

J Bloglandia

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Dark Shadows essays by
Kathryn L. Ramage

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Essays
on
Dark Shadows
by
Kathryn L. Ramage

Dark Shadows

The Beginning

As a little girl in the early '70s, I would come home from school every day and turn on the TV to watch reruns of what we called "Barnabas Collins," the show about the vampire.

I don't recall very much about the show itself, however, except that one featured character named Maggie was played by an actress named Kathryn Leigh Scott—a name I am unlikely ever to forget or misspell. Nor can I say that I gave the show much thought in the last 40 years, until the first 200 episodes of *Dark Shadows* from 1966 and '67, before the appearance of Barnabas Collins, became available on DVD in the wake of that very silly film remake. I thought I'd rent the first two sets of disks from Netflix and give it a look.

The first episode begins promisingly with a nighttime view of a Gothic house on a hill and a woman speaking in voiceover, at once evoking both *The Haunting* and *Rebecca*. When the young woman speaking is introduced, her story also seems vaguely *Jane Eyre*-ish.

Her name is Victoria Winters (as she will announce at the beginning of every subsequent episode). She was abandoned as an infant and has grown up in a New York orphanage. The only clues she has to her background are a note that was left with her as a baby, bearing her first name, and anonymous enve-

lopes containing money for her care which have been sent regularly from Bangor, Maine, over the past eighteen years.

Vicky has just received a job offer from a woman named Elizabeth Collins Stoddard of Collinsport to be a governess to her nine-year-old nephew.

Vicky has never heard of the Collinses or Collinsport. She has no idea how Mrs. Collins Stoddard has come to know about her, but Collinsport is only 50 miles from Bangor. Vicky has accepted the job in hopes of solving the mystery of her past. We meet her on a train headed for the little coastal town.

On the train with Vicky is another passenger, the massively square-jawed Burke Devlin. The two do not meet each other until they've arrived at the Collinsport station and Burke offers Vicky a lift to the hotel in town. He tries to present an air of mystery about himself and his relationship to Collinsport, but soon abandons that pose after the first people he meets at the Collinsport Inn recognize him and remark on how long it's been since they've seen him.

Also at the inn coffee shop, Vicky meets the waitress Maggie Evans, who warns her against going to Collinwood, the neo-Gothic house on the hill we saw at the beginning of the show and home of the Collins family. But Vicky is determined. Her taxi arrives and she's off to her new home.

Vicky's first evening at Collinwood takes up several episodes, during which we get acquainted with the Collinses:

- Elizabeth Collins Stoddard, head of the family and owner of Collinwood as well as the local fishing cannery. Mrs. Collins Stoddard's husband disappeared 18 years ago and she hasn't set foot off the grounds of Collinwood since.
- Elizabeth's daughter, 18-year-old Carolyn. Carolyn is a vivacious and self-centered girl,

engaged to a boy named Joe who works at the cannery—although she doesn't seem very keen on marrying him once she gets a look at Burke's manly jaw. She and Vicky quickly become friends.

- Elizabeth's snitty younger brother Roger. Carolyn calls him charming and "a dreamboat," but I don't see it. Roger's wife Laura is apparently mentally ill and living in a sanitarium somewhere.
- Roger's creepy son David, whom Vicky has been hired to teach. David's first words to Vicky are "I hate you!" David also claims to see dead people—specifically, the ghosts of the Widows who haunt the house. The cliff near the house is named Widows Hill, and it's a famous place for suicides.

We saw a little of Elizabeth and Roger back at the very beginning, while Vicky was still on the train. Elizabeth was looking forward to the new governess's arrival, while Roger was against her coming.

While Elizabeth is very kind and welcoming to Vicky from her arrival, Roger remains hostile and suspicious toward the newcomer. Both, curiously, give vague and contradictory answers to Vicky's question as to how they knew about her.

During these first episodes, we also pick up a little family history. The Collinses have been prominent in the area since the late 1600s. They founded the town and built Collinwood in the 1830s. There are some family portraits in the drawing room and we get a few names; Barnabas is not among them. Since the 1800s, the family has fallen into decay, like most of the house. They live in only a few rooms and keep no servants except for a cranky caretaker named Matthew who is fiercely loyal to Elizabeth.

After this promising beginning, a great deal of

the next 20 or so episodes is taken up with Burke's subplot, which I find rather tedious. However, since it plays a major part in the initial storyline and other plots are built up out of it, I might as well go into it now.

Ten years ago, Burke Devlin was convicted of manslaughter for a drunken hit-and-run accident; he spent five years in prison and then wandered the world and made a fortune for himself. Although his memories of the accident are vague, he maintains that he wasn't driving the car and that Roger was responsible not only for the accident, but perjured himself to ensure that Burke was convicted for a crime he committed himself. Laura, who later married Roger, was Burke's girlfriend at the time. Burke has returned to his old hometown in quest of revenge against Roger specifically and the Collins family in general.

Roger gets into one of his snits when he hears that Burke is back in town; he behaves like a man threatened. So does Maggie's father Sam, a drunken artist who seems to know more about the accident than is good for him.

After Burke pays a call at Collinwood at Carolyn's behest, Roger has another car accident—his brakes have been tampered with. The family immediately suspects Burke, but it soon becomes obvious to the viewer that little David has not only tried to kill his father, but is trying to frame Vicky for it. This storyline plays out like a grisly and over-long After School Special. Will David tell the truth before an innocent person (Burke, not Vicky) is accused?

If this storyline were all there was to watch, I would've given up early on. But interspersed with the story are some intriguing fragments of the sort of thing I chose to watch *Dark Shadows* for.

One wing of the house is shut up, but sometimes the locked door swings creakily open. So do other doors around the house. A dark figure is

glimpsed one night in the front hall. Unexplained thumps and bangs are sometimes heard, and a cup left on the front hall table is mysteriously smashed.

Most of this might be attributed to David up to mischief, but what about the sound of a woman sobbing that awakens Vicky at night and sends her exploring the darkened house? And what's behind that locked door in the cellar that both Mrs. Collins Stoddard and Matthew are adamant that Vicky keep away from?

