original Barnabas Collins, who was a vampire according to gossip."

"Gossip handed down over the centuries," she said bitterly. "I'd not think it too reliable."
“If the Barnabas who is staying at the old house was more eager to cooperate we might discover a great deal we don’t know,” he said. “But for his own reasons he has chosen to oppose me.”

“I don’t think that’s his attitude,” she said, defending Barnabas. “It’s just that he feels no good is accomplished disturbing the dead.”

“Because of my special interests I’m forced to disagree,” the man behind the desk said, snapping the big book closed with a clawlike hand.

She said, “Is there anything more you want to ask me?”

“Not at present,” he said, his eyes fixed on her. “But you may depend on it, I will be coming back to you again.”

Maggie left the study feeling panic-stricken. The evidence of the sketch had shaken her. It seemed very likely she had looked at a ghost and the ghost had been Asaph Clay. The name was coming to have an ominous ring for her. Wanting to talk to Barnabas, she wondered if he might in this single instance relax his rule of not seeing anyone in the daytime. Surely he would be willing to break his routine for her if he had any idea of the trouble she faced. It was worth a try.

With that in mind she left the house and set out across the yard in the direction of the old house. When she came in sight of it she was startled to see Hare descending the steps. She halted at once and waited to see what he would do. As she watched she saw him hesitate when he left the steps and stare around him cautiously. Then he turned and walked off in the direction of the cemetery.

She was at once encouraged. With Hare out of the way it would be much easier for her to get into the house and speak to Barnabas. Hare usually stood guard just inside the door. For some reason he had deserted his post for a little.

Knowing the coast was clear she hurried on and reached the oaken door of the original Collinwood within a few minutes. She tried the handle and it turned easily. Swinging the door open the shadowed hallway was visible. It smelled of dampness and there were cobwebs in abundance at every corner and clinging to the dirty, cracked ceiling. The house had deteriorated so much,
she didn’t know how Barnabas could bear to remain in it. Only because he was so absorbed in completing his book, she supposed.

Fighting off her first moment of revulsion and fear, she stepped into the cool shadows of the ancient building. Moving a step at a time she was impressed by the silence. It was like an empty house. Yet she knew Barnabas was in one of the rooms working on his book. She was going to call his name and then held back not wanting to so rudely disturb him.

Passing the double doors to the living room, she saw that it was as encrusted with dust and grime as the rest of the house. And the furniture was covered by ghostly white throws long since soiled and dirty. Barnabas could not make much use of the many big rooms.

Several of the doors were closed and locked. She strained to hear some sound of Barnabas so she might have a hint as to where he was working. But there was just the silence. A board creaked under her foot and she jumped, so great was her tension.

Now she had come to an open door at the rear of the hall and a steep set of stone steps leading down to the cellars. In contrast to the sunshine of the day outside, the house had seemed gray and gloomy. The cellar was nothing less than black. She doubted that Barnabas would select a room down there to work unless he felt it gave him more privacy.

Only her strong desire to see him made her go on. She gingerly went down the uneven steps, her eyes slowly becoming accustomed to the dark. The smell of dampness was stronger here. It was mixed with a musty odor of decay. Her foot touched the cellar’s earthen floor and she glanced around her hesitantly, ready to believe she’d made an error in descending to this level of the old house. About to turn and go back up again, she chanced to see an open doorway with soft light emerging from it at the other end of the cellar.

This gave her the courage to finish her exploration of the forbidding area. Careful to pick her way among the stacked possessions of generations of Collinses filling the dark and eerie cellar she moved closer to the doorway and the light coming from it.
Could this be the study in which Barnabas worked daily? If so, what a strange location for it. As Maggie drew nearer the doorway her spirits rose with the anticipation of seeing the handsome Englishman. She felt sure he would be able to set her fears at rest. He had a calm way of dealing with things which she admired.

Now she was almost at the door and saw that the light was coming from candles flickering on what at first glance appeared to be a sideboard. Then she halted and her face contorted with fear. For the sideboard had turned out to be an ornate coffin! A coffin resting on a wooden stand. She stood there frozen, wondering what secret horror she'd stumbled on.

She did not go closer to the casket, uncertain whether it was partly open or sealed. Her macabre discovery left her with no thought but to retreat, but retreat meant traversing that long dark cellar once again. So she continued to stand there transfixed.

Then a hand grasped her arm roughly and she screamed out her terror. Her other arm was seized in the same fashion and she was wheeled around and swiftly propelled in the direction of the steps. She fought to free herself and discover who and what her attacker was. As she fought and screamed she heard strange grunting sounds emanating from the one who'd so easily captured her.

Her resistance ebbed as she was literally dragged up the steps. Then along the hallway to the front door where she was released to stumble out into the sunshine. A wild snarling sound followed her and she turned weakly to stare up into the angry face of the burly Hare. The mute raised a fist as a warning to her not to return again and then went back into the old house and slammed the door after him.

She stood there in a dazed state. Her whole body ached and she was sure her clothing had been torn in places. It had all happened so quickly she'd not been able to adjust yet.

"I'd say you were treated rather roughly, Miss Evans," said a voice behind her.

Maggie turned to see Dr. Bremmer's secretary standing staring at her with a mocking expression on his rather
homely face. The eyes behind the thick glasses made her uneasy.

She spoke in a small voice, "How long have you been here?"

"Long enough to see you maltreated by that brute employed by your friend, Barnabas Collins," Noel said. "What does it mean?"

Her first thought was to protect Barnabas. "It was my fault," she said. "I was warned not to enter the house during the daytime and I insisted."

"So Barnabas allowed his man to throw you out?"

"Barnabas had nothing to do with it. He didn't even know I was in there. I didn't see him."

The balding secretary raised an eyebrow. "Is that so? I can't imagine him not hearing your screams. I heard them out here. That is why I stopped."

Maggie felt her cheeks burn. "It was not Barnabas' fault."

Noel's weird eyes searched the front of the old house. "What is it like inside? And why does Barnabas keep it guarded so well?"

"It's just an old house," she said. Now she was anxious to get away to collect her thoughts and decide what she should do next.

The thick glasses turned her way again. "It's a remarkable old structure. The typical haunted house. Surely you must have come upon something of interest in there?"

"I told you no," she said impatiently.

"And yet you were evicted in such a savage fashion," the secretary said with a prim smile. "Doesn't that change your opinion of Barnabas Collins?"

"Not at all," she said, and started to walk back in the direction of Collinwood, hoping to rid herself of his unwelcome company and questions.

But it wasn't to be that simple. Noel quickly followed her. "I have been down to the cemetery," he said, "beginning the copying of the material on the headstones."

"I see," she said, head held high, eyes straight ahead, wanting to let him know she wished to be rid of him.

He was taking no hints. "It's a fascinating place," he said. "Dr. Bremmer feels positive it will yield us some secrets about the present haunting of Collinwood."
“If we are being haunted,” she said stiffly, indicating that she greatly doubted it.

“There’s no question of spirit manifestations,” Noel said glibly as he walked at her side, his briefcase in hand. “You saw how easily the doctor was able to fall into a trance. That’s not always the case.”

“I have no experience with such things.”

“Take my word for it, the circumstances were unusual,” he said. “Dr. Bremmer has an interesting theory about what is going on.”

“Really?”

“Yes. He thinks there are two supernatural beings exerting their forces here rather than one. The warlock, Asaph Clay, and some other creature of the darkness he has not yet been able to identify.”

They were nearing the house and she increased her pace. “I’m afraid I’m not always able to follow the doctor’s reasoning,” she said.

“You’ll understand later,” the secretary promised. “Just now it’s all a little vague. But Dr. Bremmer has battled with and exorcised evil spirits in other places.”

She glanced at the man with the heavy glasses. “I’d expect him to be worried about his own safety.”

Noel chuckled. “He invites the danger. The spirit world claims his entire interest these days. And he enjoys the challenge offered by Collinwood.”

Maggie disliked the secretary and suspected him of carrying on a romance with his employer’s wife. As a test, she asked, “If he isn’t afraid for himself I’d think he should consider his wife.”

“Nina is as interested in his research as he is,” he said. “Or almost as much.”

They had reached the front door of Collinwood and she left him to enter the house without a parting word. She had an idea he knew she actively disliked him and so would not be too surprised.

Going straight to her room, she discovered that she had been right. Her dress showed the rough handling it had been given. There were two large tears in it and a seam had pulled apart. She changed and took a shower. This made her feel much better, but she was still haunted by what she’d seen in that cellar room.
She stared at her reflection in the mirror and saw the fear still boldly outlined on her face. What had the macabre scene meant? The casket with the two flickering candles in their tall silver candlesticks set on top of it was still engraved on her mind. Had this horror some bearing on Barnabas and his desire for secrecy?

It was hard for her to associate the handsome Barnabas with this dank, shadowy room of the dead. Yet Barnabas must know about it, since he lived in the gloomy old house. And she would have to admit her knowledge of what she’d seen since Hare had discovered her there and so brutally evicted her. She would have to try to explain her reasons for seeking help and at the same time make him understand why she had violated his strict desire for privacy.

She was still standing there when a knock came on her door. She opened it to discover a worried Elizabeth in the hallway. “The children are off somewhere again,” she said, stepping inside.

Maggie sighed. “I should have watched them more carefully. I went for a walk by myself.”

“I don’t blame you,” Elizabeth lamented. “It’s the mad state we’re in here. I ordered David to remain in his room until I gave him permission to leave, but he’s brazenly disobeyed me. And Amy’s gone with him.”

“They may be down on the beach,” she said. “I’ll go look for them.”

“In a minute,” the mistress of Collinwood said with a troubled expression on her face. “I’m frantic about the presence of Nina and her husband here. They are making a bad situation worse. And that secretary of theirs is no better than they are. What am I going to do?”

“I suppose you could ask your cousin to leave.”

“I may have to,” Elizabeth worried. “I can’t stand much more. I have informed Dr. Bremmer there are to be no more of those diabolical seances in the house. And I’ve asked him to get rid of that loathsome skull which Barnabas brought him. He’s keeping it in his room.”

Maggie said, “There seems to be bad feeling between Dr. Bremmer and Barnabas.”

“Because Barnabas has most sensibly advised him to stop this spirit nonsense here. It can only do us all harm.”
“He’s using the children and their weird stories as an excuse.”

“If we could only get Nina and those others out of here, I’m sure we could deal with the children,” Elizabeth said grimly. “For once I wish that Roger would get back soon.”

Maggie felt there was nothing she could add to what the other woman had said. She didn’t dare reveal all that she knew or suspected. She moved to the door and said, “I’d better go after the children or we won’t have them back in time for dinner.”

When she left the house she went directly down to the beach using a footpath that zigzagged along one of the less steep cliffs to the shore. The tide was high and the sandy portion of the beach narrowed to a dozen feet and less in some places. The waves dashed in against the huge rocks lining the area with an angry lash and great frothings. She worried that the children might have stayed down there until their retreat had been cut off in some rocky cove.

She made her way along the usual stretch where they played. It was more difficult with the tide high since she had to clamber up weathered, mossed rocks in places. Often when she made her way down their other sides there would be small pools with shelled sea creatures in them. She made no attempt to call the children. It would clearly be impossible to raise her voice above the pounding of the waves. The sound that seemed relatively subdued in Collinwood was deafening down there.

Reaching a short expanse of even sandy beach she stood still for a moment. She glanced around hoping to sight the two youngsters, but there was no sign of them. Suddenly a feeling of true fear swept through her. She had the conviction that strange eyes had suddenly fixed on her. That she was being peered at by some unseen presence. And she realized how isolated and vulnerable she was there in that lonely spot.

Her instinct was to give way to her panic and run madly. It didn’t matter where! But somehow she barely kept control of her jangling nerves and very slowly let her gaze sweep across the rocks up towards the cliff in search of whoever was spying on her.
And then she saw it! For just a fleeting second! Showing above the edge of the cliff high up over where she stood was that malevolent face with the drooping mustache framed by strands of long black hair. She screamed loudly and it was a signal for the face to vanish. Then there was just the bare edge of the cliff and the clouds beyond.

She stared up at the spot with horrified eyes. Had she seen the face or had it been a product of her tortured imagination? At the moment it was impossible for her to tell. A giant wave came dashing in, sending the froth-flecked water up to where she stood and wetting her shoes. She moved back quickly and then went on.

She was ready to give up when the children appeared suddenly around a big rock. They were walking hand in hand and looking frightened. When they saw her they ran forward with their faces brightening. She smiled at them wanly and shouted, “We must get back before the tide gets any higher.”

Actually she thought it had reached its peak but she used this to prod them into obedience. Judging by the expression on their faces when she’d first seen them, they had become scared. As further proof of this they ran along beside her obediently as she led them back to the path.

Not until they had reached the top of the cliff did she attempt to talk to them. “You must never go down there again when the tide is coming in,” she warned them. “You could get trapped and drowned.”

“We almost did,” said Amy on the verge of tears. “Let it be a lesson to you,” Maggie told them. 

David’s face was a study in mixed emotions. The boy told her, “I’m sorry about that rock, Maggie.”

“I should hope so,” she said.

“It was the phantom,” he insisted. “I didn’t mean to do it.”

She regarded him sternly. “I might forgive you doing it,” she said, “but I can’t stand your lying about it.”

A lost look crossed his face. “It was the phantom,” he insisted. “And we saw him on the beach just a little while ago.”

Maggie was ready to reprimand him again when the
memory of that menacing face crossed her mind. The face she'd seen staring at her from the cliff's edge. In a taut voice, she asked, "When did you see him?"

"He was walking along the cliff," Amy told her. "And he waved to us."

Maggie made a hasty decision to question them no more. If they were dealing with the supernatural, it was better not to go further into it. So far the youngsters were disarmingly frank in their references to the phantom. She had no wish to add morbid fear to what already must be confusing to them. This decided she quickly shepherded them back to the house.

Dinner was a fairly grim affair. Elizabeth was having a hard time to conceal her distaste for her visitors. This made Maggie uncomfortable, although the three intruders seemed to be not at all aware of the situation. When Maggie went out to the garden for a stroll by herself later Nina joined her.

The older woman was apparently anxious for information. She at once told Maggie that she'd heard all about the happenings at the old house from Noel Hart.

"Don't you agree that Barnabas is an eccentric?" Nina asked.

"Because he is dedicated to his work?"

"There is more to it than that," Nina assured her. "He never is around until after the sun sets. And his appearance has an odd other-world look. He dresses so strangely and his hands are so cold."

"None of those things bother me," she said defiantly.

Nina offered her an indulgent smile. "My husband has been adding them all together and he has come to some rather surprising conclusions. He may tell you about them shortly."

"I'm not interested," she said.

Nina looked at her very directly. "Tell me," she said, "are you in love with Barnabas Collins?"

Caught by surprise, she replied, "I don't think you have the right to ask that question." And she left the older woman to hurry out across the lawn.

She had no desire to return to the house and listen to the theories of the unpleasant Dr. Bremmer. Nor did she want to be with his wife or Noel Hart. So she remained
out by the cliff path as dusk settled. She strolled slowly in the direction of Widow’s Hill as she reviewed all the happenings of the upsetting day. She had a feeling things were developing to a point of crisis at Collinwood. Soon something horrible and utterly unpredictable was going to happen.

When she reached the high point of the cliffs night began to settle in earnest. She saw the sweeping beam of the distant lighthouse as it cut the darkness to her left. The distant buoys showed their red lights and their bells tolled with the motion of the waves, guidance for the many pleasure boats that thronged these waters in summer. To the right was the village of Collinsport on a point jutting out into the ocean. The village lights twinkled in orderly clusters against the prevailing blackness.

Turning just a little, she could see the lights in the windows of Collinwood. There were only a few lighted windows for such an imposing mansion. But then most of its forty rooms were empty. She sighed at the prospect of succeeding days with Dr. Bremmer making them all uneasy with his endless talk of spirits and demons.

“I’ve been looking for you, Maggie.” It was Barnabas who had come up beside her to speak in a kindly tone.

She stared up into the handsome face. “I couldn’t stay at the house. Things aren’t going well there.”

“I understand,” he said, his keen eyes studying her.

“Noel Hart saw what happened at the old house this afternoon,” she said. “He told all the others. They’re making a fuss about it.”

“I’m sorry about that,” Barnabas said gravely. “Had I known what was going on I would have prevented it. You do believe that.”

“I want to,” she said solemnly.

His handsome face showed distress. “Hare is a rough fellow. He took his orders too literally. I had no idea he’d manhandle you as he did.”

“I did enter the house against your orders,” she said quietly.

“You did,” he agreed. “But reckless and inconsiderate as you were, I would have spared you what resulted.”

“What does it all mean, Barnabas?” she pleaded with him. “I must know.”

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Barnabas took her gently by the arms and looked deep into her eyes. "What goes on in that house doesn't concern you. Believe me when I say that. Leave me to my work in the daylight hours. Be content with the time I can give you at night. Content as I must be."

She stared at him with a hint of fear. "That room in the cellar. I stepped inside it before Hare came after me and dragged me away. What does it mean, Barnabas?"

He frowned. "What does what mean?"

"The casket and the candles! I saw them! And I don't understand!"

The grip of his hands on her arms tightened. The face with the high-cheekbones showed torment. "What else did you see in there?"

"Nothing!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes! Yes!" she cried. "Hare dragged me away right after that."

His grip on her arms relaxed and he drew her close to him. "Maggie, my poor darling," he said in a tense voice unlike his own.

She stared up at him, her eyes wide with concern. "Tonight Nina Bremmer asked me point-blank if I was in love with you. I ran from her since I couldn't answer her." She hesitated. Then she added softly, "Because I do love you, Barnabas."

"Maggie!" He spoke her name softly and then he kissed her. The touch of his cold lips might have repelled her under other conditions, but, caught in a mighty wave of emotion, she was blissfully unaware of their oddness and returned his kiss with a passionate fervor.

When the long embrace between them ended she told him, "They are hinting dreadful things about you at the house."

"Nothing that Dr. Bremmer suggests would surprise me," Barnabas said grimly.

"You must defend yourself. Prove them wrong."

"About what?"

"They haven't said yet," she admitted. "But I'm sure it has something to do with the supernatural. A link between you and your ancestor."

Barnabas nodded. "I can imagine. But you mustn't
let yourself be afraid. I will take care of everything when the time comes.”

She stared at him again. “You didn’t explain what I saw in the cellar. What that casket meant.”

Barnabas’ face shadowed. “A time will come when I will have to explain that room in the cellar. It will be painful enough then. In the meanwhile I ask you to have faith in me. Believe that it has no bearing on what we feel for each other. Give me some time.”

His pleading was both eloquent and sincere. She could not find it in her heart to deny his request. “Very well,” she said quietly.

“And now I will see you safely back to the house,” he said, taking her by the arm.

They talked little on the way to Collinwood. When they were almost at the house he kissed her goodnight and they parted. As she came close to the front door she turned and saw that he had vanished. He was nowhere in sight. Often his sudden comings and goings puzzled her.

The big mansion was almost in darkness, although it was not very late. She was about to go inside when from around the corner of the house she heard sounds of struggle and a hoarse cry for help!

CHAPTER SIX

Without regard for her own safety Maggie hurried in the direction from which the strangled plea for aid had come. As she turned the corner of the house she saw two struggling figures. One of them glanced quickly her way for just a second so that she saw his face. It was the face of the long-dead warlock, Asaph Clay!

She screamed and the blurred figure moved backward to fade into the darkness. The other man had collapsed on the ground. She ran to his side and saw that it was Dr. Bremmer. He was gasping and the yellowish wrinkled
face had taken on a purplish tone. His clawlike hands groped at his throat and she saw that something had been twisted tightly around it. A kind of scarf. She hastily assisted him in loosening the scarf and helped him to a sitting position.

"Where is he?" the doctor demanded in a still bewildered manner.

"He vanished when I came," she said. "Are you all right?"

"I think so," the elderly man said with difficulty. He grasped the shawl in his hand. "He was strangling me with this."

"I know."

With great effort he raised himself to his feet and stood there a moment, obviously weak from his ordeal. He glanced at her. "You saw who it was?"

"Only a brief glimpse," she replied quietly, unwilling to identify his assailant as the person she'd seen in the pen sketch.

Dr. Bremmer's eyes fixed on her. "It was no human. I saw the face before he attacked me. It was Asaph Clay." He paused. "It was Clay wasn't it?"

She swallowed hard. "The features were like Clay's."

"He's making good his threat. And so he begins with a direct attack on me," the doctor said.

"You shouldn't stay out here," Maggie said with an apprehensive glance in the direction of the hedge where the mysterious figure had disappeared.

"He won't come back right now," Dr. Bremmer said, but he did follow her advice and walk around to the front door of the old mansion.

When they went inside they discovered Nina and Noel Hart in what seemed intimate conversation on a divan in the living room. The two jumped up, looking rather guilty as Maggie and the doctor joined them. It was all too apparent from his disheveled appearance that he'd been the victim of an attack. His collar was awry and his long strands of wispy white hair were ruffled and standing out from his skull.

"What happened?" Nina said, rushing forward to take her husband's arm and lead him to the nearest empty chair.
He smiled grimly as he seated himself. “I met a ghost,” he said and held up the ornate silk scarf as confirmation. Then he proceeded to tell them the entire story, including the part Maggie had played in it.

Nina recoiled in horror from the account. Turning to Maggie she said, “Did you really recognize the figure as Asaph Clay?”

“It looked like him,” she acknowledged. “But it might have been somebody who resembled him.”

“That’s hardly likely,” Noel commented. He was standing on the other side of the old man’s chair.

Dr. Bremmer held up the multi-hued silk scarf again. “If any proof it was a ghost is needed look at this scarf,” he said. “Judging from the texture and workmanship I’d say it was at least a century old. Probably dates further back than that.”

Nina’s pretty face showed her concern. “An attempt was made on your life,” she told her husband. “I don’t believe it was a ghostly attack but that of a living enemy. We must call in the police.”

The doctor lifted a hand in protest. “I don’t want my work here interfered with. The police will spoil everything.”

“That’s nonsense,” Nina said sharply. Maggie had never seen the attractive woman so concerned.

“Psychic research is of a very delicate nature,” the old man in the chair said wearily. “How long will it take to make you understand that? What happened tonight was a normal hazard of my experiment here. Asaph Clay made it clear during the seance that all our lives would be threatened. That does not influence me in the least. I intend to find out the truth about that long-dead sea captain. And the truth about Phineas Collins’ lost treasure.”

“The marshland long ago claimed that,” Nina said wearily.

“Don’t be too sure,” her husband said. “I have already come upon clues. I believe the gold may still be recovered one day.”

“At least let me report this to Chief Baxter,” Nina said. “He is a close friend of mine. There need be no fuss and the report need not go further.”
“It will threaten everything,” Dr. Bremmer complained.
“I still say it must be done,” his wife was firm on the point.

He sighed. “Very well. In the morning if you still feel the same way. Let us sleep on it.”

It was let stand that way. Maggie said goodnight to the visitors and went on up to her own room. Coming on top of the strenuous day and her meeting with Barnabas, the incident with Dr. Bremmer was the final straw. Things at Collinwood appeared to be rapidly getting out of hand. So much so that she was beginning to believe in the ghost.

Her sleep that night was restless. Twice she cried out when the weird face of Asaph Clay intruded in her troubled dreams. He smiled at her in these nightmares, a cold, wicked smile that promised further evil. When she awoke to a fog-shrouded morning she felt weary, as if she’d had hardly any sleep.

The dark, damp day seemed to have an effect on everyone in the old mansion. Dr. Bremmer crept off to the study to pursue his research. Nina was busy on the phone trying to contact the police chief and Noel was busy at his typewriter in the sewing room, transcribing the copy from the gravestones.

Elizabeth called Maggie out to the kitchen and queried her about what had gone on the night before. When she heard her side of the story the older woman’s concerned face registered new interest.

“If only this would persuade Nina to make them all leave,” she said hopefully.

“It might,” Maggie agreed. “She is calling in the police.”

“We can only hope this is the turning point,” Elizabeth said. “Please keep your eye on the children. They’re doubly likely to get into mischief on a day when they can’t play outside.”

But both David and Amy seemed to be on their good behavior. Maggie thought Christopher Jennings’ nine-year-old sister was a charming little girl when at her best. Of course David was the dominating one of the duo. And on this wet, miserable day he seemed content to play
endless games of checkers with the little girl in the games room. Maggie was in there with them a few minutes before twelve when Chief Baxter arrived and she was summoned to the living room for questioning.

The lean, tanned Jim Baxter stood in the middle of the big, shadowed room, dominating the tense conference. He addressed himself first to Dr. Bremmer, saying, “Doctor, you must admit this whole story of yours is pretty wild.”

The doctor gestured with a thin hand. “I expected that would be your reaction.”

Baxter looked cynical. “Personally I haven’t had any experience with ghosts, but we have dealt with a few lunatics in the area. And I say this is likely the answer in this case.”

Nina seemed happier with the good-looking friend of her school days in charge. She said, “I think Jim is right. Who else but a lunatic would have a motive to attack Eli?”

Dr. Bremmer gave the answer. “Asaph Clay. A warlock when he was alive and an avenging spirit now. He has vowed to extract payment from all the Collins family for his murder.”

Baxter shook his head. “Now that’s just too much for me,” he said. “I don’t even admit there are such things as ghosts.”

Noel Hart gave him a sneering look. “That only proves how naive you must be.”

The chief didn’t lose his temper, but his smile was thin. “It could be that my education in that department isn’t complete. I prefer to stick to regular police rules. And we don’t have anything in the book that deals with ghosts. So I’ll assume our criminal is alive.”

Dr. Bremmer frowned. “And what are you going to do?”

“Investigate on that basis,” the chief said.

“I thoroughly agree with you,” was Nina’s pleased comment as she gave the young Chief of Police a grateful smile.

“It’s no feather in our caps to have a man like you visit the area and be threatened by a lunatic,” Baxter said.
“How far does your investigation have to go?” Dr. Bremmer asked him.

The chief raised his eyebrows. “I don’t follow you.”

The old man said, “I’m trying to find out who will be in charge. Will the investigation be confined to you and your men?”

Baxter hesitated, his lean, tanned face showed caution. “That’s a touchy point,” he declared. “By rights I should turn this over to the State Police. After all, it was attempted murder.”

“Disregard that,” Dr. Bremmer said. “I’d prefer you acted on your own in the affair. It would be less likely to interfere with my psychic research here.”

Baxter eyed him shrewdly. “Let me ask you this, Doctor. Is your psychic research here as important to you as your life?”

Dr. Bremmer showed momentary surprise and then he brushed this off to say quietly, “I suppose that in a way it is. I hope my findings in the supernatural here will culminate my life’s work.”

“That’s an honest answer,” the chief said with a grim smile on his lean face. “Well, I won’t make any long-time promises, but for the moment I’ll hold back the report. I’ll make a try to clear this up myself.”

“I’m most grateful to you,” the old doctor said.

Baxter took them all in with a thoughtful glance. “Before I leave,” he said, “there’s something I’d like to ask you. I don’t want to become too befuddled with a lot of talk about warlocks and ghosts. So I’d like you to name any living suspects that come to mind.”

Elizabeth, who had cautioned them all not to mention anything about the children and their weird behavior and insistence they were being visited by a phantom, spoke up, “I don’t know that there are any suspects, Jim. I agree with you. Whoever did this was a lunatic. Probably some transient.”

The young chief glanced at Nina. “Have you anything to offer, Mrs. Bremmer?”

“I think Elizabeth is right,” she said. “It has to be a madman.”

“Mr. Hart?” the chief questioned the solemn-faced man with the heavy glasses.
“I’m on my employer’s side,” Noel Hart said primly. “It was clearly the ghost of Asaph Clay. Miss Evans also saw the figure.”

“Well, Maggie?” Baxter turned to her with a questioning smile.

She knew she was blushing. “The face I saw looked like the sketch of Asaph Clay, but I don’t think it was a ghost. Just somebody who resembled him.”

Dr. Bremmer got up from his chair. “I must point out that this girl is prejudiced in her views of the supernatural. And I consider her evidence as biased.”

Baxter nodded. “There is something else I should mention,” he said. “For several weeks there have been disturbing incidents of young women being attacked in the area.” He looked directly at Elizabeth. “I believe they began just about the time your Cousin Barnabas came to visit. I notice he’s not here today.”

Elizabeth’s head was held high. “Barnabas devotes his days to writing. He is engaged on a history of the family. He doesn’t wish to be disturbed.”

“So you never see him during the days at all?” Baxter asked pointedly.

Maggie’s throat tightened as she waited for Elizabeth’s answer. The dark-haired woman said, “No.”

“Yet I understand he wanders about the village at all hours of the night,” Baxter said. “As a matter of record, my men have been watching him. He was noticed in several areas where attacks on young women took place later.”

Elizabeth maintained her composure. “Surely you’re not suggesting that Barnabas has anything to do with these attacks?”

The young chief of police shrugged. “I’m not suggesting anything. I’m merely telling you what we know. I met your cousin in the village the other night and he cooperated by coming to the police station for questioning. As a result we have nothing against him. At least not for the time being.”

Nina spoke up, “Are you telling us you regard him as a suspicious character?”

Baxter frowned. “I suppose he is, from our point of view. His hours are odd. He shuts himself up in an old
house. And even his clothes are different. He’s the type who is bound to attract attention in a small village like Collinsport.”

Elizabeth said, “Barnabas is a polished London gentleman. Naturally he seems different to the people here.”

“The point I’m interested in making,” Baxter said quietly, “is that the person who has been attacking these girls might easily have been the same one who tried to throttle Dr. Bremmer last night.”

The elderly doctor shook his head. “I disagree. Consider the scarf. It’s very old.”

“The criminal could have found it somewhere,” Baxter said. “In an old house perhaps.” He paused a second to allow them to consider this, and Maggie had no question he was referring to Barnabas. Then he proceeded. “The description of the man is quite different. But wigs and false mustaches are easily available these days. Anyone can order them through the mail.”

“You make a strong case,” Dr. Bremmer said. “But if you are hinting that Barnabas Collins is the criminal, I say you are very much in error.”

Maggie was astounded at the old man’s spirited defence of Barnabas, since she knew the two had been at odds, but in any case, this seemed to bring the discussion to an end. Jim Baxter left, promising to try and find the criminal. It was not until Maggie found herself alone in the corridor outside the living room with Dr. Bremmer that she learned the reason for his coming to the aid of Barnabas.

“I suppose you wonder why I insisted Barnabas could not be guilty,” the old man said with a gleam in his eyes.

“I agree with what you said,” she told him.

He raised a thin hand. “Yet I had a special reason for saying it. I do not consider Barnabas all that lily pure. But I believe he has to be trapped in a psychic way not by the police. I prefer to deal with him in my own fashion.” Having delivered this speech he left her to go to the study.

The old man’s frank report of his motives left her more worried about Barnabas’ fate than ever. There were two factions arrayed against him: those who thought him a
possible criminal and who were watching him for evidence to convict him of the weird attacks on the local girls, and those who believed he was in some way linked with the original Barnabas and dealing in the supernatural.

Maggie felt neither group was right, and she could only hope that the man she had come to love would survive his enemies. She was certain that he deserved to. She had tried to warn him the previous night, but he had paid small attention to her.

These thoughts tormented her throughout the drab, foggy day. She looked after the children and kept a good deal to herself. When evening came she noted that the fog was heavier than before. The view of the ocean was lost to the thick curtain of gray. It was barely possible to see across the broad front lawn.

She found an interesting magazine in the sewing room and sat down in a far corner to read until Barnabas might arrive. It had gotten dark so early she had no choice but to switch on the floor lamp by the chair. Time passed and still Barnabas did not come. Then she was conscious of the entrance of someone else into the room. It was Noel Hart.

Noel said, “Sorry to disturb you. But I was working in here today and I left some things behind.” He went to the desk to gather up his papers. Over his shoulder, he added, “It’s a quiet evening.”

She put down the magazine with a sigh. “Yes. It is.”

Noel stuffed the sheets of paper he’d gathered into his briefcase. “What did you think of the views put forward by the police chief today?”

“About what I expected.”

The eyes behind the thick glasses were scornful. “A predictable type,” he sneered. “I don’t expect any results from him. He’s a friend of Nina’s, but I’d say she’s outgrown his sort.”

“I don’t think he’s partial to ghost lore.”

He began to stare at her. There was a strange hypnotic power in his eyes. The shadowed room seemed to contract and become remote from all the rest of the big house.

In a voice that had taken on a hollow, echoing tone,
he asked her, “Do you understand the composition of demons?”

“No,” she said faintly, staring into his eyes though she vaguely knew it was against her will to do it.

“Demons are without body,” he went on in that ghostly tone. “But then for a specific time they assume bodies and use them. Yet the demons are made of air or some denser matter. There is a demon among us here.”

“I don’t understand,” she said.

“You do not need to,” he said softly. “For we shall exorcise and drive out the demons here at Collinwood. I shall say, ‘Adjure you ancient serpent, by the Judge of the living and the dead, by the Creator of the universe, who has power to send you to Gehenna, that you depart forthwith from this house. He orders you to do, cursed devil, who ordered the winds and the sea and the tempests. He orders you who ordered you to be plunged from Heaven into the Lower Regions. He orders you, who ordered you to go back. Hearken, therefore, Satan, and be afraid, and withdraw, subdued and prostrate!””

He still leaned there his face close to hers. There was a long moment of silence between them. She stared at him fearfully with her mind in a whirl. He chuckled softly and the spell seemed to break.

She said, “What were you saying?”

Noel was the young secretary with briefcase in hand once more. He stood a few feet away from her with a faint smile on his long face.

“I was quoting some famous passages from the lore of demonology. I’m sure your friend Barnabas Collins would understand them. And by the way, it doesn’t look as if he were going to pay us a visit this evening.”

She felt strangely exhausted. “No. It doesn’t.”

“I’m driving into the village to pick up a few things from the store,” he went on. “Dr. Bremmer has given me the use of the car. Would you like to come along?”

“I don’t know,” she said. And it was true. She was in such a confused mental state she wasn’t able to clearly consider the question.

“It’s very possible Barnabas may be in the village tonight,” the young man told her. “I hear he frequents the Blue Whale Tavern.”
This decided her. She put aside the magazine and stood up. "Thank you," she said. "I think I'll go."

She went for her trench coat and a kerchief for her hair, and he was waiting for her in the limousine when she stepped outside. The blazing headlamps of the big car cut weird swaths through the thick fog. She settled in the seat beside him as he headed the vehicle in the direction of Collinsport.

"An ideal night for ghosts to walk," he said, and began to talk of his experiences as secretary to Dr. Bremmer. She could tell he was steeped in a belief in the spirit world. She stared out into the fog and darkness listlessly. Her thoughts were of Barnabas and why he had not come to see her. Was he already in some trouble with the police?

Abruptly Noel changed the subject and asked her, "What do you make of the marriage between Nina and Dr. Bremmer?"

"They seem very happy," she said, feeling embarrassed.

He gave her a sharp glance. "They're not," he said. "Their marriage was a mistake. She has only a superficial interest in the spirit world, but it is Dr. Bremmer's whole existence."

"Still they get along well for the most part," she countered.

His long face was grim as he stared ahead into the fog. "She puts on a good show but she's really terribly unhappy."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know," Maggie said, wishing he would stop talking about it.

But he wasn't ready for that. "She married him for his money. He's fantastically wealthy and there is a wide difference in their ages."

"That's obvious."

"I told her I was in love with her," Noel Hart said with shocking frankness. "I asked her to leave him for me, but she wouldn't."

"Perhaps she is devoted to him in a way you don't understand."

He laughed a small mirthless laugh. "I've already told you what the attraction is. It's the money."

Maggie sat huddled against the seat, feeling thoroughly
miserable. That was the last thing she wanted to hear. She had been curious about the marriage between Nina and Dr. Bremmer. What Noel had to say confirmed her worst fears about the two.

“She can’t play me along like a tiny fish on a line any more,” Noel said with a surprising bitterness. “I’m finished with that.”

They reached the tiny fishing village with its steep, single main street. She informed him that Carolyn was working in the gift shop on the hill, so he parked his car there first and they went inside. There were quite a few summer couples in the usual shorts and gay prints inspecting the wares.

She at once sought out Carolyn who had just finished serving a couple at the card counter. Elizabeth’s daughter gave her a weary welcoming smile.

“I’m tired,” Carolyn said. “I long to be back at the house. I guess I shouldn’t have taken this job.”

Maggie said, “It’s not all that restful out there.”

“Oh?” Carolyn registered surprise. “Are the children misbehaving again?”

“There’s some of that, but there are other things happening,” Maggie said, and told her about the attack on Dr. Bremmer.

Carolyn looked worried. In a low voice she confided to her, “I suppose you’ve heard about the girls being attacked here in town. And along the road that leads to Collinwood.”

“Jim Baxter was telling us about them.”

Carolyn glanced around to make sure they weren’t being overheard by any of the customers hovering at nearby counters. In the same low voice she said, “Most of us are terrified. The girls have weird marks on their throats and they can’t remember what happened to them.”

“That’s what he said.”

“There’s been some ugly talk,” Carolyn went on. “I’ve even heard that Cousin Barnabas has been suspected. Isn’t that ridiculous?”

“Because he’s different,” Maggie said.

“What brought you in here?” the other girl wanted to know.

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Maggie didn’t want to admit she’d come in search of Barnabas, although that was the truth. So she said, “Dr. Bremmer’s secretary had some errands to do. I came along for company.”

At that moment Noel joined them and she introduced him to Carolyn. He smiled at her. “I heard Elizabeth had a lovely daughter,” he said. “Now I’m faced with the evidence.”

Carolyn smiled at his flattery. “We’ve been so busy I haven’t even had an afternoon or evening to visit home.”

“I hope that changes,” Noel said. “I’d enjoy meeting you again.” He turned to Maggie. “Where can I get toothpaste and a brush?”

“The general store,” she said. “That’s down the street.” They bid Carolyn goodbye and went out into the fog again.

After he’d made his purchases at the old-fashioned general store they crossed the street and walked down a block to the neon-lighted Blue Whale Tavern. Maggie began to feel an inner excitement, since she knew this was where Barnabas was most likely to be.

Noel gave her a questioning glance as he asked, “Do you mind going into a place like this?”

“It’s the only tavern and lounge in town,” she said. “We have no choice. And they run it fairly well, in any case.”

That was true, and as they passed through the entrance door she found the tavern crowded, noisy and warm compared to the damp air outside. The bar was well lined with male customers and so Noel led her down to the back where there were some empty booths. The rock and roll music from the rainbow-hued jukebox in the rear made conversation difficult. A waitress came and Noel ordered for them.

Then they sat back to watch the others in the busy place. A couple of teenagers, a boy in blue jeans and a girl in the most mini of skirts, got up to do a frantic kind of dance that matched the music.

Maggie and Noel attempted to talk but the noise made it almost impossible. She sat there wondering why she
had come, and worrying that Barnabas might have visited Collinwood later after she’d left.

Then she saw the door open and a familiar figure enter. It was Barnabas and he was not alone. He had a girl on his arm. Maggie felt a stab of jealousy.

The girl was a coarse if pretty type, a blonde summer visitor in skintight slacks and an equally tight dark sweater, apparently designed to reveal her ample proportions. Barnabas and the girl were smiling and talking in an intimate fashion. They came down toward the booths and were almost opposite where she and Noel were seated before Barnabas saw her. At once the smile left his face and a look of remorse quickly took its place.

CHAPTER SEVEN

She tried to hide the hurt the moment brought her. Barnabas quickly seemed to recover his poise and with a word to the girl, seated her in an opposite booth and then came over to speak to Maggie and Noel. Noel stood politely at his approach.

Barnabas nodded to him, and addressing himself to Maggie, said, “I didn’t expect to find you here.”

Her smile was mocking. “I’m sure of that.”

“I mean it,” he said seriously. “This is a fairly rough spot.”

“You patronize it,” Maggie pointed out. “And your friend.” She let her eyes travel to the woman in the other booth, who was glaring at her for robbing her of the company of Barnabas. “I think she’s getting impatient for you to go back,” she said, looking up at the tall man once more.

Barnabas said, “She’s just a casual acquaintance. A summer visitor.”

“And you are showing her the high spots of the village,” Maggie said.

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His eyes met hers and there was a deeply serious look in them. "I will explain this to you later," he said in a worried voice.

Maggie was determined to treat the meeting lightly. "No need," she said. "We're all here for the same purpose—to enjoy ourselves."