At this early point, I could see why they eventually brought a vampire into the story to liven things up. Some of the characters were definitely begging for a good bite to the jugular vein. It wasn't until about episode No. 40 that things began to get interesting.

Amid innumerable conversations about what Burke Devlin could be up to, Bill Malloy, the manager of the Collins cannery, drops by the studio/cottage of drunken artist Sam Evans and learns something that absolutely astonishes him. The viewer doesn't get to hear what secret Sam has revealed, but it upsets Malloy so much that he goes out to get just as drunk as Sam and wanders around CollinSport making vague, distracted remarks about what he now knows.

During his ramblings, he meets Burke and offers him a proposition: Mr. Malloy doesn't care what happens to Roger—Roger can get whatever's coming to him—but he feels protective of Mrs. Collins Stoddard and her daughter Carolyn. If he can help to clear Burke of the manslaughter charge that sent him to prison, will Burke go away and leave the rest of the family alone? Burke agrees.

Malloy then calls on Mrs. Collins Stoddard at Collinwood to warn her about this horrible information he's about to make public, but he doesn't tell her exactly what it is. He also invites Burke, Roger, and Sam to

meet with him at his office at the cannery that evening.

The three men are all at the office waiting at the appointed time... but Malloy never arrives. He was last seen leaving his home about half an hour earlier, but disappeared somewhere on the walk to the cannery.

One night soon afterwards, while Carolyn and Vicky are walking around the grounds of Collinwood near the cliffs, they see what looks like a man's body washed up on the rocks below. They rush back to the house, where Roger snidely dismisses the idea that they saw any such thing. Elizabeth Collins Stoddard sends Matthew out to investigate.

The handyman first reports that it was only a bunch of seaweed that appeared to be a human body through a trick of the moonlight, but later he admits to his employer that it was, in fact, the missing Mr. Malloy. He had lied and pushed the body back into the water to keep police and reporters from bothering her with prying questions.

Elizabeth, not afraid of being bothered in this way, immediately calls the police herself. A search begins and Malloy's body is eventually retrieved farther down the coast. The police discover some suspicious injuries on his head that may not have been caused by the rocks.

We have a murder mystery!

Roger Collins is obviously the one who benefits most from Malloy's death. Too obviously, I'm sorry to say. Sam Evans is another good suspect, since he's implicated in the terrible secret that he and Roger have been keeping. The police also question Burke in spite of his insistence that he had the best reason to want Malloy to remain alive. Burke initiates his own private inquiries, and via the unwitting Carolyn, installs Malloy's former housekeeper at Collinwood so that she can spy on Roger and gather evidence against him. Both Burke and the housekeeper, Mrs.

Johnson, are certain that Roger is the murderer.

One curious sidelight of the investigation is the interest young David Collins takes in it. He studies local tidal currents to figure out where Malloy first went into the ocean and where he was therefore probably killed. He also spends time gazing into a crystal ball that Burke sent him for his birthday.

Before Malloy's body was even discovered, David had emerged from one session of crystal-gazing with the announcement that Roger had murdered the missing man!

Burke and David have been on friendly terms since that whole who-tampered-with-Roger's-brakes incident. Throughout the series so far, there have been hints that the boy is actually Burke's son and not Roger's; the way both men treat David suggests that they believe it might be true.

Unrelated to all of this, the first indisputably supernatural event of the series occurs around the 50th episode.

Vicky and Carolyn hear a banging noise one night and, like all young ladies who live in big, spooky, dark houses, go downstairs in their night-gowns to investigate.

They find a large book concerning the Collins family history lying on the drawing-room floor with no indication of how it came to be there. They return it to the table where it usually sits and go back to bed.

After the two girls have left, the book opens by itself and the pages turn to an illustration of one Josette Collins, a lady of the family who threw herself off Widows' Hill more than a century ago.

The Mystery of the Missing Pen

The body of Collinse's cannery manager Bill Malloy washed up on the rocks below the cliffs of Collinwood,

but the police believe that he was actually killed at a place a little farther up the coast called Lookout Point. His broken watch suggests that this happened at 10:45 pm, halfway between the last time he was seen alive at 10:30 by his housekeeper Mrs. Johnson, and the 11:00 meeting at the cannery, where Roger Collins, Burke Devlin, and Sam Evans were expecting him. He never showed up.

Since Malloy intended to produce evidence that proved that Burke wasn't driving the car during that drunken hit-and-run accident that sent him to prison for manslaughter—and that Roger was driving—Roger is very naturally the prime suspect. And Roger makes the most of it by trying to look as suspicious as possible.

A key point in the mystery involves a lost fountain pen, a distinctive-looking object adorned with silver filigree. Burke gave it to Carolyn Stoddard on one of their dates and Roger, not liking that his mortal enemy is giving his niece expensive presents, takes it away from her. He intends to give it back to Burke at that 11:00 meeting, but when he pats his coat pockets, discovers that he no longer has it.

Victoria Winters finds it while walking on the beach at Lookout Point, just under the cliff that Bill Malloy is supposed to have fallen from.

She's on an actual beach for this scene, not a fake-looking outdoor set. In the early days of *Dark Shadows*, they used quite a lot of exterior shots; one would see Vicky, Roger, or Carolyn walking around the terraces of Collinwood, wandering the streets of Collinsport, driving up to the inn and even going into it.

Vicky doesn't understand the significance of the pen at this time, only thinks that it's pretty and probably valuable. She takes it back to Collinwood, where she and Roger's son David both talk a lot about it. In the old days before Bic, individual pens

were apparently important objects. At least, everyone at Collinwood carries on about this one as if were akin to a diamond ring.

Roger's been searching frantically all over the house for the pen, and when he sees that Vicky has it, he snatches it away when Vicky and David aren't looking. He takes it out to Widows Hill and buries it under a big rock.