Noel Hart's long face wore a sneering smile and his pale eyes behind his thick glasses mocked Barnabas. "I see you have a taste for a certain kind of beauty," he said.

Barnabas frowned slightly and bowed. "I'll see you both at Collinwood," he said, and went back to the young woman in the booth. As he sat down, the blonde made what Maggie presumed was a disparaging remark about them and laughed loudly at her own comment.

She forced herself to sit there for a while. Noel talked but she didn't listen. Across the aisle Barnabas paid courtly attention to his companion. Maggie noticed that he ordered drinks but didn't touch his own.

At last she felt she couldn't stand it any longer. She told Noel she'd like to leave. He quickly settled the bill and they left without Barnabas and his blonde girl friend noticing.

When they were on the way back to Collinwood, Noel asked, "What did you think of the girl Barnabas brought in?"

"I didn't pay much attention to her," she said stiffly. She kept her eyes on the fog-shrouded road ahead.

"I imagine that's the sort of girl who has been attacked by this madman these last few weeks," Noel suggested.

She glanced at him with sharp eyes. "Why did you say that?"

He gave her a brief innocent look. "I don't know. It just came into my head."

"I can't think why," she lied. She knew what the man at the wheel was suggesting. He was hinting that Barnabas was the madman who attacked the girls and they had just seen him entertaining his latest victim.

"The way that blonde was drinking she won't be able to remember anything about the evening," Noel said. "Interesting."
She made no reply and so the unpleasant subject was dropped. But it was still prominent in her thoughts.

When they finally reached Collinwood she saw that the great mansion was almost completely in darkness. A night light had been left on in the reception hall. Noel saw her in and said goodnight at the door of her room.

Noel lingered with her for a moment in the shadowed hallway. "I realize you’re in love with Barnabas," he said. "But I think it’s a hopeless love."

"I’d rather not talk about it," she said.

"I wanted you to know what I thought," he said.

"Please!" She turned with her hand on the doorknob. He touched her arm. "All right, Maggie, but please give it some thought."

As he finished speaking he left her, and with a sigh she let herself into her room.

She reached for the light switch and turned it on. But the lights—the lamp by her bedside and the one on her dresser were controlled by the switch—did not come on. She stood there uncertainly for a moment. Occasionally a fuse blew out downstairs and left part of the house in darkness. No doubt this was what had happened now. Having come to that conclusion, she decided to prepare for bed in the darkness. Because of the fog, there was no light coming in through the windows as there might have been on a night when there was moonlight. It took her a little longer than usual, but she knew the room well and so was able to manage.

Her thoughts were bitter and still centered on Barnabas. At last she was ready for bed. She groped her way to her bedside and turned the sheets down. Slipping in between them, she found them cool to the touch. She stared up into the darkness and for the first time since she’d entered the room had an eerie sense of fear.

She found it hard to tell what had suddenly made her mood change, and she lay there debating what she should do. The shadows that had suddenly become frightening made it impossible for her to relax and sleep. She usually kept candles and matches in her room against the lights failing, but she’d used the last candle months ago. And she had no flashlight. It seemed to her she’d bought a pair of decorated candles as a gift for Elizabeth and put
the box with them away in the bottom of the closet, but she wasn’t sure. The box might be in one of the dresser drawers.

Stretching casually, her hand fell on the pillow beside her, but her hand didn’t touch the soft linen of the pillow. It struck something hard and slippery. The unexpected sent a chill of fear down her spine, and she sat up in the bed.

Gingerly she reached out again to discover what she’d touched, hoping it might have been her imagination, but her seeking hand contacted the same hard unevenness again. It telegraphed to her mind that she had touched something bony!

A quick groping of fingers and she had discovered the gaping eye holes, the triangle where the nose should be and the revolting smoothness of the round surface of the skull. With a scream of fear she drew back her hand and flung herself out of the bed.

Still crying out with fear, she raced to the door and grasped the knob. Her only thought to escape the room and the horror in her bed, but as she tugged at the knob it came off in her hand. She pounded on the door, sobbing her fear! She was trapped in the room!

She remembered the candles, and swinging around in the darkness, she stumbled across the wide room to the closet. Flinging open the door she was at once aware of an unusual sound from above and in her jittery state drew back. As she did she heard the sound of heavy objects striking the floor with dull thuds. She even felt the vibrations of whatever had so nearly toppled out onto her head and shoulders.

Standing there in the darkness in stunned disbelief, she became aware of a knocking on her door. Fighting back her sobs, she made her way back across the room.

“Open the door from that side,” she said.

The door opened, and outlined against the dim light of the hallway was Elizabeth in a black dressing robe. Her hair fell loosely about her shoulders and her pale face showed concern.

“What’s happening?” she asked. “I heard your screams.”

Maggie touched a hand to her temple. “I don’t know!
The lights wouldn’t go on. And then I found a skeleton in my bed!”

“A skeleton in your bed!” Elizabeth exclaimed in an incredulous tone. “Have those youngsters been up to their tricks again?” She marched across to the dresser lamp and fumbled with the bulb. It came on. She gave her a meaningful glance. “It was unscrewed!” Then she went to the bedside lamp and repeated the same action and that lamp came on.

Maggie stood there feeling ridiculous. She pointed to the pillow and the thing resting on it. “There’s the skull!”

Elizabeth was frowning at the grinning object set out on the pillow. “That’s the same skull Dr. Bremmer had. David must have gotten hold of it and brought it here.”

“And he and Amy must have unscrewed the light bulbs,” she said.

“That’s clear enough,” Elizabeth said grimly. Then she turned and gasped. “What’s all this?”

Maggie now saw the booby-trap she’d so narrowly escaped. Someone had attached a towel to the top of the door at one end and placed the rest of it on a shelf high in the closet. Then they had piled at least a half-dozen full-sized bricks on the towel on the shelf. As soon as the door was opened the towel drew the bricks from the shelf to come tumbling down. It was a dangerous and cruel device and the bricks scattered on the floor showed how narrowly she had escaped their full weight. If several of the bricks had struck her on the head it might have killed her on the spot.

Elizabeth stood staring at the mute evidence of the vicious trap. When she turned to Maggie she looked really ill. “I can’t believe it,” she said in an awed voice. “I can’t believe that children would dream up such awful things.”

Maggie said, “I ran to the closet after the knob came off the door.”

“And of course they must have loosened that too,” Elizabeth said in a taut voice. “I won’t wake them now but they will answer for all this in the morning.”

“It may not have been them.”

“Who else?” Elizabeth demanded. “Those children must have sick minds. I can’t think of any other reason
for their actions. This is the worst thing they’ve done yet.”

Maggie had been about to point out that the shelf was too high for either David or Amy to reach when she noticed that a table near the closet had been moved out of place. She had a mental picture of the youngsters using it to reach the shelf. There seemed no doubt of what had gone on.

Elizabeth remained to help her clean up the room and fix the knob properly on the door again. They found the leather container for the skull hidden in a corner of the closet. When they’d finished, Elizabeth went across to the door.

“You should be safe now,” she said.
“I’m sorry I woke you,” Maggie apologized.
“I’m not,” Elizabeth said angrily. “It let me see what had been done with my own eyes. In the morning I’m having a final talk with those two, and I’m telling them they’ll be sent away to a school if one more thing like this happens.”

Alone in the bedroom again, Maggie remained awake a long while trying to decide whether the children had been guilty or not. If so, was some diabolical phantom to blame for their actions? Or had she another enemy in the house? Someone who wanted to get her out of the way. It was hard to be sure, but she didn’t want David and Amy blamed unjustly. Children didn’t understand such things.

The next day was sunny and warm again. With typical Maine unpredictability the weather had changed in a few hours and the heavy fog was only an unpleasant memory now. Maggie did not look forward to the morning. Maggie was worried about how Elizabeth would deal with the children and by no means sure they were to blame. The more she thought about it the more she was convinced the series of cruel pranks had been deliberately rigged by the guilty party to make them seem the youngsters’ work. She hurried downstairs to discuss it with Elizabeth before she took the two youngsters to task.

“Don’t be too certain they are the ones responsible,” she said.
Elizabeth stared at her. "Who else would do such things?"

"I don’t know," she admitted. "But I have doubts."

As a result of this conversation, Elizabeth’s attitude was more questioning than condemning when she talked to David and Amy. As Maggie had expected both of them denied knowing anything about what had been done to her room. And after hearing their sturdy denials she was more inclined to accept their innocence than before. The whole business ended without anything settled.

Feeling depressed in spite of the pleasant day, she went for a lonely walk along the road. She’d not gone far before Chief Baxter drove up. The young man stopped the car and smiled at her out the window.

"You’re looking mighty blue today."

She offered a rueful smile in return. "Sorry. I’m not feeling my best."

His shrewd eyes studied her. "Anything wrong here last night?"

Since she and Elizabeth had made an agreement not to divulge anything to the police about the problems created by the children, she could not mention the events of the previous night. In any case she now had grave doubts about who had been responsible for the various happenings.

"Things seemed reasonably quiet," she said.

He continued to stare at her intently, a wise expression on his face. "I’m glad to hear that. Wish they’d been the same in town."

At once she tensed. "What happened in the village?"

Chief Baxter frowned. "Another one of those crazy attacks. To make it worse, the girl in this case was a summer tourist."

"Oh!"

"Her boyfriend claims she dodged him to go off with some other fellow. We found her wandering by the water tower in a stunned condition. She’d been drinking and was completely incoherent. And she had those same two weird marks on her throat. Like she’d been bitten by some kind of animal."

"That’s awful," she gasped, thinking about Barnabas and the girl he’d been with. How many people besides
her would remember seeing them? The place had been crowded and dark, but surely the waitress would recall serving Barnabas and the girl.

"Her boyfriend is raising the very devil," Baxter said gloomily. "The girl's a big dumb blonde who hasn't the brains to complain. I can only hope she'll leave town and get off my neck."

That the girl was a blonde further upset Maggie. It all fitted in too neatly. She said, "You've no idea who the man with her was?"

"No. Not a soul seems to remember seeing her with anyone. Of course, they wouldn't know her to begin with. There's not much chance of my getting any lead that way."

She felt some relief. "Then you'll just have to wait for another time."

The chief's face was grim. "Having to do that doesn't exactly make me happy."

"I suppose not."

His keen eyes fastened on her again. "The point is, none of these girls have been seriously hurt up until now. But if I'm dealing with a crazy man, as I think I am, it could be that I'd wake up one morning with a murder on my hands."

"I don't think that's likely," she protested.

"Why not?" the question was put to her quickly, as if he had a suspicion she knew more than she was letting on.

"Well," she stammered, "I don't think it fits the pattern. All these other times no one has been killed."

"Crazy people often change their patterns." He paused. "That old guy married to Nina is a rare old bird, isn't he?"

She managed a wan smile. "He is eccentric."

"Crazy on the subject of ghosts," Baxter said. "Must have had plenty of dough for Nina to marry him."

"She seems devoted."

"There's no accounting for tastes," the young chief said with a sigh of resignation. She thought he was going to drive on, but instead he waited to eye her sharply once more and ask, "By the way, was Barnabas around last night?"
“I think so,” she said carefully.
“I just wondered,” he said with too casual an air. “I thought maybe he might have gone into the village.”
“He does quite often.”
“Yeah,” the chief said. “I don’t suppose I’d be able to ask him if I went over to that old house now?”
Thinking of Hare and what the burly mute’s reaction might be, she had visions of Barnabas in immediate trouble and said hastily, “I wouldn’t do that. Barnabas locks himself in his room and there is only that odd mute on guard. He isn’t easy to explain things to.”
“I see,” Baxter said thoughtfully. “So Barnabas locks himself in his room?”
“Yes.”
“Spends the whole day in there.”
“I believe so.”
“A few more headaches like last night and I may try something like that myself.” He smiled, and drove on toward the big house.
Maggie stood watching after him. He’d ended their talk with a joke, but she was sure he was in anything but a funny mood, and she was sure he still linked Barnabas to the attacks. Probably he was only waiting for some strong evidence before charging Barnabas with being the phantom criminal.
Was Barnabas guilty? She didn’t want to think so, yet there were so many things that needed to be explained. The strange habit he had of shutting himself away from everyone in the daylight hours was only one vexing question. There was the mystery of that weird room in the cellar of the old house. He had made no satisfactory explanation of the coffin and the candles set out on it. Nor had he given any excuse for being in the company of the girl who sounded like the one who’d been attacked.
He’d looked deep in Maggie’s eyes in the tavern last night and promised there would be an explanation, but she had not heard one yet. What if Chief Baxter was able to fasten the attacks on Barnabas? Wouldn’t he likely accuse him next of being the phantom who had attacked Dr. Bremmer? He’d suggested a change in appearance would be easy for Barnabas with the aid of a wig and a
false mustache. She would have to see Barnabas tonight and warn him again about the police chief.

She took a long walk and returned for lunch feeling better. Afterward Dr. Bremmer called her to the study. Seated behind the big desk he looked thinner and older than ever, but his wrinkled face showed a smile.

"I need your help, Miss Evans," he said.

"In what way?"

He waved her to a chair. "Don’t be impatient," he said. "I'll tell you directly. You know that the police chief came by this morning?"

"Yes."

"I had a long talk with him. He's a very astute fellow. Of course he doesn't share my views about the supernatural but there are many people who don’t do that."

"I think he takes his work very seriously," she said.

"And so do I. He's most concerned about my safety, but I assured him he need not worry. The ghost of Asaph Clay will wait a while before striking again."

"How can you be so sure?"

He smiled at her. "I have my contacts in the spirit world, Miss Evans. I can predict these things. The chief is very much interested in our mutual friend Barnabas."

"Is he?" She pretended not to know.

The doctor eyed her. "I'm sure he must have mentioned that to you. But then, you've probably forgotten. He's asking very awkward questions about Barnabas, but I believe I was able to put him off the track."

"That was generous of you."

"Not entirely. As I've told you before, I plan to deal with Mr. Barnabas Collins in my own way. He can contribute an incredible amount of information to my life's work."

"In what way?"

He looked sly. "I'm not ready to reveal that yet. But may I ask you a personal question?"

She was at once on the defensive. "What sort of question?"

"About Barnabas. I'm hearing on all sides that you are in love with him. Is it true?"

"It's hardly a thing I would want to talk about," she said.
"I warn you against it," he said.
"I'll remember that," she said tersely. "Is that why you asked me in here? You said you wanted my help in something."

He rose and rubbed his thin hands together. "Indeed, I do. This is a marvelous day and I'd like to make the most of it. I have finished some research on Phineas Collins and I'm now anxious to match my findings with a look at the swamp."

"At the swamp?" she said in surprise.
"Why not?" he asked. "That's where he hid his treasure. And where the skull of Asaph Clay was set out to guard it."

"But there's nothing there to see," she protested.
"I disagree," Dr. Bremmer said. "I want to feel the atmosphere of that isolated place. Who knows? It may result in my getting a message from the spirit world telling me where the treasure is."

Maggie got up. "I'd prefer to have nothing to do with it."

"But I need your help," he insisted. "You know the area well, so Elizabeth says. I only want to go to the swamp's edge and have a look at it. We can return early, before dinner so there can be no question of our getting caught there in the darkness."

"It's not an easy walk," she warned.
"That makes no difference," he said.
"I see," she said.
"I'd like to leave at once," he told her.

She searched for some logical excuse and came up with, "I don't see how I can go. I have to watch the children."

"I spoke to Elizabeth about that. Nina is going to take them out on a picnic."

"So you have it all arranged," she said.

The old man chuckled. "I told you I was most anxious to get an immediate look at the swamp. When I make up my mind to do something, I rarely let anything stand in my way."

"The sun is strong," she said, resigned to giving way to him. "You should wear a straw hat or something to protect your head."

"I will," he said cheerfully.
His high spirits continued as they left the house for the long walk to the swamp. They quickly passed the outbuildings and when they came to the old house she saw Hare on the steps glaring at them. His eyes never left them as they went by, but otherwise he gave no sign of being aware of them.

"Barnabas has a peculiar taste in servants, don’t you think?" Dr. Bremmer asked after they had gone by the house and were heading down through the field in the direction of the cemetery.

She made no reply, assuming he was deliberately trying to delve information from her. Soon they had reached the cemetery and deep within it and almost hidden by a surrounding barrier of gravestones was Noel Hart, busy at his task of copying the inscriptions.

Dr. Bremmer halted a moment to wave to his secretary. "We are making excellent headway in the cemetery," he informed her.

Noel waved back and seemed about to come out of the cemetery and join them, but the old doctor insisted they move on. She had an idea he wanted to make the journey to the swamp alone. It was hard to read his motives. They left the cemetery behind to enter the forest of towering evergreens. Her memory of the lonely terror of the swamp and forest made her feel uneasy the instant she set foot along the shaded path.

Dr. Bremmer stayed close to her. "You must have guessed that Phineas Collins made his fortune in the slave trade," he said.

She frowned. "Are you sure?"

"I’ve been spending the last few days going over his journals," the old man said with satisfaction. "There can be no doubt of it. Black gold paid better than any other cargo."

"It’s a dreadful thing to contemplate," she said with a shiver. "The suffering and loss of lives such a trade must have caused."

Dr. Bremmer nodded. "And yet there were many of the righteous ship owners of New England engaged in the same black traffic," he told her.

"It’s a shadow on their names."

"Exactly," he agreed. "And that’s the reason Phineas
killed Asaph Clay. Clay knew all about his evil dealings. In addition, Clay had the reputation of being a warlock, a male witch. Old Phineas became terrified his former captain would work some kind of spell on him.”

They were deep in the shadow of the woods now. She said, “And so he murdered him.”

“And hid the body in the cellar of the old house. I imagine that dark old building contains many a secret.”

“I suppose so,” she said in a small voice. She was thinking of the room with the casket.

“But Phineas found a use for his friend’s skull,” Dr. Bremmer said in his odd cheery fashion. “And so have we. My seance over it has led us here today. And I hope it will eventually lead me to that cask of gold.”

“This is the swamp,” Maggie told him, for they had come to the end of the woods trail and the dark, murky stretch of swampland lay before them. The stagnant pools, thick menacing brush, gray phantom boulders and twisted vines, all waited in sullen quiet to engulf them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Dr. Bremmer stood beside her with a look of ecstatic greediness. She had expected him to be wearied by his long walk to the edge of the swamp, but he showed no visible signs of being tired. He removed his hat and mopped his bald pate with a large white handkerchief. In his shabby black suit he presented a strange contrast to their almost jungle-like surroundings.

“It is a forbidding looking place,” he acknowledged as he returned the hat to his head.

“I hate it here!” Maggie said vehemently. And it was true. Even before her terrifying experience of being caught in the quicksand, she’d had an aversion to the isolated swamp. She had always avoided its fetid pools and thick undergrowth whenever she could. To her it was an evil area with a menacing hint of unknown horror.
As they stood there, the odor of the marshy land, mixed with the evaporating scum from the pools under the hot sun, was nauseating. The place fairly reeked of danger. Hordes of insects made it more unpleasant. Maggie had an instant desire to turn and go back to Collinwood.

But the doctor seemed to have other plans. From an inner pocket he drew out a sheaf of papers on which there was a good deal of writing. “I have made a number of notes,” he said, unfolding the sheets for study. “And I think I may have some pointers as to where the treasure was buried.”

She frowned at him. “I can’t imagine a more useless activity. In the quicksand here that gold would have sunk beyond any hope of recovery by now.”

“I disagree,” he said. “If we can decide on the site of its burial, I’d say the chances of finding it are good. I do not believe it would sink beyond a certain point. The problem is that the landmarks have changed over the years.”

“There is a flood period every spring,” she said. “This swamp was always in a state of transition.”

He studied her thoughtfully. “But some things should remain fixed,” he said. “In his journal Phineas refers to the flat-topped rock on which he carved his initials. And to the three pine sisters standing in a row. Surely the rocks and the great trees still remain as they were.”

“But Phineas Collins couldn’t even find the treasure himself after Asaph Clay’s skull was swept from its marking place,” she protested. “How can you hope to have better luck?”

Dr. Bremmer smiled grimly. “I have certain theories.” “Theories have sent many people to their deaths in this swamp.” “I don’t want to involve you in a long search,” he said, the papers still in his hand. “But I would like to look around a little now that I have reached here.”