Vicky thinks that David took it. This isn't long after that tedious business where David tampered with the brakes on his father's car and tried to frame Vicky for it, and the boy is still resentful that Vicky discovered what he was up to. It's very easy for Roger to play on David's feelings and encourage his son to get back at her.

It's not the first time David's threatened her after that incident, so Vicky is really stupid when she lets David lure her into the closed-off part of the house on the pretext that he hid the pen there. Once he's led her up into a little attic room where no one can hear her, he locks her in and leaves her there.

The Collinses all wonder where she is, but they assume she's gone out without telling anybody even if it is a dark and stormy night.

Vicky spends a few miserable hours shut up in the room. Her one attempt to get the key, which David left in the other side of the door, fails. Eventually, she lies down to sleep on a cot.

The second appearance of a ghost on *Dark Shadows* occurs then—not Josette this time, but the transparent figure of the recently drowned Bill Malloy, dripping wet and covered in seaweed. He warns Vicky to leave Collinwood before she's killed too. Then he disappears without doing anything helpful like opening the door for her. But he does leave some of his seaweed behind on the floor so she's certain that this apparition wasn't simply a dream.

It's Roger who eventually lets her out. Once he

figures out what his creepy son did with Vicky, and the rest of the household is asleep, he gets a flashlight and opens the secret panel in the drawing room (the first time we'll see it used) to venture into the empty part of the house. Once he locates the room where Vicky's locked in, he pretends to be a ghost himself—he raps on the door, then puts a handkerchief over his mouth and also tells her to leave Collinwood. While Vicky is screaming, he picks up the key from the floor, opens the door, and appears to rescue the terrified girl, who flies into his arms. Our hero.

This haunting of his own is why Roger doesn't believe her story about seeing Bill Malloy's ghost when she tells him about it later. But Elizabeth does.

Vicky should take the ghostly advice and leave Collinwood the next morning, but as usual she lets the Collinses (apart from Roger) talk her out of it.

David is now eager to have Vicky stay—not that he likes her any better, but since she saw Malloy's ghost, he hopes that it will appear again and confirm that Roger killed him. David has seen this for himself in the crystal ball Burke Devlin gave him, but he thinks that personal ghostly testimony will be stronger evidence of guilt.

Over in a romantic subplot, Joe Haskell has finally gotten sick and tired of Carolyn's yanking him around, forgetting their dinner dates, and chasing after Burke. He goes out with Maggie Evans instead, beginning that romance. When Carolyn hears about it, she goes into jealous fits and heads over to Burke's hotel room to try and lose her virginity in revenge, but Burke isn't interested. While he's resumed his plans to destroy the Collinses now that Bill Malloy is dead, the girl he's actually sweet on is Vicky.

Vicky doesn't quit her job and leave Collinwood, but she does take a couple of days off to get away from the place for a while. She goes to Bangor; Burke gives her a lift, and Carolyn has an-

other jealous hissy fit.

But Vicky's mind isn't on Burke. She's looking for information about her background and parentage, and wants to follow up on the only clue she's found so far.

About 25 years ago, Sam Evans painted a portrait of a woman named Betty Hanscomb who looks a lot like Vicky. Vicky has since found a mention of B. Hanscomb in an old list of staff names at Collinwood, on letterhead from the Collins family lawyers in Bangor.

This is where Vicky meets Frank Garner—the young man I refer to as her “sort of” boyfriend in subsequent episodes. He's the son and junior partner at Garner and Garner. Frank is too young to know anything about people at Collinwood more than 20 years ago, but he's eager to help Vicky in her search. The elder Mr. Garner tells Vicky that Hanscomb was the butler in the old days at Collinwood when they had a lot of servants. Betty was his niece or daughter. After Frank and Vicky go out for lunch, Mr. Garner phones Elizabeth to tell her that Vicky's asking questions.

Although Betty Hanscomb will be mentioned a few more times, this is as far as Vicky ever gets in pursuit of the woman she believes might be her mother. The entire story is soon dropped, but I do sometimes wonder where the writers originally intended for this mystery with the Hanscombs to go.

While she's in Bangor, Vicky runs into Burke a couple of times; they're staying at the same hotel. She meets one of his business associates and sees that this man has a pen very like the one she found. When she asks about it, he tells her that Burke gave it to him and that there are only two like it in North America. Burke joins them and, when he has to sign some papers, says that he has no pen with him.

Vicky therefore concludes that Burke lost the pen on the beach while he was murdering Mr.

Malloy. Terrified, she refuses to accept a ride back to Collinsport with him and instead phones Roger and asks him to come and get her. Roger gets to play the hero for her again.

On the drive home during another wild storm, Vicky tells Roger her suspicions about Burke. She wants to go to the police about it, but Roger doesn't think it's a good idea. A pen isn't enough evidence to convict anyone, he says, and she should forget about it. Besides, Vicky doesn't even have the pen anymore.

The next day, Vicky searches for the pen. She still thinks that David's hidden it someplace.

She doesn't realize the truth until Carolyn tells her the story of how Burke gave her the pen and Roger lost it on the very night that Bill Malloy was killed. Vicky then goes to Collinsport to tell Burke about the pen and apologize for thinking that he was the murderer.

Burke is very forgiving, since this information finally gives him a chance to strike at Roger. He cautions Vicky about going back to Collinwood, but she feels that she'll be safe enough there as long as Roger doesn't know that she knows he was the one who dropped the pen.

Meanwhile, back at Collinwood, Carolyn blathers obliviously to Uncle Roger that she did tell Vicky precisely that.

I find it hard to determine if Carolyn is more stupid than Vicky in this story. Carolyn only sees the pen as a pretty present from her new boyfriend, which is why she keeps going on about it, but she doesn't seem to notice that so many other people consider the pen crucially important or wonder why they care. When Uncle Roger starts asking her where Vicky's gone, who she's seeing, and then goes driving out to find Vicky, oblivious Carolyn takes it to mean that he's got a crush on the governess.

Okay, maybe Vicky's stupider. At least, she has

less of a sense of self-preservation. She does go back to Collinwood, where Roger is waiting to pounce.