It didn’t seem worthwhile to remind him that he’d promised before they set out that he’d only wanted a brief glimpse of the swamp. If he’d hinted otherwise she would have refused to come. Now he was insisting that she lead him further into the threatening maze of quicksand bogs, stagnant pools and thick brush.

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She said, “I don’t want to go further. Not after being caught in there the other day. It’s much too dangerous.”
“But there are two of us. You were alone then.”
“It’s still not safe.”
The doctor gave a resigned shrug. “If you’ve made up your mind I’ll explore a little on my own. You can wait here for me.”

She found herself in a quandary. In a protesting tone, she said, “It would be torment just to wait here for you. I’d be thinking every minute that you were in some kind of trouble. I’d advise you to come back with a guide. You might get Matt to come with you. I believe he knows the swamp as well as anyone.”

Dr. Bremmer stood there with an obstinate expression. “I only want to go a few hundred feet. To get the feel of the place.”
“There are no paths,” she warned him, “You have to pick your steps and every moment can bring danger.”
“You make it sound very dramatic.”
“I’m merely telling you the truth,” she insisted.
“Let us go just a little way,” he said. “You know the swamp better than I do, so I’ll let you pick the direction in which we’ll go. And I’ll allow you to decide when we turn back. I can’t be fairer than that.”

She had it on the tip of her tongue to tell him if he really wanted to be fair he’d turn back now. That was what he’d agreed in the first place. But she saw that he was in no mood to reason. She’d placed herself in an impossible position when she’d given in to his request to be guided to the isolated area.

Since she was familiar with the first stretch of the gloomy, impenetrable swamp she decided her best move would be to humor him. Take him just a little way and then begin their journey back.

She said, “I think I know where that flat-topped rock could be. I won’t say it’s the same one, but there is a huge boulder answering that description just a little way from here.”

“Excellent,” Dr. Bremmer said, sounding pleased.

Maggie began to do the thing she’d promised herself she wouldn’t. Slowly she advanced across the treacherous marshy ground. In the daylight she could see an occa-
sional flowering of marigolds and marsh mallow in con-
trast to the stench and drabness of the cursed place. Every
so often they came to brush and vines thick enough to
block their way and she didn’t dare venture too close to
the sides of the pools or banks of the tiny streams since
the yellow oozing mud presented the threat of quicksand.
When there was the occasional region of taller trees the
swamp became like a dark tunnel.

At last she reached the rock, which only in a vague
way resembled the one he’d described, she stopped and
turned to inform him about it. But he’d apparently fallen
behind. He was nowhere to be seen!

For a moment it didn’t bother her. She expected his
stooped form to show in the dark shadows behind her
any second. But still he did not come!

It was then she began to feel frightened. What could
have happened to him? One moment they were talking
as they made their way through the unfriendly place and
the next he’d vanished into thin air. Had he merely fallen
behind? Or had he lost his way?

Had the cruel hand of Phineas Collins, murderer and
miser, reached out across the centuries to strike this in-
truder down in the foul dark swamp? Maggie’s eyes were
wide with fear.

“Dr. Bremmer!” she called out.

There was no reply. Some giant winged insect came at
her diabolically and settled on her cheek. She frantically
brushed its weird softness from her skin with a cry of
alarm. Then she called out the old man’s name once
more. But only a brooding silence answered her.

With a sigh that was close to a sob she clenched her
hands and glanced around in the direction of the flat-
topped boulder again. Could he have bypassed her in
some way? But as her eyes settled on the stone she forgot
all about the question in the enormity of a new discovery.

Standing on top of the boulder staring down at her
gravely was the phantom figure of the long-dead piratical
captain, Asaph Clay. The unkempt mane of black hair
almost touching his shoulders, the narrow, sinister eyes,
the drooping mustache, all matched the sketch she had
seen. And his ragged jumble of clothing seemed of no
period.
She gasped out her alarm. "No!"

"A swamp nymph!" The words were spoken by the apparition on the rock in a very real, masculine voice. Maggie was petrified with shock. She stared at the strange creature. "You are human!" she finally said in a taut voice.

"That has been questioned," the figure on the rock said and he slid down with an easy movement to stand before her.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I have the most ordinary of names," he said in his mocking fashion. "My parents, not wanting to embroider on the plain family name of Smith, dubbed me Joe." He bowed. "At your service, Miss. Joe Smith, knight without armor."

"What are you doing here?"

The narrow eyes in the slender young face held a wild light. "I'm an intruder," he acknowledged. "And you're one of the family from the big house. I peered at you over the edge of the cliff the other day. When you saw me you ran off down the beach."

"I thought I had seen a ghost," she said. "As I did just now."

He smiled, the drooping mustache giving him an oriental mien. "I have heard the Collins family have more than their share of ghosts."

She stared at him. "How do you know I'm from Collinwood?"

"I can see the house from the spot on the beach where I've pitched a tent. It's a tattered and modest one, but it protects me and my young lady friend from the elements."

"That's why you have such an odd appearance," she said. "You're one of those hippie types. I should have realized."

"Aspiring hippies," he said with modesty. "My Anna strums a fair mandolin and I sing folk songs in a dulcet tenor. Anna is a fugitive from the institution of higher learning known as Radcliffe and I am by profession an artist."

She gave him an accusing look. "The children spoke of seeing you on the beach. They mistook you for a phantom. Have you been deliberately frightening them?"
“Indeed not,” he mocked her. “I did tarry a moment to wish them good day. And when they seemed to take me for a ghost I felt it proper for me to amuse them by playing the part.”

“I don’t find it amusing,” she said firmly. “If you’re the one who has been putting those youngsters up to all kinds of mischief I can promise you that you’ll have to answer for it.”

“I give you my word I have only talked with them once,” he said.

She was not impressed. She’d forgotten about Dr. Bremmer. She’d also temporarily lost her fear of the isolated swamp, not realizing how completely she was at the mercy of this dubious hippie type.

“What are you doing camping on the estate?” she demanded.

He waved his hand in a careless gesture. “I have followed a fair lady here. I’m given to romantic impulses.”

Taking in his scruffy, unkempt appearance, she could only think this claim was somewhat ridiculous. She was about to ask him further questions when she heard someone approaching behind her. She turned and saw that it was Dr. Bremmer who had finally put in an appearance.

At the same instant he spotted the long-haired, mustached hippie and his face took on an enraged expression. Pointing a scrawny finger at Joe Smith, he cried, “How dare you follow us here!”

“Take it easy, man!” Joe Smith said with an insolent smile.

She gazed at Dr. Bremmer in astonishment. “You know him?”

“Of course!” The doctor snapped. “He’s a pest who has been annoying Nina for months!”

“I resent that,” the young man said. “Nina is very fond of me.”

“Nonsense!” Dr. Bremmer snorted. “I’d suggest you make yourself scarce or I’ll have you run off the property!”

“Cool down, man!” the hippie said. “No need for you to blow your skull! I’m on my way!” And with a leering
smile for Maggie he dodged past them and vanished in a moment into the dense brush.

The doctor glared after him. "What’s he doing here?"
"I can’t imagine," she said. "I discovered him standing on the rock."

The old man turned to her, still scowling. "He’s a no-good hippie. Claims to be an artist. Nina met him at a sidewalk show and bought one of his so-called paintings. He’s bothered us ever since."

"And he’s followed you all the way here?"
"Why not? I don’t suppose he has anything else to do. We must get back to Collinwood and warn Nina."

Maggie felt a great sense of relief. At least the encounter with Joe Smith had done some good. The doctor was willing to give up his futile searching in the swamp and go back.

"Yes," she said, "probably we should."

On the way back through the woods she questioned the upset doctor about Joe Smith some more. It seemed he knew very little concerning him beyond what he’d previously told her, but Maggie was beginning to have some suspicions of her own. She recalled the night when she’d seen Nina with a phantom figure on the lawn. Nina had denied there had been anyone there, but Maggie was sure it had been Smith. Nina had lied so the truth would be kept from her irate husband. In which case it meant that the attractive Nina was encouraging the hippie’s attentions.

This meeting with Smith and the hippie’s weird resemblance to the phantom warlock, Asaph Clay, had brought up other interesting questions. Was Smith the phantom who’d been encouraging the children to do evil with his pretending to place a spell on them? And was he the figure she’d seen so briefly in the darkness attempting to strangle Dr. Bremmer? Why not, if Smith was in love with Nina and she was returning his affection.

It could be that this was the solution to most of the bewildering happenings at Collinwood. But then, she couldn’t rush to conclusions. It had to be proved. And it still didn’t explain the attacks that had been made on the young women in and around the village. Though Chief Baxter had been hinting strongly that he suspected Bar-
nabas of this criminal activity, it could be Smith who was the culprit.

She realized that she was looking for an easy solution to the appearances of the phantom and the shadow hanging over Barnabas. And she had to admit to herself that because Joe Smith was a rebel and a hippie didn’t mean he was mad or a criminal. He might be completely innocent. After all, he did have his Anna, and Nina Bremmer, to occupy his time and thoughts. He could be merely a nuisance and nothing more.

As they emerged from the woods and came by the cemetery Dr. Bremmer halted to look for a sign of his secretary. “He’s not there,” he murmured angrily. “He doesn’t seem to have any interest in what he’s doing. He has no feeling for psychic research!”

Resuming their walk back to Collinwood, Maggie said to him, “You can’t expect others to share your enthusiasm, Doctor.”

The stooped man kept in step with her. “I suppose not. It takes a certain gift. I have a flair for the supernatural. You saw how it was when I held the seances at Collinwood. It is a pity Elizabeth refuses to let me hold any others.”

“She felt it was too unsettling,” Maggie said, defending her employer. “The children talk about ghosts as it is. She thinks it’s an unhealthy atmosphere to create.”

“I have other ideas why she was against my contacts with the spirit world.”

“Oh?”

They were passing the old house, and Dr. Bremmer nodded towards its shuttered silence. “The answer might rest there. She is anxious about her cousin from England and feels she must protect him.”

Maggie was alarmed, and said, “I’ve never known her to say anything that would indicate that.”

“She wouldn’t be liable to,” Dr. Bremmer said bitterly. “But she might think my contact with the spirit world would establish something about this Barnabas that would be embarrassing.”

Pretending innocence, she said, “I’m afraid I don’t understand you.”

With a quick, scornful side glance, he told her, “I’ve
felt from the beginning Barnabas Collins is not a normal man, and I'm more sure of it now than ever. It's my guess he's a vampire, as his ancestor was."

"A vampire?" she gasped and came to a halt to stare at the old man. They were close to the rose garden of Collinwood.

He nodded grimly. "A vampire! The police chief has been telling us about these girls being attacked. That suggests a vampire in the area. The attacks have been made to drain them of blood. The odd marks on their throats are the marks left by a vampire's teeth. The only way such victims of the curse of the living dead can survive is through drinking human blood regularly."

"I can't believe any of this," she protested.
"I may soon be able to offer you proof."
"No!"

The pinched, yellow face was smiling scornfully. "You don't want to hear it. You are in love with him, aren't you?"

Maggie's anger toward the old man was so great she was ready to tell him that she did love Barnabas, and that all he said about the handsome Englishman was wrong. But before she could make any sort of reply, Nina came strolling to join them from the direction of the gardens.

"My!" the doctor's youthful wife exclaimed. "You two are looking dreadfully serious!"

Dr. Bremmer turned from Maggie to pour some of his venom out against his wife. "And you seem in an oddly placid mood," he said. "Would it have anything to do with the fact I've just seen Joe Smith?"

There was a moment of awkward silence, then Nina shrugged. "Why should I lie? I know Joe has pitched a tent down on the beach, but you needn't worry; he has some girl with him."

"He came here to be with you," Dr. Bremmer said accusingly. "You know he's been doing that for months."

She laughed shortly. "The evidence is all against it. I saw the girl stretched out on the beach by the tent. She's young and very pretty."

"And just a camouflage for his real purpose in being here," her husband said angrily. "I'm going to speak to
Elizabeth about this. I’ll ask her to have that character evicted from the property.” His voice had risen to a peak of rage and now he strode off.

Nina, petite in a smart pale blue dress, watched him go with sad eyes. Then she turned to Maggie, “Take my advice. Never marry an old and jealous man.”

She blushed. “I don’t think he meant all that. He’s upset about various things.”

“Were you there when he and Joe met?”

“Yes.”

“What did Joe say to him?”

“ Mostly he seemed to mock him,” she recalled.

Nina sighed. “Which is just about the worst possible way to handle him. My husband has no sense of humor.”

“We met Joe Smith wandering in the swamp,” Maggie explained. “I can’t imagine what he was doing there.”

The other woman smiled ruefully. “Why does Joe do any number of things? He is a wild, reckless fellow. Not without talent as an artist, though. He may have gone for a solitary walk looking for inspiration for his work.”

Maggie wondered about that. She had a feeling Joe Smith wasn’t the dedicated artist Nina was trying to picture. But it would be normal for her to stick up for him if there was any romance between them. Maggie decided it would be better not to pursue the discussion.

She said, “I must go in. Did the children enjoy their picnic?”

“We had a very good time,” Nina said. “I took them to the beach.” Then she paused and looking guilty added quickly, “Now, please don’t be like my husband. Don’t think I offered to take them there because I hoped I would meet Joe.”

“It hadn’t entered my mind,” Maggie said.

“I did see the girl,” Nina said unhappily. “But that was purely an accident.”

Maggie left her, doubting that she’d been entirely truthful. She guessed Nina had gone to the beach for the purpose of getting a close-up look at the young girl from Radcliffe who was sharing Joe Smith’s tent with him. It was convenient to have the children as an excuse. And Nina’s behavior was what could be expected in a jealous woman.
It amused Maggie in a wry way to recall she'd been so far wrong as to think there was a romance going on between Nina and Noel Hart. All the time it was the sarcastic young hippie who'd apparently won her love.

When she entered the cool and shade of the reception hall she came face to face with Noel. Frowning, he was apparently on the way out of the house. He looked at her balefully.

"He's just taken me over the coals for leaving the cemetery early," he said in anger.

"He stopped by to look for you on the way back."

Hart glanced up the stairs where the doctor had evidently gone. "Miserable old ghoul!" he complained. "At least there is one bright thought. He'll be a ghost himself soon enough!"

With that shocking comment he opened the door and went out. Maggie couldn't help wondering if he might be taking his complaints to Nina. The whole complex situation seemed to be becoming more confused. Just when she felt she was beginning to understand the subtle relationships around her the picture changed.

She stopped by the children's rooms and heard their excited account of the day at the beach. In the innocent mood in which she found them she couldn't picture them as the same youngsters who had more than once put her life in jeopardy with their vicious acts. It seemed the spell had fallen away from them. But would it return?

As she showered and then dressed for dinner she did a lot of thinking about her own problems. Prominent in her worries was Barnabas. Dr. Bremmer was obviously going to try and do him some harm. The talk about his being a vampire distressed her. She kept recalling the coldness of his hands and lips, his aversion to daylight, and finally the casket she had come upon in the cellar of the old house. The casket which he had been unable or unwilling to explain.

While she felt that Collinwood might be haunted and she did believe there could be such things as restless spirits, there was a limit to her acceptance of the supernatural. Asaph Clay, the phantom warlock, might lurk in the dark shadows of Collinwood. The ghost of the long-dead captain might have visited the children and cast his
evil spell over them. And it was possible his vengeful shade still remained to threaten all those in the Collins family.

But in spite of Dr. Bremmer’s undoubted familiarity with the occult and his gift for invoking the dead in seances, she was not ready to accept his talk of vampires and the like. At the worst she believed Barnabas to be a man of melancholy disposition and in poor health. Many of his actions might be explained simply as efforts to conserve himself for his dedicated task of completing the family history.

She resolved to close her ears to any other accusations the wily old doctor might make against Barnabas. Just because Dr. Bremmer was unhappy and jealous himself, he wanted to see everyone else in the same plight. It was too bad for her resolve that Bremmer chose that evening at the dinner table to ramble on about vampires, and as he did so he often looked mockingly at her.

“Vampires plagued both Wales and Scotland only a few centuries ago,” he informed everyone at the table. “It took a goodly number of hawthorn stakes through black hearts before they were set to rotting in their graves as all good men should.”

“I find your discussion morbid and disgusting,” Elizabeth reproved him from the head of the table. “I wish you wouldn’t speak of such things before the children.”

Dr. Bremmer chuckled, enjoying everyone’s discomfiture. “The truth is, if you actually met a vampire you wouldn’t likely find him disgusting at all. Dangerous, perhaps, but other than that perfectly charming.”

Nina was pale. “I’m sure none of us want to hear anything more on the subject.”

“A pity,” he said. “The walking dead are a fascinating subject. Do you know that vampires can change their physical body in a matter of seconds. And their favorite refuge is to assume the likeness of a bat.”

David spoke up from his place at the table, his face alive with interest. “I saw somebody turn into a bat.”

Elizabeth gave him a reproving glance. “Don’t tell stories, David.”

“It’s not a story,” the boy protested, turning to Amy
for confirmation. “Is it, Amy?” The little girl reacted by looking frightened and saying nothing.

Dr. Bremmer at once seized on the opportunity to continue the discussion of the unpopular subject. With a false geniality he smiled at the boy. “Indeed, that’s an interesting statement you made, my boy. Would you like to tell us when and where you saw this strange thing happen?”

Nina leaned forward angrily and told her husband, “Please behave. Elizabeth has told you she doesn’t want to hear anything more of this.”

“I think the boy should have his say,” Dr. Bremmer insisted. And he gave Maggie a malicious smile. “Don’t you agree, Miss Evans? You wouldn’t want the lad to be brooding over this and keeping it to himself?”

Elizabeth spoke up to save her embarrassment. “Ask him whatever you like,” she said with open disdain. “I suppose it is fitting to play childish games with a child.”

“Children have great psychic sensitivity,” the doctor informed her. Turning to David again, he asked, “Where did this happen?”

The boy hesitated. “On the side lawn.”

“When?”

David was slow to answer again. Then he said, “The other night. We heard someone scream and we woke up. And then Amy and I looked out the window and we saw somebody walking across the lawn.”

“Yes?” the doctor’s voice had an eager edge.

David hesitated once more and looked at Maggie with frightened eyes. Then in a low voice, he said, “The man stopped walking and wasn’t there any more. There was a big bat flying above where he stood. It came up close to our windows and then it flew away towards the ocean and went out of sight.”

“Most interesting,” Dr. Bremmer gloated. “And did you recognize the man?”

David looked solemn. “Yes,” he said. “It was Cousin Barnabas.”
CHAPTER NINE

Maggie was stunned by the youngster’s words. In a way, she had anticipated he would say something like that. And Dr. Bremmer had also apparently expected the same thing, since he’d so carefully led the boy on. There was a strange silence at the table. Nina looked shocked. Noel Hart had turned to a pleased Dr. Bremmer to see what he would say next. Elizabeth appeared pale and angry.

It was Elizabeth who broke the silence. She told David, “If you and Amy have finished your dinners you can leave the table now.”

As usual the youngsters were delighted to be free of their elders’ company. They got up from the table at once and hurried out of the room. It was evident that David had no idea of the serious consequences his statement might have for Barnabas.

When the children had left the room, Elizabeth addressed herself to Dr. Bremmer, saying, “I assume you understand that David’s statement had no foundation in truth?”

The expert in psychic research looked startled. “I disagree.”

“I’m sure I don’t care whether you disagree or not,” Elizabeth said firmly, her attractive features wearing a frown. “You are entitled to your own opinion, and so are the rest of us. David enjoys telling these stories. He has a vivid imagination. Your wild stories about vampires were bound to touch it off.”

Nina spoke up, “I do think Barnabas has something odd about him. But I agree that David was obviously indulging in fantasy.”

Dr. Bremmer was livid. “I found his account too detailed to suggest he was making it up.”

“That is because you know nothing about children,
Doctor,” Elizabeth said in her commanding way. And the subject was closed.

Maggie was grateful to her employer for the way she’d taken care of the difficult moment. With dinner over, they filed out of the big paneled dining room and she found herself alone with Noel Hart in the reception hall. He gave her one of his sour smiles. She wondered if his eyes were really strange or if it was the heavy glasses that made them look that way.

“The doctor is on the warpath for Barnabas Collins,” he said. “Any idea why?”

“I can’t imagine,” she said. “Barnabas had always been firm with him, but they’ve never actually quarreled.”

“He blames Barnabas for forcing him to halt his seances. And he thinks that if he’d been permitted to continue them he’d have discovered where the gold is. The truth is, he’s as interested in money as he is in the supernatural.”

“So it seems,” she said. “He took me to the swamp today to try and find landmarks to locate the trunk of gold.”

“I think it’s funny that he ran into Joe Smith,” Noel said with malicious glee. “He knows Joe and Nina are carrying on behind his back. It drives him wild.”

“I thought something like that was bothering him.”

Noel was disdainful. “Of course, Nina must be insane to get mixed up with a fellow like Smith. She’s using no judgment either.”

“I suppose not,” she said. It was apparent that Noel thought he would have been a much better bet for his employer’s wife. Not wanting the talk to drag on, and anxious to speak to Barnabas, she excused herself and went outside. It was a pleasant evening but not yet dusk. She decided to walk as far as Widows’ Hill. Barnabas often went there in the evening. It could be her best chance of meeting him.

When she arrived at the high point on the cliffs known as Widows’ Hill she found someone there ahead of her. Joe Smith and his girl, Anna, were seated on the single bench that had been placed at the scenic spot. He had his arm around the girl, who had long blonde hair reaching to her shoulders. He greeted Maggie with an insolent
grin on his slender, mustached face and made no attempt to rise or remove his arm from around Anna.

"Well, it's the lady from Collinwood," he said jeeringly. "How are all the ghosts?"

"I wouldn't worry about them if I were you," Maggie told him. "But I would think about putting up my tent somewhere else before you're evicted. I heard Dr. Bremmer asking Mrs. Stoddard to put you off the estate."

"Hear that, Anna?" he said, turning to his girlfriend with a smile. "That's the establishment speaking."

"I'm trying to be your friend," she said. "You don't make it easy."

He looked at her through insolent narrow slits of eyes. "Did Nina tell you to give me that message? Does she want me to leave?"

"I have no idea what she wants," Maggie said. "I didn't discuss you with her."

"In that case I'll let you in on my legal position in the matter. My tent is pitched just on the other side of the Collins line in an area of public beach. So I don't think Mrs. Stoddard will be doing anything to move me."

"You know best," she said, angry at his bantering insolence and that his being there would drive Barnabas away.

He seemed to read her thoughts, for he said, "You planning to meet the swinger in the Edwardian coat here?"

"I don't think that matters to you," she said.

Smith and Anna exchanged knowing smiles. Then they both got up from the bench. He told her, "You're one of those repressed, suffering females. You're out of style, Luv. Learn to live it up like Anna here. We don't want to spoil anything so we'll just move on."

She watched them walk off slowly, their arms around each other. What a strange couple they were! But in a way she was grateful that they had left her alone. Now there might be some hope of Barnabas joining her. He would never have come if he'd seen the other two sitting there. And she realized with some surprise that the girl with Smith hadn't said a word during the time they'd been there.

The tide was coming in again and the waves were
pounding on the rocky shore. Below she could see the
water churning and boiling in frothy fury. The lash of
the water had a dismal sound. At least it seemed so in
her present mood, for she had been depressed by the
events of the afternoon and what had been said at the
dinner table.

The transparent gray of dusk had settled on the hill
and soon a complete cloak of darkness would replace it.
She seated herself on the bench and waited. The melan-
choly breaking of the waves continued at regular inter-
vals. Then a giant crow came by cawing loudly to startle
her.

The crow had barely winged off into the drab curtain
of dusk with its mournful cry echoing behind it than she
was conscious of someone standing at the end of the
bench. She looked up to see Barnabas. He stood there
in the blurred light, his shoulders proudly erect under
the heavy Inverness coat and his cane with its silver
wolf’s head in hand.

She got up quickly. “I’m so glad you came.”
“I had to talk to you,” he said seriously as they faced
each other. “I wanted you to understand about last
night.”
“I’m sure you had a good reason for being with that
girl,” she said.
“I had a very good reason,” he told her solemnly. “It
has nothing to do with us or any feelings I might have
for you. Can you understand that?”
“I’ll try very hard.”

His deep set eyes burned into hers. “That is all I can
ask. You have been more sympathetic than I ever ex-
pected.”
“That girl you were with, Barnabas,” she said, “some-
“That girl you were with, Barnabas,” she said, “some-
thing happened to her last night.”
“Yes,” his expression had become inscrutable.
She nodded anxiously. “Yes. The police chief was here
this morning. He said they found her wandering about
dazed with those odd marks on her throat. From the way
he talked I think he believes you were responsible.”
“If he believes that he should charge me with the crime
and take me in.”

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“I don’t think it was you, Barnabas,” she said unhappily. “I’m only trying to let you know what he said.”

The handsome man smiled sadly. “I can tell you are alarmed.”

“I can’t help it,” she said, near tears. “Dr. Bremmer has been hinting some dreadful things about you.”

“I can imagine.”

“And tonight at the dinner table he tricked little David into telling a story about seeing you change into a bat.”
Barnabas raised an eyebrow. “That is fanciful.”

“Elizabeth settled the whole business and gave Dr. Bremmer to understand it was all the boy’s imagination. Of course the doctor was furious.”

“I don’t doubt that.”

“Can’t you make them stop these ugly rumors?” she pleaded.

He put a restraining hand on her arm. “You mustn’t worry about them,” he said quietly. “One of these days I’ll be leaving. Then the village will forget me quickly. All this tempest in a teapot will pass from their minds.”

She looked up at him earnestly. “But I don’t want you to go.”

He smiled in his melancholy way. “I’m not thinking about it just yet. Please don’t worry. And who were those two I saw you talking with here?”

“A hippie named Joe Smith and his girl, Anna,” she said, and went on to explain about them. Barnabas listened intently. It was now dark and in the distance she could see the lights of Collinwood.

He said, “It would seem that Nina and the doctor are not the devoted couple you first surmised.”

“I’m afraid not.”

“She is apparently leading this hippie on. She enjoys the idea of having him follow her all the way here.”

Maggie sighed. “That’s how it seems.”

“And you think he may be acting the role of phantom?”

“Perhaps only a part of the time,” she said. “But at least I think he was who I saw standing on the lawn with Nina that night. And then, when I went down there he’d run off and she pretended she hadn’t seen anyone.”

“I remember.”
“They’ve brought nothing but unhappiness to Collinwood,” she said in despair. “You should never have given him that skull. It was through it he learned all about Asaph Clay.”

“He would have tried to find out anyway,” was his reaction. “Do you know where the skull is now?”

“In his room, I believe,” she said. “I returned it to him.”

“When I see him again I’ll ask for it back,” Barnabas said in a considered tone. “The spirit of Asaph must be troubled by the skull being in Bremmer’s possession.”

She stared up into the handsome face now almost lost to the darkness. “Do you truly believe that Asaph is an avenging phantom and out to revenge himself on the Collins family?”

“Take away the warlock and too many things will go unexplained,” he said. “I believe we are dealing with this phantom adversary and I’m going to try and defeat him.”

She pressed close to him. “Nothing must happen to you.”

His arms encircled her in a comforting manner. “It will be all right,” he assured her gently. And then he drew her tightly against him for a lasting kiss. In that brief moment of bliss Maggie forgot all her uncertainties and concern.

When he released her, he said, “We’d better start back. I have some important things to look after.”

She glanced up at him. “Barnabas, where do you go after you leave me?”

He shook his head. “Don’t ask me that now. But I have many things to attend to. Things I cannot reveal at the moment.”

She sighed as they walked in the direction of Collinwood with arms linked. As they neared the great mansion with its lighted windows a car suddenly appeared along the road from the village.

“Someone’s coming,” Maggie said, all at once uneasy. Barnabas seemed not at all concerned. “You’re right. I wonder who it could be.”

“We’ll soon know,” she said as the car approached, its headlights moving up and down as it covered the last
section of the somewhat bumpy road that connected Collinwood with the main highway. The car entered the drive and then came up close so that it was only within a dozen feet of them. With a squealing of tires it came to a stop and a slender figure got out. Even before the newcomer spoke she recognized it was the lean-faced young Chief, Joe Baxter.

The car’s headlamps were still left on and blazing them in a beam like a spotlight. As the chief lazily approached them she could feel Barnabas steady himself for a difficult moment.

She trembled as the young chief came towards them. She whispered to Barnabas, “Be careful.” His reply was to squeeze her hand in an encouraging fashion.

“Good evening, folks,” Baxter said casually.

“We haven’t met since the other night at the station,” Barnabas reminded him in a friendly fashion.

“You’re right,” Jim agreed. He was standing directly in front of them. The beam from the headlights allowed them to see his face clearly and he could study them just as well. Maggie had the premonition that this could be a showdown.

She said, “I saw your car lights a long distance off.”

“I suppose so,” he said. “You remember what I told you about taking walks after dark? You’re still not afraid?”

“Not when I’m with Barnabas.”

“I suppose not,” the chief said dryly. Then he gave his attention to Barnabas. “I was going to try and see you earlier today.”

“I’m difficult to reach in the daylight hours,” Barnabas said.

“So I’ve been told,” Jim Baxter’s reply was made in a certain tone. A tone that indicated skepticism.

“Was it something urgent, Chief?” Barnabas asked politely.

“We had another of those cases last night,” the chief said. “A girl you were reported seen with turned up after midnight hysterical and with those queer marks on her throat.”

“Indeed,” Barnabas said. “I’m not sure I recall the girl. I meet many people when I’m in the village. And
this business of the girls with marks on their throats is getting to be old stuff."

"Not for me," Baxter said, his tone cutting. "This is not the first time something like this has happened to a girl you've been seen with."

"Do you mean that to signify anything, Chief?" Barnabas said lightly.

"I'm thinking the girls you go out with have a habit of turning up in trouble," the chief said, and addressing Maggie, he added, "I hope this doesn't prove true in your case, Maggie."

She tried to sound assured. "I'm positive it won't."

"Trouble is, you never know," Baxter said seriously. It was a tense little drama with each of them indulging in a kind of double-talk standing there in the blaze of headlights with darkness all around them like a high wall.

"I wouldn't lose any sleep over her safety, Chief," Barnabas said in his suave way.

"No?" Baxter sounded skeptical.

"No," Barnabas replied in a firm voice. "Now about the girl last night. Was she able to identify who attacked her?"

Baxter gave him a cynical smile. "You ought to know better than ask me a question like that, Mr. Collins. Anyway the answer is no. She'd been drinking a lot. Mostly in your company, so I hear. And she was muddled bad by the time we found her."

Barnabas listened politely and said, "So she couldn't tell you a thing?"

"Not a thing," Baxter said grimly. "But next time we may have better luck. The girl may be smarter and she mightn't drink so much, so her brain will be clearer. And then we'll get the statement we need. I'm a kind of optimist, Mr. Collins."

"In your line one has to be," Barnabas responded ur- banely.

The obvious fencing between them had set her nerves on edge. She decided it was time to get the chief off on another track, so she said, "You have a new problem on your hands, Jim. A hippie and his girlfriend have pitched tent along the public beach."
"We've got scads of hippies all around the village," he told her.

"Not one like Joe Smith," she assured him. "He's followed Nina Bremmer here. He has a wild crush on her. And he's the living image of the phantom I saw standing on the lawn with her. And who later attacked Dr. Bremmer."

Jim Baxter frowned. "Are you saying this guy has been playing ghost and causing trouble?"

"At least part of the time," she said. "He admitted to pretending to be a phantom for the sake of impressing the children."

"Sounds interesting," he said. "I'd better check on this Joe Smith. You say Nina has been having trouble with him?"

"He did follow her here."

"I'd better have a talk with her first," he said. "I'll see you two later." He returned to his car and backed it up to park it on the driveway by the front door. Then he got out and went into the house.

Maggie and Barnabas remained on the lawn, watching him from in darkness again. She said, "That ought to take his mind off you for a while. Nina will try to protect Smith. I wonder what she'll say to the chief."

"If Bremmer gets to him he'll have plenty to tell," Barnabas commented quietly. "That is, if he's as jealous as you say."

"That bad or worse," she promised.

Barnabas smiled down at her. "I appreciate what you did for me. I hope I'll be able to show you it was justified."

"One thing I don't like about Jim Baxter," she worried. "He's too anxious to solve things the easy way. That's why he's picking on you. Because you're different from the others in town he's singled you out."

"I can deal with him."

"You sound so certain. He does represent a lot more than just himself. He can call on the State Police at any time."

"I have handled such problems before," Barnabas said, unperturbed.

"Where?"
“I’ll tell you about it later,” he promised. “Now I must see you safely inside and be on my way.”

Barnabas urgently seemed to want to be on his way so she did not try to detain him. At the door he was his courtly self as he kissed her goodnight before she went inside. When she entered the reception hall she found Chief Baxter and Nina standing there engaged in what seemed to be a serious discussion. They acknowledged her entry with mere nods and she moved quickly on into the living room, not wanting to intrude on their privacy.

Just inside the living room doorway she found Dr. Bremmer seated in a high-backed chair, staring straight ahead of him with a grim expression on his pinched face. Seeing her, he got up.

“Well,” he said, “I suppose you have been seeing our mutual friend, Barnabas?”

“As a matter of fact I have,” she admitted.

“And what did Barnabas have to say this evening?”

“He mentioned the skull of Asaph Clay. I believe he would like to have it back.”

Dr. Bremmer chuckled unpleasantly. “I have no doubt of that, but you can tell him I have no intention of parting with it yet.”

“You had better speak to him about it yourself,” she said quietly. Her dislike of this stooped, miserly man had increased each day.

He pointed a skinny finger at her. “That skull could deliver a fortune into my hands. The trunk of gold that Phineas Collins buried in the swamp. I mean to hold another seance soon.”

“That money is tinged crimson with blood,” she protested. “I can’t believe that anyone would want it. Or that there could be any luck associated with it! Why should it mean so much to you, since you’re already a wealthy man?”

Dr. Bremmer shrugged. “One is never all that wealthy. I gather I have set Barnabas thinking. He wants the skull back so he can work towards finding the treasure on his own.”

She frowned. “I don’t believe that at all. He is more interested in it being properly laid to rest. He feels you are being disrespectful of the dead, and he thinks that
while this continues the spirit of Asaph Clay will remain restless and a threat to us all."

"Indeed. Your friend Barnabas probably has such high scruples because he is worried about his own safety."

"No more so than he is concerned about the others in the house," she said. "You have had one experience with the phantom. If I hadn't arrived in time you might have been strangled."

He nodded. "Granted. And I still have that ancient scarf to remind me of it. Has Barnabas ever mentioned Angelique to you?"

"No." The name was strange to her and she wondered if it could be that of the girl she'd seen Barnabas with the previous night.

"Or Josette?"

"He's never mentioned either of those names to me," she said, puzzled at what he might be trying to say.

The familiar gloating expression was showing on his pinched face. "I have an idea that sooner or later you will hear of those two ladies. They belong to a past that Barnabas has thus far successfully concealed from you."

"You make it sound like something underhanded," she said.

"Do I?" the sunken eyes mocked her. The old man moved across the living room to stand under the Barnabas Collins portrait. Staring up at the sad, aristocratic face, he said, "Have you ever wondered about the remarkable likeness Barnabas bears to this portrait?"

"Everyone has spoken about it," she said, wondering why he was suddenly making such a mystery of it.

He turned to her with questioning eyes. "Don't you think it suggests more than ordinary coincidence?"

"I can't imagine why," she said warily, sure that he was cunningly trying to make some evil accusation against Barnabas.

"Could it be that this Barnabas we know and the one in the portrait have much more in common than we guess?"

"The man in the portrait has been dead a hundred-and-seventy-five years," she reproved him. "What could the link be between that first Barnabas and the man we know?"
“The man in the portrait was sent away from Collinwood because he was said to be a vampire,” Dr. Bremmer said with careful deliberation. “I think our friend Barnabas may also be one of the living dead.”

Even though she’d been prepared for something like this, his words had a shattering effect on her. She stood in bewildered silence for a long moment with her eyes lifting to the familiar face painted in the dark tones of the artists of New England. The eyes staring at her from the gloomy canvas with its ornate golden frame could be those of Barnabas.

And the eyes had a hypnotic, reassuring message for her. They made her realize that Barnabas would never let this devious old man trick him into a state of doubt or panic and she must not let this happen to her either. She drew upon all her reserves of courage.

Then she said, “I agree with Elizabeth. I’m inclined to think there has been far too much loose talk in this house about the supernatural. I’m sure we all understand your obsession with it, but you mustn’t expect normal people to share your dubious enthusiasm.”

It was Dr. Bremmer’s turn to be taken aback. Astonishment on the yellowed, parchment face gave way to anger. “You had better not include Barnabas when you speak of normal people,” he warned her.

“And I think you should make any accusations concerning Barnabas Collins to him,” she said. “I’m sure he’ll be able to deal with them promptly.”

Nina came in to join them at that moment. She was mildly surprised when she saw them. “Why are you two glaring at each other in such a fashion?”

Her husband ignored the question. “Have you finished with Baxter?” he wanted to know.

“Yes,” she said in a resigned tone. “I’ve told him the whole story about Joe.”

He scowled. “I hope they lose no time in running him out of here.”

“I doubt that they can do that,” Nina said mildly. “After all, he’s breaking no laws.”

Dr. Bremmer became furious. “He’s intruding on our privacy and camping on a private estate!”

“No, Eli, on a public beach,” she corrected him.
Maggie had listened to enough of their arguing. Quietly she said, “If you’ll excuse me I’m very tired. I’m going up to my room.” And she left at once.

When she reached the privacy of her room she began thinking of her conversation with the doctor. While she had managed to keep her nerves in check by remembering the example of Barnabas, she was still shaken by the unpleasant interlude. If he went on spreading these ugly insinuations it could end with the handsome Englishman in bad trouble. People were only too ready to believe such stories. Chief Baxter wouldn’t need much encouragement to make a charge against Barnabas.

These troubling thoughts plagued her so much that when she finally did get to sleep it was a feverish, restless one. Amid her tossing and turning, tiny moans of fear escaped her quivering lips, and she had ugly nightmares involving Barnabas in deathly struggles with the phantom warlock, Asaph Clay. The lean, cruel face with the drooping black mustache and fringed by the long hair leered at her in triumph. She screamed out her fear and suddenly wakened to hear other distant screams mingling with her own.

CHAPTER TEN

Maggie fought to lift herself out of the dark tunnel of her nightmare to the confused reality of the distant screaming. Sitting up in bed, she stared into the blackness of her bedroom and tried to decide whether she was asleep or awake, whether this was frightening dream or terrifying truth! And as the repeated screams cut deep into her consciousness she no longer had doubts. New horror had come to Collinwood!

She quickly flung back the bedclothes and put on her slippers and dressing gown. Within seconds she was on the way to the door. Emerging into the dim hallway she
located the cries as coming from the third floor. She ran
to the bottom of the third floor stairway and was pre-
sented with an eerie spectacle.

Crouching near the top of the stairway was the pajama
clad figure of Dr. Bremmer. He was screaming with fear
and pain as a ten-foot lash curled and snaked about him
again and again. On the landing of the third floor the
phantom figure of the warlock, Asaph Clay, showed
faintly in the near darkness as he wielded the whip on
the hapless doctor.

Maggie cried out for the punishment to cease and it
was a clue for the phantom to bring the whip down on
Dr. Bremmer's back a final time before fading into the
shadows. With a piteous moan the old man raised his
arms and stumbled backwards to fall down the long stair-
way and finally lay motionless at her feet.

She immediately knelt by him to see if he was still
alive. He could have easily broken his neck in the long
fall, but he seemed to be breathing. By this time Nina
appeared and bent down to assist her husband with a
sobbing cry. Then Elizabeth came, and a moment later,
Noel Hart. There was a general pandemonium with the
entire house aroused. Elizabeth shooed the children back
to bed, while Noel Hart carried the battered doctor to
his room and bed.

Almost the moment he touched the bed the doctor
opened his eyes. He blinked dazedly and asked in a weak
voice, "Has he gone?"

Nina turned to Maggie who was standing at the foot
of the bed. "What is he talking about?"

Maggie said. "The phantom. He was whipping him."
And to Dr. Bremmer, she said, "He vanished the moment
I screamed at him."

He closed his eyes and murmured, "Asaph Clay!"

Nina spoke sharply to him. "Don't tell us it was a ghost
who did this to you?"