He grabs Vicky, takes her into the drawing room, and admits that he did phone Malloy that night and they agreed to meet at Lookout Point before the meeting in his office. He tells her that he found Bill Malloy already dead at the edge of the water and must have dropped the pen then.

David, who has eavesdropped on all these conversations, goes over to the old house to consult the portrait of Josette. Like a medieval peasant praying for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, he humbly requests that she ask the ghost of Bill Malloy to reappear and confirm that Roger killed him; the boy also asks that Josette and her other ghostly friends protect Vicky from Bill's murderer.

The portrait glows faintly while David is talking to it, but the ghost of Josette doesn't make an appearance until after the boy leaves.

The ghostly protection David has requested for Vicky doesn't kick in right away. First, someone—a grown man, not David—unlocks her door and tries to enter her bedroom in the middle of the night; Vicky's screams frighten him away. The next evening while she's walking back from town, a car tries to run her down at the Collinwood gates. She's certain that it must be Roger both times because he knows she doesn't believe his story.

Even Elizabeth begins to look at her brother with suspicion at this point.

Vicky hasn't been able to find the missing pen, but Burke is sure that Roger hasn't gotten rid of it. He gets an idea: "And it just might work!"

He drives back up to Bangor, then returns to Collinsport and consults with George Patterson, the local Chief of Police, who has been laconically investigating Bill Malloy's death. Burke says that he can get Roger to incriminate himself and provide the tan-

gible evidence they need.

The two men drive up to Collinwood just after Vicky has returned to the house hysterical after nearly being run over. She's okay, but lying down upstairs. Elizabeth gave her something to sleep.

Patterson questions Roger. He denies everything, including the story he told Vicky about finding Malloy's body; he implies that the girl is emotionally unstable and imagines all kinds of wild things. He even denies that she found that pen on the beach.

Where is that pen now? Roger sneers.

Burke takes a silver filigree pen that looks very much like the missing one from his pocket. You mean this one? he asks.

Roger says it can't be the same pen, but of course both Vicky and Carolyn can identify it. The police will ask both girls to come down to the station in the morning to do so.

As soon as he thinks they've gone, Roger rushes right out to the place on the cliffs where he buried the pen and digs it up. But Burke and the police chief haven't gone after all; they've followed him.

Busted!

I remember that Columbo once set up the same type of trap with a contact lens in a car trunk. He caught Robert Culp with it.

The Phoenix

When we last visited the charming coastal town of Collinsport, Maine, Laura Collins, Roger's long-absent wife, had returned to ask for a divorce and to reclaim her son David. But as her story progresses, it becomes increasingly obvious that something is not-quite-right about Laura. She has a peculiar effect on certain people, especially her son, and some very odd and interesting things are happening.

Sam Evan's painting of a woman amid flames is almost finished. The woman portrayed is clearly Laura Collins. Lines fan out behind her like rays of light or stylized wings. A David-shaped blank spot remains in one lower corner. Everyone who sees the painting is appalled by it and calls it horrible. Actually, I think it's kind of cool. Sam's best work from what I've seen.

In spite of her opinion of the painting, Vicky feels compelled to buy it and take it back to Collinwood to show the family. When David sees it, he loves it and wants to hang it in his bedroom.

That night, the painting glows and the head of Laura Collins emerges from it until it looms large over the foot of the sleeping boy's bed. The huge, blonde head does not chant "Tom Stewart killed me! Tom Stewart killed me!" although the floating head of the murdered singer in *Tormented* is the first thing that springs to my mind.

David awakes as if from a nightmare.

Then things begin to get even weirder.

The local police come to Collinwood bringing news that there's been a fire in Laura's apartment house in Phoenix. An unidentified dead woman was found in her rooms, burned beyond recognition. Does Laura have any idea who she might be? Laura says no. The police also bring an item that survived the fire: an antique locket containing a photo of David as a baby and a lock of his hair. But Vicky has seen this identical locket before; Laura showed it to her a few episodes earlier. This is clearly impossible, since the locket was still in Phoenix at that time. Nor can there be two lockets. It's a Collins family heirloom, one that both Roger and Elizabeth know well. Laura denies showing the locket to Vicky at all, which is a lie.

Having finished one painting of Laura Collins in flames, Sam Evans starts another. He can't help

it; he tries to draw something else, but the moment the charcoal touches the canvas, his hand moves against his will to draw the same image again. I had thought that this was Laura's doing, but when she hears about the second painting, she visits Sam's studio to tell him to stop it. When he says that he can't, she returns to the cottage on the Collinwood grounds where she's staying and sits gazing into the fire. We cut to Sam asleep on his sofa. The newspapers scattered on his floor burst into flame. Sam wakes in time to beat the fire out, burning his hands in the process. No more painting for a while!

Everyone attributes the fire to a drunken man falling asleep with a lit cigarette (which is true enough), but they are unable to explain how the second painting of Laura, on the other side of the room and under an untouched cover, is also burned.

While all this strange and supernatural stuff is going on, there's been a tug-of-war between Burke and Roger over Laura. You may recall that she was present at that hit-and-run accident which led to Burke Devlin's conviction for manslaughter and she shares with Roger and Sam the horrible secret about what really happened. Since she first returned to Collinwood, the three men have been eager to learn whether or not she'll tell what she knows. Roger hangs his agreeing to a divorce and letting her have David on her keeping her mouth shut. Burke is hoping she'll tell the truth. He's also hoping to resume their old romance once she's free, but Laura puts him off by saying that regaining her son is her first priority.

When the police at last identify the body in Phoenix, they claim that it's Laura Collins. But a medical examination of the woman at Collinwood confirms that she is Laura.

After a slow start, *Dark Shadows* is really picking up! I'm enjoying this very much. It's not the usual type of ghost story. While the earliest episodes were

set in a primarily realistic world with a few mildly ghostly trappings, the show has now moved into the unabashedly supernatural. Ghosts come and go all the time. The characters try very hard to find rational explanations for the inexplicable events occurring around them as things become more fantastic. Piecing together information about what Laura Collins is exactly and what she's up to has kept me intrigued. There is some very nice layering and symbolism involved in her story. Not only has she apparently literally risen from the flames, but she also tells David the legend of the Phoenix to provide the first clue as to what's going on here. After hearing the legend, David draws a picture of a bird amid flames, echoing Sam's paintings. To top it off, Laura has come from the city of Phoenix!

My one criticism is that too many people feel compelled to do things in order to move the plot forward. Sam is compelled to paint Laura in flames, okay. But then Vicky buys the painting and brings it to Collinwood under compulsion instead of being given some more reasonable motive for her actions. And it isn't enough that Burke hopes to revive an old flame (no pun intended), but he seems to be under some sort of spell to do Laura's bidding.

More of the Phoenix

While watching *Gone With the Wind* recently, I viewed some of the extras in the DVD set, including screen tests for prospective casting. I'd forgotten that 30 years before taking the role of Elizabeth Collins Stoddard, young Joan Bennett had been one of the Scarlett O'Hara finalists before Vivien Leigh knocked her, Paulette Goddard, and all the other contenders out of the running. I mention this since, after weeks of having very little to do except keep Collins fam-

ily secrets, Joan Bennett finally has an opportunity to put in a real performance.

We learn at last what force lies behind those strange compulsions moving the characters to act in strange ways: it's the family ghost, Josette Collins.

Now that Sam Evans is no longer able to paint pictures of Laura Collins in flames, Josette takes a more direct approach. She appears in David's bedroom and completes the unfinished painting herself.

When Vicky goes into David's room, she is horrified to find that the David-shaped blank space in one corner has been filled in—with David's face. The others are likewise terrified, since no one had been in the room before Vicky went upstairs. No one they know of could have finished the painting. Yet the paint is still wet.

Faced with this undeniable evidence of some supernatural agency at work, the only thing they can think to do is immediately destroy it. The painting is thrown into the drawing-room fire. A woman screams. I first thought that this was meant to be a metaphysical cry, signifying Laura's pain or even her destruction, but Vicky, Sam, and the Collinses hear it too. However, it goes unexplained. The next time we see Laura, she's fine and as determined to gain custody of her son as ever.

As the bizarre tale of Laura Collins continues, her story becomes more coherent. While Vicky and her sort-of boyfriend Frank are driving through the Maine countryside one night after dinner in Bangor, Vicky smells jasmine—Josette's signature scent. She directs Frank to turn down a side road and they end up at a house near a graveyard. A little old man answers the door.

"You're alive?" he asks the young couple, and explains that everyone else who knocks on his door is dead. His job is to let them in. In spite of their state of being, he lets Vicky and Frank in.

This introduction to the character and setting is delightfully creepy, but I'm sorry to say that nothing much comes of it. The only ghost we'll see any sign of is the one who brought us here.

The old man shows his living guests around the house and adjacent crypt, where members of the Stockbridge family have been buried since the early 1700s. He also keeps books that record the Stockbridge family marriages and deaths.

Vicky smells the scent of jasmine again and is drawn into the crypt to find the tomb of L. Murdoch Stockbridge, who burned to death in 1767. Later on, one of the old man's books falls from its shelf and opens to a page containing information about L. Murdoch Radcliffe, who also "Died by fire!" in 1867. The tombstone is discovered in the graveyard outside.

Back at Collinwood, Vicky questions Laura about her family, which goes back very far in New England's history. "One of the oldest," Laura tells her.

We've heard Laura's maiden name before, but from this point on it's mentioned frequently. Laura Murdoch Collins. Laura Murdoch Collins. Laura Murdoch Collins. Just to hammer it home in case the viewer missed Laura's connection with the previous L. Murdochs who died by fire 200 and 100 years ago.

This 100-year cycle clears up something I'd noticed earlier and thought was a mistake. When Laura first told David about the phoenix, she said that the bird went up in flames and rose from the ashes every 100 years. Every version of the legend I'd heard before has it as every 500, 1,000, or even 5,000 years. But the interval had to be shortened for this storyline; American history doesn't go back far enough for a pattern of fiery deaths to emerge otherwise.

More of Laura's unearthly powers begin to show themselves. After finding Laura with Burke

Devlin at the cottage, Elizabeth demands that her sister-in-law leave Collinwood without David. She says that she'll tell Roger what she's seen. Laura responds that Elizabeth will be sorry—she has resources too. Then she settles down to gaze into her fire...

At the house, Elizabeth has a dizzy spell and falls halfway down the stairs. Roger and Vicky find her. She insists she's fine, but the last 10 minutes are a blank. As she tries to remember, another, worse spell follows. Elizabeth is put to bed and doctors are summoned, but they can find nothing medically wrong with her.

This is the big scene for Joan Bennett as Elizabeth's memories fragment. Sometimes, she doesn't even recognize Carolyn, who sits tearfully at her mother's bedside. In other moments, she speaks of her daughter as if Carolyn were still a little girl.

The episode comes to a head later that night just as Elizabeth's memory begin to return. A shadowy, cloaked figure appears before the windows. Elizabeth screams and collapses.

When Vicky and the Collinses rush in to help her, she can only babble incoherently about a bird in fire and a stone. The family wants to send her to a hospital, but Elizabeth adamantly refuses to leave the house. She makes Carolyn promise to abide by her wishes and leaves her daughter in charge.

Very soon afterward, when Laura visits Elizabeth in her bedroom, Elizabeth goes into a catatonic state that baffles her doctors. Frank confers with Vicky; he suggests they bring in a parapsychologist to investigate the case.

"That's a little far out," says the young woman who has just accused Laura of casting some sort of spell over Elizabeth. Not to mention following clues pointed out by a ghost.

Frank prevails and brings a new character into the story, Dr. Guthrie. The doctor isn't as far out as

one might expect a parapsychologist to be. He takes a psychological approach to Elizabeth's condition and, after examining her, declares that she is in a trance!