Her husband opened his eyes to her again. His face
held livid tracks of the lash giving him an odd expression.
"It was the phantom," he said. And then his eyes showed
concern and he raised himself weakly. "The skull? Where
is the skull?"

"I don't know," Nina said with open revulsion.
Noel Hart, solemn in his dark bathrobe, moved quickly across the room to the closet. "It was in here," he said, opening the closet door. Then he turned with surprise in the pale eyes behind the thick glasses. "The skull and its carrying case are gone!"

"I knew it," the doctor moaned. "That's what he came for."

Elizabeth asked Nina, "Hadn't I better get a doctor from the village?"

Before Nina could offer a reply, Dr. Bremmer rose shakily from the bed and said, "No! I need no doctor. I'll be all right. Go back to your beds."

Not entirely satisfied, Elizabeth hesitated. "You had a bad fall. Are you sure?"

"I'll do my own doctoring," he said defiantly. "My injuries are minor." Then, addressing himself to Maggie, he added, "You came in time to see him, didn't you?"

"Yes," she said quietly.

His sunken eyes had a haunted look. "He intended to kill me. He would have in another few minutes. The whip! What about the whip?"

"I don't know."

"See if you can find it," he told Maggie. "If you do, bring it here to me."

With a questioning glance at Nina she withdrew from the room and went out to the landing in search of the cruel weapon which had brought Dr. Bremmer to his dejected state. There was no sign of it at the spot where he'd fallen. She went slowly up the stairs and found the ancient whip about a third way down. Lifting it by the short crop she saw that the lash was unusually long and thick. She has never seen a whip like it before.

She took it back to him, and he held it in trembling hands, his face fearful. "There have been no whips like this used in New England in years," he said in a taut voice.

Noel Hart, who was still there, frowned. "It has a familiar design."

"Indeed it has," Dr. Bremmer said in wry triumph. "You have seen many of them pictured in books and articles relating to the slave days. This is the kind of whip the slavers used on their black cargo." He held the
whip before him. "And Asaph Clay brought this one back from the grave to use it on me!"

Nina protested. "That's fantastic nonsense, Eli."

He glared at her. "Explain how it came here, then. A whip centuries old." He turned to Elizabeth. "Did you ever see it before?"

Elizabeth stared at the whip a long moment and then said, "No. I have never seen anything like that in the house until now."

"How much proof do you skeptics need?" Dr. Bremmer wanted to know.

"This skeptic requires sleep more than proof," Nina said wearily. "If you're certain you need no outside medical attention, Eli, I say we should all retire."

The conference in the injured man's room ended. Maggie went back to bed and considered what had happened. The phantom figure on the landing had looked ghostly enough, but she was not inclined to agree with the doctor's theory that it had been Asaph Clay returned from the dead. To her it had seemed too much like the hippie, Joe Smith.

Likely there were many ways the wild young man could have gotten into the house. And since he enjoyed acting the role of phantom, he could have assumed the role of warlock once more. The whip had been an extra touch. Although Elizabeth had not recognized it, there was no reason why the young man might not have found it in some remote antique shop. Or even have stolen it from one of the local museums.

On the following sunny morning Chief Jim Baxter arrived and was told of the weird happening of the night before. Maggie was in the living room with the others as he grimly examined the whip.

"There has been a notice out about this," he informed them. "It was stolen from the museum in Ellsworth about a week ago."

Nina gave her husband a reproving glance. "So your phantom didn't bring it from the regions of the dead after all."

Dr. Bremmer looked uncomfortable, hunched in an
oversize chair. "That doesn’t have to be the same whip that was stolen. It could be one similar to it."

"Sorry," Baxter said, and held the bottom of the crop out for him to see. "It's the same whip all right. There is a six carved in the leather."

"Which means our intruder last night was not a ghostly one," Elizabeth said.

"Hardly," Baxter said dryly. "I've never thought you had that kind of problem from the start."

Noel Hart spoke up. "I'd say all the suspicion points to Smith."

Nina turned abruptly to Maggie. "You saw who or whatever it was. Do you think it could be Joe?"

Maggie sighed. "I thought it looked a great deal like him, but in the darkness it's hard to be positive."

"That sounds good enough for me," Baxter said.

"One moment!" Dr. Bremmer raised a protesting hand. "No one wants to be rid of that hippie more than I do, but I don’t want mistakes made either. I don’t think he’s guilty. I had a fairly good glimpse of my attacker. He looked like Joe Smith but it wasn’t him. And you mustn’t forget that the skull of Asaph Clay was taken from me by whoever used the whip."

Baxter eyed the old man coolly. "You sound as if you’ve got some ideas."

"I have," the doctor said. "I still say the intruder was linked with the supernatural. And if you ask Miss Evans I’m sure she’ll tell you that Barnabas Collins spoke to her about my returning the skull to him. I refused. And I think that is why he came upon me in the night and took it."

The chief’s eyes narrowed. "You’re saying that this Barnabas is not a normal human being?"

"Yes," Dr. Bremmer said crisply.

"And you believe he attacked you?"

"I think it is possible, indeed, very likely," Dr. Bremmer said with a vengeful glance in Maggie’s direction.

Maggie spoke up. "I’m sure Dr. Bremmer is wrong. Barnabas would not do such a thing. And he only spoke of the skull because he objected to the use being made of it by the doctor."

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"I agree with Maggie," Elizabeth said quickly. "Barnabas is a gentle man and wouldn't hurt anyone."

Baxter looked skeptical. "There are people in Collinsport who think differently about him."

"Because they don't know him," Elizabeth said. "And anyway, Barnabas would have to don a disguise to resemble this phantom. And I can't see him doing that either."

The police chief's smile was sour. "I know he's your cousin, Mrs. Stoddard. I'd like to keep him out of any trouble if possible. But there does come a time."

"That is what you are faced with," Dr. Bremmer said, rising. "One Collins protecting another. We all know about the various attacks made on young women lately. They sound suspiciously to me like the work of a vampire." Dramatically he pointed a skinny finger to the portrait of Barnabas on the wall. "He was a vampire! Why not this Barnabas?"

"My husband doesn't know what he's saying," Nina broke in.

Baxter weighed the whip in his hand and in a grim tone said, "I'm going to have to go at this like I would any regular investigation. And if I can't make sense of it, the State Police will have to take over. The first thing I'll do will be take Mr. Joe Smith in for questioning and if that doesn't produce something, I'm going to have another talk with Barnabas."

"Please don't let talk of what has been going on circulate around the village," Elizabeth pleaded. "They enlarge so on whatever they hear and make far too much of it."

"I understand, Mrs. Stoddard," he said with a sigh. Then he turned to Maggie. "I'd like a final word with you before I go."

He went outside and she followed him. He walked as far as the gardens before he halted to question her. He began by saying, "I guess you know that in spite of all the fancy talk Barnabas gave me last night, I'm still not sure about him?"

"You're being unfair to him," Maggie said, her hair rustling in the slight breeze.
“You say that because you’ve got a crush on him.”
She blushed. “No. I’m just sure you’re wrong.”
The chief’s eyes bored into her. “If that is so, why does he act in such a weird way? Why does he never show himself in daylight? What does he do locked in that old house? He’s supposed to be writing a book. Have you ever seen it?”
“I haven’t asked to see it,” she said uneasily.
“And I doubt if he could show it to you,” Baxter said with a frown. “I’ve known you for a good spell, Maggie, and I like you. I hate to see you getting into a mess like this.”
“You talk as if you were sure Barnabas is guilty of something,” she said.
Baxter glanced back at the dark hulk of Collinwood and said, “I’m not paying attention to that crazy old doctor. His ravings about ghosts and the supernatural don’t interest me, but I am concerned about what has been happening to those girls in the village and the attempts made on the doctor’s life. As far as I can make out, there are only two possible suspects. The prime one is Smith and the other is Barnabas. If Smith doesn’t turn out to be guilty, I’m going to be after Barnabas.”
“I’m sure it won’t come to that,” she said. “I saw the figure on the landing. It looked like that hippie.”
“I’m going to the beach now,” he said. “But until this business is definitely cleared up, I’d advise you to stay clear of Mr. Barnabas Collins.”
“I won’t promise that.”
“Then I won’t promise you’ll escape being hurt.” That being his final word, he left her to go to his car.
With misgivings, she watched him drive away. It would probably only need the girl Anna to offer Joe Smith a reasonable alibi and he’d be able to ease out of his being suspected. Then the chief’s full activity would be directed against Barnabas with the idea of pinning all the criminal happenings on him.
The prospect was bleak. Dr. Bremmer’s weird accusations hadn’t been taken seriously, but they had helped to bring Barnabas under a cloud. She and Elizabeth had worked hard to protect him, but probably they had gone as far as they could in their efforts. The vampire thing
nagged in her mind, especially since Barnabas had evaded giving her any clear replies to the questions she’d put to him concerning the doctor’s accusations.

Could he be tainted with the curse that had ruined his ancestor’s life? Staring out at the placid ocean, she supposed that it was possible. Would it make any difference to her and her feelings towards Barnabas? She doubted it, but she knew so little about such things. Aside from Dr. Bremmer the one person at Collinwood who was versed in the supernatural was Noel Hart.

She decided she would like to ask him some questions about the nature of vampires. She walked back to the house and asked Nina if she knew where Noel had gone.

Nina was standing in the reception hall, looking worried. “My husband sent him down to the cemetery to complete copying the material on the gravestones,” she said. “Has Jim Baxter left?”

She nodded. “He’s on his way to the beach.”

“Poor Joe!” Nina said with a deep sigh. “It’s too bad.”

“Do you think he’s the one to blame?”

Nina shook her head sadly. “I’m fond of Joe, so I hope not. But it does look as if he might be.”

Maggie left her standing in the hall and started on the way to the cemetery. It meant passing the outbuildings, and she saw Matt Morgan standing in the open doorway of the barn. In the last week they had finished getting in the hay crop. Elizabeth still kept a single horse for the farm work and she had three cows. Aside from a few chickens that was the entire livestock at Collinwood.

Moving on, Maggie was soon close to the old house. The sight of its shuttered windows and the memories of its silence and that eerie room in the cellar sent a chill through her. There was something macabre in Barnabas remaining in that musty place all day.

When she reached the entrance to the grim old place she hesitated. Talking to Barnabas at this moment would give her great satisfaction. Was it worth an attempt? She recalled the harsh reception she’d received from the burly Hare on her last visit, but she was still desperate enough to want to make another try. Mounting the steps, she lifted the corroded brass knocker and announced her ar-
rival. It was some time before she heard heavy steps pounding along the corridor.

The door was opened cautiously and the beard-stubbled face of the sullen Hare peered out at her in the narrow crack between frame and door. He recognized her and made an ugly grunting sound.

"May I see Barnabas for just a few minutes?" she pleaded.

The angry grunting sound was repeated. Hare's eyes held a gleam of hatred, and he abruptly slammed the door closed in her face. It was obvious that he wasn't going to cooperate. He did take his instructions very seriously. She wouldn't be able to see Barnabas until evening. It seemed a very long time away.

With shoulders slumped, she went down the steps and headed for the downslope of the field and the cemetery on the fringe of the towering trees. She doubted that she'd get much sympathy from Noel Hart, but at least she could question him some about the ways of vampires.

Moving down the fairly steep hill of the broad field, she presented a solitary figure against the tall grass and the sky above. As she neared the iron-fenced cemetery the sun went under clouds and the day took on a bleak air suited to her mood.

Entering the cemetery, she saw no sign of Noel. The forest of tombstones and the pathetic grass mounds suggesting the reclining skeletons resting beneath them always made her feel melancholy. She forced herself to walk to the very rear of the cemetery and there she saw Noel leaning before a weathered gray tombstone.

He looked up with surprise on his long face as she approached. "This is an unexpected pleasure," he said, rising and folding his notebook closed.

"Nina told me you were down here," she said.

The pale eyes behind the thick glasses blazed. "He sent me down here as soon as the chief left. He's always afraid I may have a few minutes to myself."

"How are you making out?"

"I've only about a dozen more gravestones to copy," he said. "I'll finish before I go back."

She sighed and gave him a troubled look. "What do you make of it all?"
Noel looked cunning. "I think Nina has really gotten herself in a mess this time. That police chief is a pretty smart cookie, and even though he and she were childhood sweethearts, I think he sees through what is going on."

Maggie frowned. "Just what is that?"

"Nina has fallen hard for that hippie. And she's the one who has put him up to killing the doctor. Once they have him out of the way, she and Joe Smith could live on his money in high style for the rest of their days."

"Then you feel Joe Smith is the guilty one?"

"Who else?"

Her eyes met his. "Dr. Bremmer seems very anxious to implicate Barnabas."

He smiled sourly. "That's for other reasons. Nina has the old man out of his mind with jealousy. He's not rational any more. And then he has this obsession about the treasure in the swamp and Elizabeth Stoddard won't allow him to hold any more seances to try and find out where it is."

"Do you believe he has spiritual powers? That his seances are authentic?"

Noel's face registered surprise. "Did I ever suggest that they weren't? However much I dislike Bremmer, I'm forced to admit he is a fine medium. I haven't a doubt those voices that issued from his mouth during the seances were those of Phineas Collins and Asaph Clay."

"You believe in spiritualism," she said.

"Yes. And I'm impressed by the fact Bremmer believes Barnabas Collins is a vampire. His hunches are usually right."

"What do you know about vampires?"

"Middle Europe or Haiti?" he said in his cynical way. "Take your pick. Vampires were supposed to be fairly common in both those areas. The legend of the living dead is a popular one."

Maggie frowned. "Do they live off human blood?"

"They must have it. And they dare not show themselves by day. They sleep in their coffins from sunrise to sunset. Doesn't that seem to fit in well with Barnabas?"

"It's too easy," she said.

"Bremmer has spoken to me of Barnabas also being
the phantom," the man with the thick glasses said. "And it could be true."

"Is there any cure for a vampire?" she asked him.

"A stake of hawthorn through the heart," was his reply. "And believe me they are better off dead."

"Thanks," she said in a small voice. "I'll leave you to your work. I seem to have heard enough."

Noel stared at her from behind the thick glasses. "Sorry I've not been able to offer you more encouraging news," he said. "And by the way, Dr. Bremmer has found a lot of material to suggest what I've told you about Barnabas. It was in some of the old journals written by Phineas Collins. So take care."

"I will," she promised.

On the way back up the hill she began to think about the children. They had been better in the past few days. Perhaps the spell that seemed to have fallen on them had lifted. Noel Hart, surely an intelligent young man, seemed to have no doubt that there were such things as ghosts. And he also appeared to believe that the phantom warlock, Asaph Clay, was in an avenging mood.

Was the dark spirit of the dead slave captain dominating the body and mind of Joe Smith, as he'd dominated the children? Could that be the answer to the series of distressing incidents? She had refrained from mentioning the evil moods of David and Amy to Chief Baxter because Elizabeth had asked her not to, but had that been right, or even wise? The question tormented her.

The demonic possession of the youngsters had a bearing on all else that had taken place at Collinwood. How could Baxter make a fair appraisal of the situation without knowing about it? She made up her mind to tell him the next time she saw him whether Elizabeth approved or not. There were certain decisions she had to make on her own.

The old house was as silent as before when she passed it and she counted the hours until dusk when she would have a chance to talk with Barnabas. She couldn't help wondering how the chief had made out with Smith. If that turned out well, it could mean Barnabas would have no worries.

Reaching Collinwood, she found it quiet. She went to
the children's room to discover them busy with one of their word games. Ben 'ing down to help them with it, she was surprised to find young David staring at her oddly. His eyes held that certain light of the difficult days again and made her frown at him.

She asked, "Is something on your mind, David?"

"I was thinking about Barnabas," he said. Amy had ceased her arranging of the blocks to listen with interest on her bright young face.

"In what way are you thinking of him?" she wanted to know.

The strange bright eyes mocked her. "How he can turn into a bat so easy."

Maggie tried to make light of this. "You must have dreamed that," she told him.

"No," his voice was strangely firm. "I saw it happen. And so did Amy." He turned to the little girl. "Didn't you, Amy?" She looked nervous and nodded without speaking.

Maggie felt firmness was required on her part. "I think you should forget all about such things," she said.

"And about the phantom too?" the question came from the lad in sly fashion.

Startled, she said, "Yes." His odd mood was making her increasingly uneasy.

"The phantom came to us again today," he assured her gravely. So that explained it!

Maggie studied the boy's strangely solemn face.

"When?"

"In the garden. The same way as always. When Amy and me were alone."

"You shouldn't make up stories, David."

"But he did come," the boy protested. "And he said somebody here was going to die."

"I don't think we should talk about such things," she said, trying to hide the fear his words had brought her. "We'll read from one of your books until dinner time."

She turned their attention to reading for a little, but their interest wavered and at dinner she noticed they were in a weirdly subdued mood, almost as if they had some kind of conspiracy between them. This sudden
change in the mood of the youngsters didn’t seem to be noticed by the others.

Dr. Bremmer had not come down to the evening meal, still feeling the effects of his beating the night before. Elizabeth and Nina kept a conversation going by talking of their childhood in the village.

After dinner Carolyn returned for a short visit to pick up some clothes. She took Maggie aside and asked her what was going on at Collinwood. “There’s been some talk in the village,” she said. “And I don’t like to ask Mother. She always gets so upset. But the police chief has been out here several times, hasn’t he?”

“Yes,” she admitted. “Odd things have been taking place. The children have spoken of a phantom visiting them, and Dr. Bremmer has been attacked twice.”

Carolyn’s pretty face showed astonishment. “Attacked by whom?”

“He says by a ghost,” Maggie said with a sigh. “But no one else believes him. There’s a hippie who has a tent pitched on the beach. Most of us blame him.”

“That must be the one Chief Baxter took to the jailhouse today,” Carolyn said excitedly. “A thin fellow with a mustache and long black hair.”

“That’s him all right,” Maggie said.

“He let him go a little while later,” Carolyn informed her. “When I left work I saw him walking along the main street with a girl with long blonde hair.”

“That would be Anna, his girlfriend,” Maggie said, worried that the hippie had been released. It surely meant the police had not been able to prove him guilty. No doubt the chief would be out to call on Barnabas next.

Carolyn talked a few minutes longer and then left for the village again. It was close to dusk and Maggie was anticipating seeing Barnabas. She decided to go upstairs and check on David and Amy before going out. Their actions had upset her.

She found Amy in her room, but there was no sign of David. “Where is David?” she asked Amy.

“He had to meet someone,” Amy said.

“Who?”

“The phantom,” Amy replied, her tiny face serious. “Don’t play games with me, Amy,” she reproved her.
“David has no right to be running off at this hour. Where did he go?”

“To the barn to meet the phantom,” Amy said.

Maggie was annoyed. David had been warned to keep out of the barn. There was always the danger of his being kicked by one of the livestock. And the old lofts were treacherous, especially now that hay covered some of the open places where a boy could fall through. She had told him he was not to go there unless she or Matt was with him. So he’d made up this fantastic story as an excuse for disobeying her. With a sigh she turned to leave and find him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Maggie had come to look forward to the arrival of dusk, since it meant the time when she could anticipate seeing Barnabas. But as she stepped out of the rear door of Collinwood into the haze of the summer evening on that particular night she had a feeling of apprehension. It was hard to explain. A general mood of uneasiness had engulfed her. She thought it was probably due to her concern about the children, especially David, who had gone off on this forbidden visit to the barn.

She crossed the wide yard in the deepening blue of the approaching night. Amy’s solemn statement that the boy had gone to keep a rendezvous with the phantom had upset her. Of course she recognized it as a crafty excuse on David’s part for his venturing out to the barn without permission, and yet she wondered. Especially in remembering the odd, sullen moods that had been typical of the youngsters lately.

Reaching the open entrance of the barn she looked for some sign of David, or even of the handyman, but there was no one in sight. Matt usually went off to the village in the evenings when the stock had been looked
after, but if David had entered the barn he shouldn’t be hard to find.

The interior of the big barn was dark and shadowed. The pungent smell of the livestock permeated the air, mixed with the odors of fresh-cut hay. She approached the stalls, and the horse and cows, wary of her, moved about restlessly.

“David!”

Receiving no answer she went on down to the end of the barn. It was really dark there and she stood for a moment considering with a troubled expression on her pretty face. Again she was conscious of an inner voice warning her. She wondered if David was in the barn after all. Perhaps she’d made a mistake in trying to follow him.