In hopes of breaking whatever hypnotic hold Laura has over her, Carolyn finally agrees to let her mother be taken from the house and placed in a hospital. It's the first time Elizabeth has left the grounds of Collinwood since before Carolyn was born.

Now that Elizabeth Collins Stoddard is out of the way, Roger overrides her instructions to Vicky and Carolyn not to let David near Laura. He is, after all, the boy's father and he isn't as intimidated by the two girls as he is by his big sister. He lets David have a sleep-over at the cottage where Laura has been staying. While the boy sleeps in his mother's arms on the sofa, Josette makes one of her jasmine-scented appearances; Laura sends her away, saying that there's nothing the ghost can do while she's holding her son. Nothing else happens. After all their predictions of disaster, Vicky and Carolyn are a little disappointed the next morning when David tells them that he had a nice time with his mom.

Dr. Guthrie, meanwhile, proposes a *séance* to contact Josette. He's doubtful that she'll appear, but I was sure she'd show up. She's been in more episodes lately than Joe or Maggie. Roger sneers as usual but agrees to it. Laura refuses to attend.

The *séance* is performed on a dark and stormy night. Great! I love this stuff.

Given their sympathetic relationship, it isn't surprising that Vicky is chosen by the ghost of Josette Collins to deliver her message. Vicky enters a trance and begins to moan and groan—but before she can actually say anything, the drawing-room door bursts open with a blast of wind and a flash of lightning. A hooded figure stands in the front hall. It's Laura. She says she's changed her mind and decided to come af-

ter all.

Laura makes a few feints at discouraging Vicky from resuming her contact with Josette, but gives up without much of a struggle when Vicky insists. She joins the circle around the table and as the séance continues, stares at Vicky so hard that her eyes bulge out.

Vicky begins to speak in French. "Vicky doesn't speak French!" exclaims Carolyn, which strikes me as odd. What kind of a governess doesn't speak French? But Carolyn's governess, if she ever had one, didn't speak French either and she doesn't understand a word of what Vicky says.

From my own high-school French, I pick up a few key phrases: Aside from the expected references to fire, a "petit garçon" who is "morte" is with Josette. There is also a "presence diable"; "personn s'appelle"... but before Vicky can name this diabolic presence, she screams and faints. This ends the séance.

Fortunately for us all, Dr. Guthrie is happy to translate anything we missed or didn't understand. In addition to the dead little boy and the as-yet-unnamed diabolic presence, Josette spoke of a fire recurring every century; another will come soon. Dr. Guthrie has recorded the entire séance, but when he reviews the tape the next day, he finds that the voices of the participants have been replaced by the sounds of crackling fire. Of course, he could just have put the tape recorder a little too close to the fireplace.

At the Phoenix morgue, the body of the unidentified woman who was found burned to death in Laura's apartment has disappeared. Dr. Guthrie tells Laura about this just to see her reaction. When he keeps poking, she warns him to leave her alone.

The nature of the accusations the doctor, Vicky, and Carolyn have been making give this part of the story the feel of an old-fashioned witch-hunt; as Laura herself wryly points out when Guthrie questions her, they haven't had witchcraft trials in New

England for a long time. Because of this, I can't help some feeling sympathy for her. But Laura is capable of precisely the things they suspect she's done. We're about to see another demonstration.

A little while later, as she gazes into her fire at the cottage, Dr. Guthrie experiences the same sort of dizzy spell that overcame Elizabeth and eventually sent her to the hospital in a coma. He would no doubt have ended up in the same condition if David hadn't come to see his mother just then and interrupted. The spell is broken, and Dr. Guthrie finally puts things together—the 100-year cycle, the phoenix reborn from the ashes. He wants Carolyn and Joe to help him open the tomb of Laura Murdoch Stockbridge to see what's inside.

Heading Toward Barnabas Collins

During the aftermath of the Phoenix storyline, as Elizabeth Collins Stoddard recovers from her coma and returns home, a new, mysterious stranger appears in Collinsport. His name is Jason McGuire and he's an extremely smarmy character with a suspect Irish accent. He claims to be an old friend of Paul Stoddard, Elizabeth's husband who disappeared more than eighteen years ago. McGuire hints that he knows something about Paul's disappearance and, more than that, holds this knowledge over Elizabeth. Within days of his arrival in town, he's forced her to invite him to stay at Collinwood.

McGuire also seems to know something about Collinwood. One evening while Roger is searching the cellar for some paintings he purchased from Sam Evans ten years ago, he encounters the mysterious houseguest examining the padlock on the door to that even more mysterious locked room. The two chat about McGuire's long-absent friend, Paul Stoddard.

When, asks Roger, did McGuire see Paul last?

McGuire grins and gestures at the basement floor at the foot of the stairs. "Right here." A moment later, he adds that Paul was packing up a few things before leaving Collinwood, but I don't believe that's what he meant at all.

The next day, Elizabeth learns about McGuire's poking around in the cellar and warns him away from that door. McGuire reassures her with the cryptic reply that he hopes that that door stays locked as much as she does.

Cut to Roger heading back down into the cellar to bash the padlock with a large chisel.

Elizabeth, hearing the banging noise from upstairs, comes down to put a stop to this before Roger breaks the lock. Roger claims that the paintings he's looking for must be stored in the locked room, since he's looked everywhere else. Elizabeth is sure that the paintings can't be in there; it's where she stored Paul's old belongings after he left. "Yes, that's right," she quickly adds, much in the same tone of "That the ticket!" and it's just as unconvincing. By the end of the conversation, it's clear that both brother and sister are keeping secrets, both realize it, and neither will tell the other anything.

Why is Roger so desperate to locate these paintings? He received them from Sam after that hit-and-run manslaughter incident, as an excuse for giving Sam ten thousand dollars to keep his mouth shut. Now, Sam has an offer from an art dealer for his old work that will mean a lot more money for him. If Roger doesn't return the paintings, Sam will tell what he did see that day.