Standing there alone in the shadows of the vast barn she grew more tense each moment. The livestock continued their uneasy trampling on the planks of the floor, the sound reverberating hollowly, making it impossible to hear anything else clearly. She found her unreasonable fear increasing and fought a desire to race the length of the barn and escape to the freedom of the yard.

But she should find David before she left if at all possible. She took advantage of a moment of silence to listen intently and she did catch a rustling movement directly above her in the loft area. Of course David was most likely to be stretched out there on a cushion of the hay, perhaps watching her over the edge of the loft and laughing at her softly.

A ladder leading to the lofts was beside her. After a moment’s hesitation she decided to go up for a brief search of the storage area before returning to the house. She started to climb the ladder and found it unsteady and a little scary. But she soon had reached the loft with its bountiful stacks of hay. Again she called the boy’s name and again there was no reply.

Because of the darkness and the tricky footing offered in the loft she moved cautiously along its edge hoping to come upon the boy at every step. At the other end of the loft there was a square door open so that bales of hay could be lifted to the upper level. Through it she
could see that it was almost as dark outside as in the barn.

She wished she had remained at the house until Barnabas had appeared. And by the time she’d made her way along one side of the loft she realized her search was futile and decided to end it. With this in mind she gingerly retraced her steps to the ladder. But she’d just gone a third of the way when she heard another rustling in the hay only a few feet distant from her.

Maggie froze in shock and called, “David!”

Her eyes searched the shadowed corners of the loft for a hint of the rising form of the boy. Then she spotted a sign of movement which made her catch her breath, for the figure she saw emerging from the darkness was too large to be David’s. It came loping towards her over the uneven ocean of sweet-smelling hay with a frightening swiftness. Drawing back, she missed her footing and fell down on the soft perfumed mattress.

She struggled to get her footing again with the hay complicating her efforts almost as frustratingly as the evil quicksand had on another occasion. She cried out in alarm and then she saw, poised over her half-reclining body, the head and shoulders of the phantom warlock, Asaph Clay! There was no mistaking the cruel face with the drooping black mustache and the long black hair streaking down almost to his shoulders.

A maniacal laughter issued from the phantom and she felt her throat clasped by cold, bony fingers. The fingers tightened in a skeletal, steel grip and she felt her breath cut off. Frantically she fought back and tried to free herself, but the phantom was crouched over her with a mad light of triumph in his eyes as his death-vise vanquished the life in her.

She knew now why she had been so fearful, and as her strength ebbed she almost lazily resigned herself to the death that seemed inevitable. Her eyes blurred as she gazed up past her attacker’s head and shoulders to the peaked rafters of the old barn. Then a new element came into the situation.

Vaguely she was aware of something descending from the upper blackness of the rafters; a strong fluttering of wings, a swooping that came joltingly against her attacker;
the startled expression on the face of the ghostly Asaph Clay; his releasing her to defend himself from this winged dark monster that had come out of the night to attack him. She heard a cry of terror from the phantom and then he vanished from her vision, the winged thing still pursuing him. She fell back on the hay and fainted.

When she came to young David was standing over her anxiously, he said, “Amy told me you’d come out here after me.”

She raised herself on an elbow, still weak and her throat paining. “How long have you been here?” she asked.

“I came just now,” David said. “Are you sick, Maggie?”

“No,” she replied and quickly improvising, went on to add, “I stumbled and must have fainted. Where were you all the time I was looking for you?”

The boy hesitated. “Back by the old house,” he said finally.

Maggie was standing now. “But you told Amy you were coming here to find the phantom.”

“That was just a story so she wouldn’t tag after me,” he declared with juvenile scorn.

“I came here looking for you. I was worried you might have an accident up here. I could have been badly hurt.”

“I’m sorry,” he said sincerely.

“You well may be,” she replied, still trembling a little as she glanced around in the shadows of the hayloft.

“Did you see anyone else when you came in here?”

“No. Matt has gone to Collinsport for the evening.”

She glanced down at the boy. “We’d better get away from here.”

“Sure,” he said, looking around in an eager fashion.

“Gee, isn’t this some spooky spot!”

“It is,” she agreed grimly, her recent experience still hauntingly fresh in her mind.

Back at the house she saw David to his room and then went to her own room to check her condition. There were two or three ugly red marks on her throat, but that was all the evidence remaining of her ordeal. She bathed her throat in cool water and fixed her make-up. Then she went downstairs in the hope that Barnabas might be there.
Lights had been turned on in the halls and in the rooms of the lower floor of Collinwood. As she reached the bottom of the last stairway she was startled to hear the angry sounds of an argument going on in the living room. She hesitated on the steps for a moment, still not over her experience in the barn. She had not been able to decide whether her attacker had been a ghost or an evil human. Certainly she'd been rescued by some force beyond her understanding. She had no clear recollection of what had gone on those final seconds before she'd fainted.

A weird winged creature seemed to have interfered on her behalf. Or maybe it had come blindly flying in through the opening in the loft and harassed her attacker in an effort to get free again. It didn't matter so long as she'd benefited by the intrusion. Yet it was shocking and she didn't dare discuss it with anyone but Barnabas. She felt he might be the one person likely to believe her and understand.

The angry voices continued and she recognized one of them as belonging to Dr. Bremmer. Moving into the doorway, she saw that the doctor was being confronted by Joe Smith. The sight of him and his likeness to the phantom creature who had such a short time ago made her his victim in the hayloft caused her to catch her breath.

The hippie's narrow face was contorted with wrath as he exclaimed, "Man, I know who sent the fuzz after me! That's no secret to me!"

"I want no further words with you," Dr. Bremmer snapped.

"You don't want any arguments? Well, that's too bad! That's really too bad!" Joe mocked him. "You got yourself a big wall-to-wall hang-up on me. And you'd better forget it. I settled all my problems with the fuzz and I'm staying right where I am."

"We'll see about that!" the doctor cried.

"Don't jump out of your skull, old man," Joe said with disdain. "You aren't going to live any hundred years. Take it easy. Enjoy the flowers!"

"Get out of here, you and your threats!" Dr. Bremmer ordered.

Joe's mocking smile was painfully familiar to Maggie.
Then he said, “Yeah, man! I crave fresh air after this place!” He strode swiftly out of the room to come to a halt by her.

He gave her a jeering glance. “You’re looking straight at me with both eyes, aren’t you?” he said. “You got the look of being on a trip. Had some pot?”

She shook her head. “I thought I saw you in the barn.”

“In the barn? That’s good!” He threw back his head and laughed loud. “That’s really good!” And he went on and out, slamming the front door behind him.

A shaken Dr. Bremmer came over to her. “You heard him,” he said in a quavering voice. “You heard him threaten me! That young man is a criminal.”

“What brought him here?”

“He wanted to berate me for reporting him to the police,” the doctor said. “He’s typical of the new breed of young men. He has no integrity and no standards of behavior.”

Maggie was still wondering whether Joe had come directly to the house after the winged creature had driven him from the barn. She asked, “How long was he here?”

“He arrived just before you did,” the old man said.

She thought quickly. Then it could have been him. But her thoughts were interrupted when the doorbell chimed again. Dr. Bremmer gave her a questioning look and she went to answer it.

It was Barnabas who stood on the steps. He bowed and said, “I trust you will forgive my intrusion.”

Maggie looked nervously back into the living room where Dr. Bremmer was standing, and with a knowing glance at Barnabas again, she suggested, “I think we’d better take a walk.”

He quickly caught on. “Good idea,” he said. “But it’s misting. I suggest you put on a raincoat.”

“I will,” she said. “I have one on the rack down here.” She left him for a moment to get it with the door still partly open. The light raincoat hung from the hall rack. She hurriedly threw it over her shoulders and went out to join him.

It was much more misty than it had been even a short time ago. The fog was sweeping rapidly in from the 136
ocean. She looked up at him. “We had quite a scene in there a few minutes ago.”

“Indeed?” his heavy eyebrows arched.

“Joe Smith came by and read the riot act to Dr. Brem-
mer.”

“That sounds in character,” Barnabas observed with a
tight smile.

“He blamed the doctor for putting the police on him.
That is what Dr. Bremmer did, but they let him go for
lack of evidence.”

“I know,” Barnabas said with a grim nod.

They had walked out to the rose garden. He stood
there by her, his broad-shouldered frame prominent
against the clouds of fog in the faint light from the win-
dows of Collinwood.

In a knowing voice he asked, “How have you been
making out?”

“Not too well,” she admitted. “A little while ago I
went to the barn looking for David. I was attacked by
the phantom. Or it could have been Joe Smith. He looks
exactly like the sketch I saw of Asaph Clay. In any event,
the thing tried to throttle me. It would have if some weird
kind of winged creature hadn’t come into the hayloft and
frightened him off.”

“Extremely fortunate for you,” Barnabas said suavely.

“It was. I’m still upset from it,” she admitted.

“You’ve been warned about venturing in lonely places
by yourself,” he reminded her. “That was a foolhardy
thing to do.”

“I realize that now.”

“I hope you won’t make the same error again,” Barna-
bas said with a stern expression. “You might not be so
fortunate next time.”

She stared at him. It was almost as if he knew all the
circumstances of the incident. She said, “Barnabas, what
do you think it was that came to harass and frighten off
my attacker?”

He smiled faintly and shrugged. “Some night creature,”
he said. “Why worry about it now? You were rescued.”

“I was thinking of something,” she said, her tone
hushed.

“Yes?”
Her glance was embarrassed. “The children told a story of seeing you change into a giant bat.”

He showed no concern. “How original of them,” he said lightly.

She frowned. “Don’t try to evade my questions, Barnabas,” she said. “Is there something about you I don’t know? Do you have supernatural powers? Could that winged creature have been you?”

He smiled sadly. “How quickly people accept fantastic stories! No wonder legends of ghostly visitations have been handed down through the years. The average person is gullible enough to cling to a belief in all kinds of phantoms. But I expected better of you.”

“Be honest with me, Barnabas,” she pleaded.

“I have your best interests at heart in whatever I do,” he told her with a sudden burst of intensity. “I happen to be in love with you.”

“And I love you, Barnabas,” she said, her eyes gentle, “that is why I need to know the truth about you no matter what it is. I’ll love you just the same.”

His eyes met hers. “I pray you’ll never regret your devotion,” he said quietly and he took her in his arms.

The touch of his cool lips on hers brought a refreshing assurance to Maggie. She felt most of the fear the evening had brought her vanish in the security of his embrace, and she hated herself for ever having listened to the evil rumors about him.

As the charming Britisher released her, she said, “Don’t ever leave me, Barnabas.”

“I’d not find it easy to do.”

“Things are so mixed up here. What is going to happen next? The chief has had to let Joe Smith go. He’s sure to try and blame you for all the crimes. He told me so.”

“It has already begun to happen,” Barnabas said with a sigh. “When he drove Smith back here he came to the old house to talk to me.”

“That was early in the evening,” she said. “Before sunset. Did you see him?”

“No. I never talk to anyone during the day,” Barnabas said. “You know that. Hare tried to threaten him off and Baxter took him into custody. Hare is in jail in Collinsport now.”
“That’s awful! Did Baxter try to get to you in the house after he’d arrested Hare?”

“No. Hare gave him so much trouble he forgot all about me. But it leaves me alone without anyone to guard my privacy.”

“I’ll do it,” she offered.

He smiled faintly. “I appreciate the offer, but you’ve hardly got Hare’s ability to frighten people off. I desper-ately need him back. I was hoping you’d drive me into Collinsport so I might try to reason with Baxter and get Hare out on bail.”

“Of course,” she said. “I can take the station wagon.”

The fog became heavier as they drew closer to Collins- port. The passing cars’ headlights beamed eerily through the haze. Maggie found the drive difficult, yet she did not mind with Barnabas in the front seat beside her. She found his mood difficult to fathom, since he sat very silent most of the time, staring out the side window oc- casionally to remark on some landmark they had passed.

Once he murmured, “It has all changed so.”

She’d glanced at him from the wheel. “You mean the countryside? I didn’t know you’d visited here before.”

“This is not my first time at Collinwood,” he said quietly.

The answer confused her. She tried to recall if Eliza- beth had mentioned him being there at some earlier time but she couldn’t remember clearly. He was a mystery to her in so many ways.

“Do you think there is such a thing as a warlock?” she asked, as she kept her eyes on the road ahead.

“They are not unknown in the records of New Eng- land,” he said.

“Asaph Clay was supposed to be one. And now his phantom is set on avenging everyone at Collinwood,” she mused.

They were entering Collinsport. And through foggy night the small town on the hill was visible chiefly through the lights of its homes and stores. There was a scattering of neon signs down the steep main street that led to the wharves and the Collins Fish Processing Plant. Maggie knew that the jail was near the waterfront. That was
where it had been built in the old days. The clipper ship era had been a busy and rough period in the history of the Maine coastal town.

As she guided the station wagon down the steep main street with cars parked on either side of it, she said, “They have the jail down here because it was where it was most needed in the sailing ship days.”

The man in the black caped-coat nodded. “Those were turbulent times. A man sodden with rum in the Blue Whale could be carted off and shanghaied without knowing what was happening.”

“Shanghaied?” She gave him a questioning glance.

“It was a favorite means of finding a crew in that era,” he said. “No expense to speak of, and most of the poor devils were too drunk to know what had gone on or where they were until they were well out to sea.”

“They actually kidnapped seamen?”

“A regular custom,” Barnabas told her. “The mate would pay the keeper of the Blue Whale Tavern for the rum that had been drunk and a hard devil of a captain would keep the men in line until they were paid off at some other port to have the whole thing happen again.”

“You sound as if you’d been there in those days,” she marveled. “You make it seem so vivid.”

Barnabas laughed softly and bitterly. “I am something of a historian,” he said, and nodding to a two-story building on their left he added, “I think that is the jail.”

“You’re right,” she said surprised. “You must have been here before.”

“Only as a visitor, I assure you,” he said.

They parked the car and went into the dingy, damp office. A sleepy-eyed constable told them to wait a minute and he’d get the chief. He vanished up a flight of stairs. They waited.

There were the sounds of approaching footsteps on the stairs and then Jim Baxter came into view. He was wearing a blue shirt with his official badge on it. He looked trim and athletic and there was an air of sternness about him. She noticed the big bruise on the side of his face, as if he’d been hit hard or had a nasty accident of some sort.
Baxter said, "I was just on the point of driving out to Collinwood. You saved me a trip."
Barnabas seemed in a very subdued mood. "I'm sorry Hare gave you so much trouble."
"You should be," Baxter said dryly, touching a hand to the bruised spot. He gave Maggie a bleak smile. "Doesn't improve my beauty, does it?"
"Did Hare do that?" she gasped.
He nodded. "Along with some other bruises you can't see. Take my word for it, Hare has small respect for the law."
Barnabas touched a hand on the counter between them and the police chief. "Hare is somewhat retarded. He cannot be blamed for all that he does."
Baxter stared at the Englishman, unsmiling. "Then he shouldn't be at large. There are institutions for people who aren't responsible."
Barnabas frowned. "Hare is not that incompetent."
"He tried to break my arm when I asked to be allowed in to see you," Baxter said. "I call that irresponsible."
"You shouldn't have bothered him. I have instructed him to let no one in."
"Then maybe I should blame you."
"If you like," Barnabas replied.
Maggie said, "He's given us no trouble since we know better than to bother him." She didn't mention the day she'd been literally thrown out of the old house.
Baxter was staring across the counter at Barnabas with cold eyes. "You must have known I wanted to question you."
"You could have waited until this evening," Barnabas said calmly.
"I have reached an end of my patience with your eccentricities," Baxter said. "And maybe that's just a nice word for what I mean."
Barnabas paled. He said, "Are you planning to blame me for the things you couldn't make Joe Smith confess to?"
"I'm planning to clear up some of the mysteries we've had here. And I'm sure you know what I mean."
"I've come for Hare," Barnabas told him ignoring the implications of what he'd said.

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“I’m not sure I should release him,” Baxter said stolidly.

“I’ll pay any reasonable bail and answer for his behavior in the future,” Barnabas said calmly. “Surely you can’t ask for more than that?”

Baxter eyed Barnabas sharply. “The question is, can I consider you a responsible person?”

Maggie was shocked at his frank statement. It made her very much afraid that Jim Baxter had more evidence against Barnabas than he was revealing, and that he was just waiting for a desirable moment to close in on the man she loved.

Barnabas didn’t show any emotion at all. With the black cane with the silver wolf’s head draped over his arm, he reached in his pocket and produced a wallet. “I’ll pay whatever you ask,” he said. “And Hare will appear in court when you want him.”

Baxter hesitated, then reached for a receipt book. “It will take a hundred dollars,” he said. “And he would be better off to stay in jail and consider his violence. It might teach him a valuable lesson.”

Barnabas put the bills on the counter. “He acted for me,” he said quietly.

Maggie was touched by the loyalty Barnabas showed for his burly employee. Chief Baxter completed the receipt and took the cash. Then he spoke briefly to the stout police officer who had come back behind the counter. The officer vanished in the rear of the old building to return a few minutes later with Hare beside him.

The beard-stubbled face of the big man took on a broad smile as he saw Barnabas. In a lively show of gratitude he rushed forward and shook his master’s hand, at the same time making guttural sounds of joy.

Barnabas responded in his poised yet warm manner and then gave Maggie a side glance and said, “I’d better take him right out to the car. He’s still very upset.”

She nodded and the handsome Englishman led Hare out, speaking to him in a soothing manner, explaining that it was all a misunderstanding. As they vanished into the foggy night, Chief Baxter came around the counter to stand facing her solemnly.

“What does Barnabas Collins mean to you?” he asked.
She was astonished by the abrupt question. "I'm very fond of him."

"How fond?"

Maggie shrugged. "I admire him more than any man I've ever known."

"Bad!" Jim Baxter said with concern.

Her eyebrows raised. She knew there was something behind all this—something he was attempting to imply rather than tell her outright. She said, "Why do you say that?"

"From all you've told me I'd suspect you're in love with him. That could mean heartbreak for you."

Her expression mirrored her unhappiness. "He can't have done anything so bad!"

"Maggie, if you take my advice, you'll never see him after tonight."

"I'd have to have a reason," she said.

"I can only warn you, Maggie." His lean face was a study in mixed emotions of which anxiety and solicitude were probably the prominent ones.

"Thanks," she said in a small voice, knowing that whatever he said would make no difference in her love for Barnabas. She slowly walked out of the dingy jail to join Barnabas and Hare in the car and drive them back to Collinwood.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The somber warning of Chief Baxter haunted Maggie's dreams that night, and though the following morning was warm and sunny, the mood of depression still clung to her. The children also seemed to have receded into their silent, tense states once again and she feared what new outrage they might commit. After breakfast she left them playing croquet on the lawn and walked toward the cliff to try to sort out her troubled thoughts.
The fleecy white cumulus drifted calmly in the windless blue of the sky. Far out on the silver water, pleasure boats moved with what seemed a lazy ease. The multi-colored sails of several yachts clustered on the ocean like graceful swans, indicating that the summer visitors were enjoying Collingsport Bay. For Maggie, however, it was a morning of depression. The words of the police chief the night before had been carefully weighted. Jim Baxter knew something. Something frightening!

At last she found herself standing on Widows’ Hill. From there she had a clear view of the surrounding shore, including the beach where Joe Smith had his tent pitched. As her eyes touched the area where the hippie had chosen to stay, her heart gave a tremendous leap. There were a group of at least a dozen men gathered around the tent. And although the distance was too great to make it possible for her to know what was going on, she was sure there was trouble involved. The men moved about and gesticulated and every now and then one vanished up the path leading to the distant cliff.

Maggie’s pretty face mirrored her consternation. She shaded her eyes with a hand to try and better see what was going on, but it remained a mystery to her. She was sure that whatever had happened would soon be known at Collinwood, so she turned and hurried back to the big house, filled with dark premonitions.

She knew another moment of panic as she came close to Collinwood. For plainly parked in front of the old house was Chief Baxter’s dark sedan. Without being told she knew that something dreadful had happened down there on the beach. Her only hope was that whatever it was would clear Barnabas of the dark shadow hanging over him.

When she entered the cool and shadows of the man-sion she saw a solemn assemblage gathered in the living room. Nearest her was Jim Baxter, who faced the others and had apparently been addressing them. Hearing her enter, he turned with a grim expression on his lean face.