When Roger fails to find the paintings, Sam eventually fulfills his promise and we finally arrive at the end of this plot that's been going on since Burke Devlin returned to Collinsport in the first episode. By the original air-dates, that's been nine months, from

June 1966 to March 1967. All the same, they drag out these final moments for as long as possible, as Sam Evans repeats the story he's been keeping secret for so long to his daughter Maggie, then to Burke, then to Elizabeth until Roger is at last cornered and has to confess that he was the one driving the car. Considering how ruthlessly determined Burke has been to have his revenge, he ends up letting Roger and Sam off pretty easily once he has them where he's wanted them for so long. But at least it's all over!

Elizabeth's problems with her own blackmailer aren't so easily resolved.

While the above events were going on, McGuire invited a friend to join him in Collinsport, an unpleasant little creep with a quick temper and the annoying habit of referring to himself in the third person: "Willie doesn't like that."

The name captures my attention. Is this Willie Loomis? I remember that name from my childhood viewing. Willie Loomis is the one who will find and inadvertently revive Barnabas Collins, and thereafter might as well change his name to Renfield. The Willie Loomis I remember was played by John Karlen, but it turns out that, yes, this is the same character.

Willie invites himself to stay at Collinswood, where he makes himself even more repulsive. Earlier on, he had hit on Maggie in an overly aggressive way. Now, he pursues Vicky then Carolyn with an intent that gets very scary very quickly. The man doesn't seem to understand words like "No," "Go away," or "Don't touch me!" His "I don't hear a word you're saying" attitude toward young women is one of the most frightening things I've seen on the show. When he traps Carolyn in the drawing room, she finally forces him to listen to her by pointing Roger's pistol in his face.

This last incident provokes Elizabeth to make a

stand. Regardless of the hold McGuire has over her, she will do anything to protect her daughter. Willie must go, or else she will call the police. McGuire sees that she really means it, and tells Willie to leave the girls alone. He doesn't want his friend to mess up his plans, since he's expecting to score big re the Collins family millions (not knowing that the Collinses don't have that kind of money; that's why they're living in a handful of rooms in their decrepit mansion). Willie only wants to grab whatever items of value he can and leave.

David interrupts the conversation at this point, as the two men are standing beneath the portrait of the boy's great-great-great-grandfather. Since Willie has never threatened him, David is happy to tell Willie what he knows of his family's history and show him some other family portraits.

"And this is Barnabas Collins," David concludes his tour, bringing that name up for the first time as he gestures to a striking portrait of Jonathan Frid on the wall of the entrance hall, just inside the front door. There's never been a painting on that wall before.

Willie perks up when he hears that Barnabas was very rich and shows particular interest in all the bling Barnabas is sporting: a large ring, a medallion. Are these pieces of jewelry still in the family? David says no, but Willie plans to search around Collinwood for them... and will dig up more than he's bargained for.

The scene, the episode, and this DVD end with a close-up on the portrait of Barnabas Collins. The eyes are very white, and almost appear to glow.

We're getting close to the *Dark Shadows* I remember.

What's Behind that Locked Door?

I wasn't sure whether or not I was going to continue

to write these reviews, but one unresolved storyline prompted me to go on: What's behind the locked door in the basement? This mystery was introduced in the very first episodes, when Victoria Winters wandered down into the basement on her first night at Collinwood, following the sounds of a woman's sobs. Elizabeth Collins Stoddard refused to leave her home for 18 years because of whatever was in there. I didn't remember this story at all from my childhood viewing and I had the idea that that was where Barnabas's coffin was hidden, and Elizabeth was keeping guard over a long-hidden family secret.

The secret behind that door isn't as old as that. At long last, we're going to get a peek inside.

Jason McGuire is still at Collinwood. He makes a few feints at figuring out what happened to Willie Loomis and why his former uncontrollable accomplice is now the meek and apologetic servant of Barnabas Collins, but his primary interest remains in blackmailing Elizabeth for all he can get. While the two originally hinted about the true fate of Paul Stoddard, Elizabeth's long-missing husband, they now speak openly of it between themselves. Elizabeth killed her husband and Jason helped her to hide the body in that locked room.

It had been my impression earlier in the series that Paul disappeared before his daughter Carolyn was born, but as Elizabeth tells the story now, it seems that Carolyn was a baby at the time. Elizabeth also speaks repeatedly of these events happening 18 years ago. However, everyone has been saying that Carolyn was born, Paul disappeared, and Elizabeth shut herself up at Collinwood 18 years ago since the very beginning of the series. That was nearly a year ago. Shouldn't it all be 19 years past at this point?

Whatever. Jason has been receiving large sums of money from Elizabeth for keeping her secret. She's also given him a partnership in the Collins family

cannery, although he doesn't actually do any work there. But this isn't enough. When she refuses to pay him anymore, he proposes... well, he proposes. He suggests a marriage of convenience between them so that he can share in all she owns without receiving traceable chunks of cash at intervals.

Elizabeth balks at first. She says she'd rather die. Then she begins to give in and talks to her lawyer about obtaining a divorce for desertion, since she can't admit that her missing husband is dead. Although she tells her brother Roger that she doesn't intend to remarry, she also tosses out a few hints about her future plans that alarm both Roger and Carolyn.

Roger, Carolyn, and Vicky too are certain that Jason has some hold over Elizabeth to make her put up with so much from him, but they don't guess what it could be. Carolyn shows the most perception; she believes that it has something to do with the locked room and she's determined to have a look inside, either by stealing the key from her mother or having Elizabeth open the door herself. Unbeknownst to Carolyn, it's Jason who actually convinces Elizabeth to hand over the key—after he uses it to go into the room himself and check that everything is as it should be.

Elizabeth leads the curious party downstairs and unlocks the door. Finally, we get to see what's behind it!

Not much of interest, really.

The room is remarkably free of dust, considering how long it's been locked up, with just a few cobwebs in the corners. A suitcase and trunk contain Paul Stoddard's clothes—possibly these were meant to be what he took with him when he supposedly decamped. There are also a metal box-spring for a bed and an ugly looking Victorian statue placed on top of a barrel.