“T’m glad you’ve come, Maggie,” he said. “You’d bet-ter join us. This has concern for you as well.”

She walked slowly into the hushed silence of the living room. The shocked faces of the others registered vaguely
with her, but she looked to Baxter for an explanation.  
“Tisaw a crowd on the beach. Down by Joe Smith's  
tent,” she said. “What does it mean?”  
His serious eyes met hers directly. “Anna was mur-  
dered in the night.”  
“Oh, no!” she gasped and froze where she stood.  
“I was afraid something like this would happen,” he  
said grimly. “Now the State Police are involved.”  
“Do they know who did it?” she asked.  
“They’ve taken Smith into custody, although he denies  
the crime,” Baxter said with a sigh. “Personally I’m not  
convinced he’s guilty, though he could be.”  
Elizabeth spoke up, “He certainly seems the most likely  
suspect.”  
“Men seldom strangle girls they are having a romance  
with unless there is some good motive,” Baxter said. “To  
be brutally frank, and because I’m speaking practically  
within the family, there is a possible motive. He followed  
Nina here and he made no secret of his infatuation with  
her. If Anna threatened his chances with Nina he might  
decide to remove her.”  
Nina’s lovely face was a mask of grief. “Please, Jim!  
That’s the wildest of suppositions.”  
“Indeed it is, sir,” Dr. Bremmer snapped, his wrinkled  
face a pasty white.  
“I doubt that Smith would murder the girl so openly  
if that was his intention,” Noel Hart suggested.  
Chief Baxter gave him an approving nod. “You’re  
making excellent sense, Mr. Hart. And you are voicing  
my own thoughts. I think there are other influences at  
work here.”  
“That has been my contention from the beginning,”  
Dr. Bremmer said stepping forward. “I know the spirit  
of Asaph Clay is dominating this mansion. He has caused  
the children to be infected with demonic traits and  
brought murder to us. Twice there have been attempts  
on my life!”  
“We could suppose that Smith made them,” Baxter  
said. “Because of Nina he would naturally want to elimi-
inate you.”  
“I gave him no encouragement!” Nina protested.  
“It is not Joe Smith we should blame,” her husband  
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said, “though I thoroughly dislike him. It is the spirit of Asaph Clay working perhaps, through one of us.”

Elizabeth gave him an angry glance. “Must your spiritualistic nonsense intrude on everything? This is murder we are dealing with, not one of your fantastic theories.”

“My theories are not all that fantastic,” the doctor said indignantly.

Chief Baxter had been listening to all this with a wise expression on his lean face. “Anna was strangled, supposedly while Joe Smith slept. It could have happened that way.” He paused and gave Maggie a significant glance. “On her throat there were marks, marks we’ve become all too familiar with lately. Marks as if she’d been bitten.”

Maggie scarcely breathed. Of course! He was going to implicate Barnabas. The hostility between Chief Baxter and the man she loved had been bound to lead to something like this.

Elizabeth said, “You’re referring to the girls who have been reported dazed and wandering after attacks made on them.”

He nodded. “All their throats bore the same sort of marks.”

“Then this Joe Smith must be a madman,” Elizabeth said. “He has been to blame for all these incidents.”

“In some cases he had a tight alibi for his whereabouts at the times of the attacks,” Chief Baxter said. “He couldn’t have been responsible for all of them.”

Maggie felt she should defend Barnabas if he was involved. “None of those girls were killed,” she said. “Anna was murdered.”

Jim Baxter’s eyes were sad. “I warned you that murder would come.”

Dr. Bremmer was fairly trembling with excitement. “I know what you are inferring, sir,” he said. “You are bearing out my point. Coming back to my stand that we are dealing with the supernatural here.”

There was no quick protest from any of the others in the room this time. Instead, only an awed silence. Chief Baxter didn’t reply for a moment. Then he said, “Perhaps.”

“Exactly,” the stooped doctor said raising a skinny
hand to emphasize his words. "We have the phantom warlock, Asaph Clay, joined by another supernatural creature. The attacks on those girls were made by a vampire, and it is my contention that Barnabas Collins is one of the living dead!"

His reedy voice rose to an excited pitch and consternation showed on the faces of the others in the room, with the exception of Noel Hart, who looked smug, and Jim Baxter, who was grim.

Baxter said, "I share a lot of your suspicions, but I'm hesitant to approach the State Police with talk of a vampire loose in the area. Yet Barnabas will have to submit to questioning."

"You're being ridiculous, Jim," Elizabeth protested. "I know Barnabas to be a gentle, scholarly man incapable of such a violent deed."

"I appreciate your feelings about your cousin," Baxter said patiently. "But his entire manner of living has been odd since his arrival here. I'm going to the old house now and ask him to come down to the jail."

Maggie burst out with, "You can't do that!"

"Why not?" the chief asked calmly.

"You know what happened before! Hare has careful instructions. If you try to enter the house again there'll be a repeat of yesterday's melee."

He frowned. "You're asking me to halt the forces of justice to cater to a halfwit."

"Hare is no halfwit," she protested. "And in any case, you know that Barnabas is safely in the house occupied with his work. He'll make no attempt to leave. You can approach him this evening as well as you can now. And without creating a disturbance."

Elizabeth said, "She's right. If you cause trouble now it will do no good."

Baxter looked less assured. "I shouldn't wait."

Defense of Barnabas came from an unexpected quarter as Dr. Bremmer entered the conversation again. "I'm inclined to agree with this young lady and Mrs. Stoddard," he said. "You will accomplish nothing by a frontal assault on the old house now. Wait until tonight and I'll help you convict Barnabas, if he is guilty."

"How do you propose to do that?" Jim Baxter asked.
“Through a seance,” the doctor said. “I will invoke the spirits.”

“Not in this house,” Elizabeth warned him.

“I do not propose to hold the seance here,” the doctor said with dignity. “I would suggest having it in the swamp—the swamp where the treasure of Phineas Collins still lies buried and where the avenging warlock Asaph Clay still hovers.”

“That’s a very strange request, Doctor,” Baxter said.

“Using the skull of Asaph Clay as a concentration point of the seance I will make the spirits talk,” Dr. Bremmer said, his sunken eyes bright with a wild glitter. “And I shall prove what I have always believed, that Barnabas Collins is a vampire and responsible for much of the mischief that has gone on.”

Nina appealed to Baxter, “It’s up to you, Jim. You have always been a good friend. I don’t approve of many of my husband’s ideas, but I am anxious to see that Barnabas does have fair treatment.”

Maggie watched Jim Baxter’s face for a clue as to what he might decide. Her own fears for Barnabas were mounting. And her feeling that he indeed might be tainted with the curse of the vampire was growing in her mind. But she did not care. She loved him. All else paled beside that. All else was of scant importance.

Baxter sighed. “I guess I’m a fool. But I have always had great admiration for this family. I’m not anxious to bring shame on a fine old name. I’ll go along with your scheme, Dr. Bremmer, even though there is a lot of the crackpot in it as far as I’m concerned. I’ll not interfere with Barnabas until you’ve had your seance.”

“You will attend it?” Dr. Bremmer asked.

“Count on that,” Baxter said curtly. “I expect to take Barnabas into custody right after it is over. I think he is our murderer.”

This solemn announcement ended the conference among them. They scattered and the police chief drove off. But each of them would know a tense few hours until the evening when the seance would be held. Maggie tried to occupy herself with the youngsters but found it hard. Both David and Amy had heard the news and were strangely excited about it.
"That Anna was killed and her blood drained by a vampire," David told Maggie. "Matt Morgan says so."
"Matt is a superstitious and ignorant man and you mustn’t pay any attention to what he says," she told him.
Amy said, "But Barnabas is a vampire, isn’t he? We did see him change into a bat."
"That is wicked talk," Maggie protested. "You mustn’t indulge in such fantasies."
Yet, for all her brave talk, she was in a thoroughly confused state of mind. She was convinced there was more to the story of Barnabas than she knew. The coffin she’d seen in that candlelit room in the cellar could be the clue. But she had not lost faith. She did not believe Barnabas to be a murderer and she did not think him a true vampire.

Tension increased after dinner. Dr. Bremmer was making elaborate preparations for the seance. He had gotten Matt to prepare torches for the occasion, insisting they were required for the mood. And he’d already brought down the grinning skull of Asaph Clay in its leather carrying case. Elizabeth accepted the ritual with pale annoyance, but she confided to Maggie that she would attend the seance.

"Not that I enjoy the idea of the long trip to the swamp and being in that eerie place after dark," she said. "But I know Dr. Bremmer’s theories will be made nonsense of and for that goal it’s worth seeing the business through."

"I don’t know how Barnabas will feel about it," Maggie worried.
"I wouldn’t blame him for being angry," Elizabeth said. "But the police will make him cooperate."

Maggie’s brow wrinkled. "Are you sure Chief Baxter will be fair to Barnabas? That he is capable of handling things?"

Elizabeth gave her a wise look. "I’ve thought of that too. As it happens, I have a good friend in charge of the State Police headquarters in Bangor and I’m going to talk to him before tonight. I want to make sure we’re amply protected in that swamp and that there are State Police there as well."
“But that could annoy Jim Baxter. He might feel we didn’t trust him.”

“He won’t know,” Elizabeth said. “I’ll have the State Police stationed there quietly without informing him.”

“That would be best,” Maggie agreed, feeling some relief.

But the feeling was only temporary. And her concern increased when she came upon Noel assembling the material for the seance in the entrance hall.

“Aren’t you worried about tonight?” he asked.

“Not especially,” she bluffed.

His long face took on a sneering smile. “You should be. You are in love with Barnabas Collins, and tonight will wind up with the truth about him being revealed.”

She said, “That need not be so terrible. Barnabas is a fine person.”

“And something more,” he warned her. “But I see you must find out for yourself.”

Maggie moved on without talking further to him, but she was badly upset. At dinner she only picked at her food, and as dusk approached she could hardly contain herself. She prayed that Barnabas would arrive early before they set out for the swamp. She wanted a private talk with him.

But as the blue of the dusk thickened and Barnabas had not yet arrived, she began to despair. Then Jim Baxter drove up, and as his car halted before the front door she saw that Barnabas was in the car with him.

They entered the reception hall together and Chief Baxter frowned slightly as Maggie rushed forward to stand by the side of the man she loved. Barnabas seemed unperturbed, and he gave her a reassuring smile.

Baxter addressed the others. “I don’t want to lose any more time. I suggest we go to the edge of the swamp now. You can pick a place for your seance, Doctor, and we’ll get it over with as quickly as possible. And for the safety of all of us I suggest we keep close together.”

Dr. Bremmer nodded. “Thank you, Chief Baxter. I notice that the fog is coming in. I think it would be wise to light our torches to help show the way and serve as a signal to keep us together.”

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Jim Baxter frowned. "A rather dramatic touch if I may say so. Do you think it necessary, Doctor?"

"I do," the veteran doctor said. "The atmosphere must be exactly right. Torches will help induce the mood."

The chief frowned. "Very well. Torches, if you like. Let's get on our way." He turned to Barnabas. "You will walk with me."

"If you don't mind, Chief, I'd prefer to accompany Maggie," Barnabas said in his poised way, a keen look in serious black eyes. "You need have no fear of my trying to leave the party. I'm most interested in the experiment."

Baxter looked reluctant. "Very well," he said at last, "but keep close to the others."

Maggie and Barnabas were in the vanguard of the strangely assorted little party that wended its way down the fog-shrouded field, by the cemetery with its host of dead Collinges and through the forest to the forbidden mysteries of the swamp.

Barnabas held a flaming torch, as did Noel Hart, Nina Bremmer and Chief Baxter. Maggie's arm was linked with that of Barnabas as they slowly made their way through the darkness of the forest. The reflection from the flaming torch gave his handsome face a lively, ruddy glow. It sickened her to think that this was all a trap set for him.

He gave her a glance of comfort. "It will be all right," he said.

"I hope so," she replied in a small voice.

"You know I didn't murder Anna."

"Of course. But those marks on her throat."

"I have seen the body," he said grimly. "Those marks were clumsily produced by someone after she'd been strangled. They bear no resemblance to the marks on the throats of those other girls attacked in the village."

"Jim Baxter thinks they are the same."

"Then he is wrong," Barnabas said. "I know. I have no idea what will come out of this seance but I'll need your support."

"Anything," she said.

"I have a flashlight here," he said, producing it from the pocket of the black caped-coat. "There may come a
time when I'll want you to use it. Keep apart from the hypnotic effect of the seance. Remain alert, and if I ask you to shine the torch obey me instantly."

"I'll remember," she said, taking it and hiding it in her own raincoat pocket.

With the others at the edge of the swamp, Maggie thought it more menacing by night than during the daylight hours. The fetid smell was strong in the air and the earth beneath her held that terrifying softness. Chief Baxter called them to a halt.

"This is far enough," he said. "Proceed, Dr. Bremmer."

The old man was holding one of the flaming torches, and spotlighted in the fog-shrouded night, his wizened features held a demonic quality. "We will form the usual circle," he ordered them. "And then I shall use the skull to attempt to invoke the ghost of Asaph Clay once again."

They mutely followed his instructions. Maggie found herself between Barnabas and Chief Baxter. Opposite her were Elizabeth, Nina and Noel Hart. She thought everyone looked weary and strained from the ordeal of the walk and this strange communion in the misty swamp.

Dr. Bremmer opened the leather case and produced the ugly skull of the long-dead piratical captain. Holding it before him, he gazed at them and said, "Now you must put out your torches. The spirits will not join us if there is any light."

"Surely the torches won't matter," Elizabeth protested. "You suggested them yourself."

"I'm sorry. We must have complete darkness," the expert in psychic research said.

Maggie glanced fearfully towards the jungle-like growth beyond the circle of flaming torches. Would they be safe in the darkness in this dread place? She thought of the State Police Elizabeth had promised would be there and wondered if they might be stationed somewhere in the shadows watching. The thought that this was possible heartened her.

Chief Baxter's lean face was grim. "I had not understood about the torches. But if we douse them I order no one to move without instructions from me. No matter what!" He glanced at them all sternly. "Do you understand?"
“I’m sure they do, Chief,” Dr. Bremmer said. “I am now ready.”

One by one the torches were extinguished. Barnabas was the last to put out his and Maggie’s final glimpse of him showed a cynical expression on the handsome face. Then they were in complete darkness. Together with the fog the blackness of the night made it impossible to see even those nearest her.

Next Dr. Bremmer began his weird incantations in a high-pitched, quavering voice. From above there was a flutter of wings and the screech of some night bird as it made angry protest of their intrusion in its domain.

Maggie was trembling and she could sense the fear that gripped the others in the circle. Dr. Bremmer’s weird mumbling went on and she felt her fingers touch the cold metal of the flashlight in her pocket. The warning Barnabas had given came back to her vividly. She was not to let herself become embroiled in the hypnotic spell of the seance.

She tried to ignore the eerie ritual and keep alert. Suddenly the mumbling ended and a burst of harsh laughter came from the center of the circle. It was a familiar laugh! The laugh of Asaph Clay she’d heard in a previous seance.

He began in that raucous voice. “So you are all here! Here to worship at the shrine of my skull! The skull of the man Phineas Collins murdered. And you beg me to spare the Collins name and tell the truth about murder! I know the truth about one murder! My murder! Phineas thought to keep his name and his treasure and he lost both! And once again I shall deal justice out to one of the name of Collins!”

The triumphant claim ended on a different note. A terrified, loud shriek that was more like the tone of Dr. Bremmer than the ghost he’d supposedly invoked.


She lifted the flashlight and turned its powerful glow on the old doctor. And she gave a horrified gasp! For the ghost of Asaph Clay had appeared to take the psychic research expert’s throat in his hands and strangle him. The thin face with the drooping mustache bore that fa-
miliar smile of malice and the phantom’s long hair streaked down to his shoulders. The beam of the flashlight caused the smile to vanish and a look of fear replace it. The phantom released Bremmer and dashed from the circle into the jungle darkness.

A distance off, a male voice called out, “Stop!” And then a shot was fired.

General pandemonium broke out. Amid the startled cries and threshing about, both Barnabas and Noel managed to light their torches, so when a State Policeman appeared carrying a body, they were able to see him clearly. Two other State Police followed.

The State Police officer’s expression was grim. “I’m afraid he’s dead,” he said, putting the body down.

Maggie stared at it and saw the fear-contorted features of the phantom warlock staring up at her with sightless eyes. The same drooping mustache and black hair that had been the ghost’s trademark remained to haunt her.

Barnabas spoke quietly, “Just one moment,” he said. He knelt by the outstretched corpse to deftly remove the mustache and long black wig, revealing the lean face of Chief Jim Baxter!

“Jim, darling!” The sobbing cry came from Nina Bremmer, who rushed forward to kneel down by the dead man and hysterically begin showering his face with kisses.

Maggie felt she might faint. Somehow she managed with the help of Barnabas to return to Collinwood. They were all shocked, with the possible exception of Barnabas. Now it was all revealed.

Nina had always been in love with the good-looking Collinsport police chief. She had talked her husband into returning to Collinwood for psychic research for the explicit purpose of having him murdered. At first it had been planned to make the murder seem an accident. Then she and Jim Baxter had decided it would be easy to blame an apparently eccentric Barnabas Collins for the crime. Joe Smith’s appearance had only helped them perfect their plot, but like all murderers, Jim Baxter had made some errors. He’d underestimated the intelligence of Barnabas and he’d not known about Elizabeth having the State Police on hand. As Nina hysterically confessed
her part in it all, a shaken Dr. Bremmer made his way home with the help of his secretary.

The others had all gone inside but Maggie and Barnabas remained out on the lawn in the dense fog. He showed little sense of triumph in his escape from being accused of the murder.

"The time has come for me to leave Collinwood," he told her.

Alarm flashed in her lovely eyes. "But why? We need you here. You have been wonderful."

"There are some mysteries not explained. The State Police will be curious," he said in a guarded way.

"But I love you, Barnabas," she protested, pressing close to him.

He held her in his arms and a hand caressed her hair. "And I love you, Maggie. But this must all end. The joy we know in meeting, along with the happiness of loving, are one, in a sense, with pain and parting. None of them would be possible without the other. Please try to remember that."

"No, Barnabas!" she pleaded.

But he cut her pleas short with a kiss. The kiss lasted a long while. His embrace was warm, but when he let her go it was with almost a curtness. She went into the house feeling hurt and baffled.

The next morning only the children seemed their normal happy selves. It was as if a shadow had lifted from them. Somehow Maggie knew that whatever demon had possessed them was now at rest. Though Jim Baxter had impersonated Asaph Clay for his own purposes, Maggie herself had come to believe that perhaps his ghost as well had been present at Collinwood. But now the ghost was gone, and Maggie knew that whatever else she felt, she was grateful to the old doctor for that much. She was almost convinced that he had dispelled the ghost of Asaph Clay, once and for all.

Yet Dr. Bremmer was disconsolate. He left early in the day with Noel Hart. And later, Nina took a taxi to nearby Ellsworth on her own. The State Police had made no charge against her but had requested that she not leave the area.

The discovery of Jim Baxter as the master criminal

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meant that Joe Smith had been released at once. But Maggie felt it unlikely the young man would any longer be interested in the treacherous Nina.

Elizabeth showed utter relief in their all leaving. “Roger will be returning tomorrow,” she said to Maggie. “And I’m sure I don’t know what he would have said if they were still here.”

Collinwood was returning to normal. Maggie could only hope that Barnabas would be there to share the pleasant change of atmosphere with her. She counted the hours until dusk, and when it came she was waiting on the steps of the old house.

But Barnabas did not appear. Nor was there any sign of Hare. When she tried the handle of the front door it opened easily, and she entered the ancient house to find it empty. Barnabas had left, as he said he would.

She ran out to the steps again and stood there with tears in her eyes. She had lost him! And then in the midst of her grief a strange thing happened. She suddenly felt as if he were close by. His handsome face smiling at her through the gathering shadows. And in that moment she knew that she would really never lose him. There would always be something of him close by her. What had he said?

“There can also be love in pain and parting.” The words were so vivid in her mind he might have spoken them. And she began to slowly walk back to Collinwood convinced that he had spoken them.
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BARNABAS COLLINS VERSUS THE WAR-LOCK is the eleventh in a series of thrilling novels based on ABC-TV’s popular suspense drama, DARK SHADOWS.