Carolyn, Roger, and Vicky are disappointed as

they have their look around. None of them seems to form the same idea about the luggage that crossed my mind; they simply regard it as some of Paul's things that Elizabeth has stored here, just as she claimed.

It makes me wonder why Elizabeth was so afraid to leave the house for so many years. It's not as if the skeletal remains of Paul Stoddard are lying sprawled on the floor or are stuffed inside the trunk for anyone to discover while casually poking around.

So where is his body? No words are spoken to answer this question, but both Jason and the camera focus their attention on the stone slabs of the floor...

Once the contrite little group has returned upstairs, Elizabeth announces her engagement.

But the above is merely a subplot. Since his arrival, Barnabas Collins has completely taken over the show.

I can see why he was such a big hit when he first appeared. He makes a terrific initial impression with his charming, old-fashioned manners and his dreamy-eyed soliloquies about what the old Collins house was like when it was newly built.

He claims to be the great-great-great-grandson of the Barnabas who supposedly went to England and bases his detailed knowledge of the Collins family history on traditions and historical records that were kept by the English branch of the family. Why should the New England Collinses doubt him? He looks so much like the portrait in the front hall. He's even wearing the same ring. These two points will be noticed by everyone and repeated about 400 times. Besides, he seems like such a nice man.

He's not so charming to his victims.

When Barnabas asks Elizabeth if he can live in and restore the old house to its former glory, she consents. The only disquieting note occurs when the Collinses notice that he's hired Willie Loomis to do the renovation work, but Willie is so well-behaved

for Barnabas that no one makes much fuss about his remaining. In no time at all, Willie's fixed up the front room and restored one bedroom upstairs so that it is suitable for a lady to inhabit. The portrait of Josette is moved from its position over the parlor fireplace to this room. Barnabas then hires Sam Evans to paint his portrait to hang downstairs.

I think it was a mistake to make Barnabas so obviously a vampire from his introduction. We know it now, of course, and have for over 40 years, but there was no mystery about him for the original viewers either.

What made the Phoenix story so entertaining for me was working out what sort of supernatural being Laura Murdoch Collins was and what she was after. But from the moment that ringed hand reached up out of the coffin to seize Willie Loomis, there was no question about what Barnabas was.

Although Barnabas's story will take some bizarre and original twists later on, this early part is very much like *Dracula*. I've already referred to Willie Loomis as "Renfield," and the old Collins house might as well be Carfax Abbey. When Barnabas turns his attention to Maggie Evans, the process of her victimization closely resembles Lucy Westenra's. Maggie is drained of blood, receives a transfusion, and is drained again. Barnabas hangs around her home in wolf form (not seen, but often heard howling outside).

But it seems that the universe in which *Dark Shadows* takes place is one where the story of *Dracula* does not exist—or at least no one in Collinsport has ever read the book or seen a movie version. The nature of Maggie's illness baffles everyone in spite of the tell-tale puncture marks on her throat. A doctor might not seriously consider the idea of a vampire, but no one else remarks on the possibility either, even as a joke. Oddly, the doctor seems to be the only

person with an inkling of what's going on, but his instructions are routinely ignored. Don't leave Maggie alone for a minute! She is left alone, several times. Keep that window shut! A nurse opens the window and Maggie disappears from her hospital room, abducted by Barnabas.

This is the part I recall watching during the early 1970s as a child. It's Barnabas's idea to hold Maggie in hypnotic thrall, convince her that she is his beloved Josette, and make her his vampire-bride. Maggie is dazed and disoriented at first, but eventually, she recovers her own identity. To humor Barnabas and protect herself until she can escape, she pretends to believe that she is Josette. Barnabas accepts this, but Willie has his doubts. I can see why: Maggie pretending to be Josette shows signs of a spirited personality and is capable of forming complete sentences. When she was under Barnabas's spell, the best she could manage was a confused echoing of the last thing he or Willie said to her. Which makes me wonder about the level of conversation Barnabas was anticipating from his chosen companion-for-eternity.

The real Josette threw herself off the cliff rather than become a vampire—a fact that Barnabas disregards during his transformation of Maggie. I was wondering where ghostly Josette was during all of this. She used to act as the family's guardian and made frequent appearances in that same house. Is she afraid of Barnabas? What's a vampire going to do to harm a ghost? Or does she just not care about Maggie?

The scene I recalled most clearly from childhood was one where Maggie sees the coffin Willie has made for her; she says it's beautiful, and he replies that she isn't supposed to think so until after she's been transformed. That's how he knows she's faking it. Exposed, she pleads for his help and offers him a diamond necklace Barnabas has given her.

As it turns out, this scene is almost the last thing at the end of Collection 1. Willie is still partial to jewels and is enormously tempted by the offer, but he's more afraid of what Barnabas will do to him if he helps her.

Maggie, at least, has seen a vampire movie. She knows that the way to get rid of Barnabas is to drive a stake through his undead heart. She is about to do so... but unfortunately, she tries it just a little too close to sunset.

How Barnabas Became a Vampire

Time has been suspended at Collinwood. It waits for the completion of an uncertain and frightening journey into the past, back to the year 1795...

With some variation, this is the new opening voiceover for every episode of *Dark Shadows*. Since the character of Victoria Winters has been sent back into the past to witness the beginning of the unhappy story of Barnabas Collins, Alexandra Moltke no longer does these introductory speeches and the other women in the cast take turns with it.

I have to note that when we were introduced to Josette Collins in the very earliest episodes of *Dark Shadows*, and even when Barnabas first arrived, the key events of their lives and deaths were supposed to be happening in the 1830s. At some point in the narrative, the timeline shifted back about 40 years to the late colonial era, which is where Vicky suddenly and unexpectedly finds herself.

Vicky has been in love with the past and dreaming about the history of Collinwood for some time, but she's about to discover that the olden days weren't all that great to live in.

Not that we'll see this at first. As we and Vicky

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