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THE CHEMICAL VAMPIRE

By LEE FRANCIS'

He tried to create life; but the body that came from his laboratory was dead . . . until night came!

I CAN'T understand it, Mr. Grant. None of the workmen touched the coffin—we were only repairing the mausoleum as you instructed. And I know it wasn't open like this earlier this afternoon . . ."

The foreman stood uncertainly at the entrance to the mausoleum, his eyes

watching the frowning features of Jason Grant.

Grant was a short, plumpish man, with thin grayed hair and hard business eyes. Many had said they were as hard as the bricks that had made the Grant fortune. Now those eyes, which had guided the Grant Brickyards to

a lofty position in industry, were clouded. They stared at the foreman with concealed puzzlement.

"Why should anyone want to open the coffin of Marta Boronna?"

The foreman shook his head. "I wouldn't know about that, sir. Maybe you better take a look at it. There's something else that's mighty peculiar . . ."

Grant inclined his head. "I'll do just that. But what else is so unusual?"

The foreman turned away. "You'll see, sir."

Jason Grant shrugged and edged past the workman into the musty mausoleum. The air was dank, oppressive. It had about it a quality of stillness, of age. Unconsciously Grant found himself trying not to breathe too deeply. He had the queer sensation that he was drawing the vapors of eternity into his lungs.

He walked slowly across the broad granite floor. His eyes swept the sides of the massive tomb, caressed briefly each dusty coffin resting on its own hallowed niche. Each coffin with an inscription. Each inscription a member of his family for the past hundred years. His eyes by-passed the empty niches. There were no inscriptions on those—yet.

Finally he came to a coffin that lay slightly askew on its stone slab. His eyes narrowed as he saw the lid of the coffin raised and projected an inch or two off its previous sealed position. He read the inscription cut into the stone beside the casket: *Marta Boronna, born 1850, died 1880. May she rest easier in her tomb than they who put her here . . .*

Grant heard the foreman move up beside him. He watched as the man moved over to the coffin and raised the heavy lid.

"Here, sir, look . . ."

Grant stepped forward hesitantly. He did not like to look into the privacy of death. But he noted the insistence in the man's voice and peered over the edge of the casket.

His breath drew in sharply and for a moment he felt a strange wave of fear. Then the fear turned to startled amazement.

He was staring at the slender remains of a skeleton. The bones lay grey and somber, with a skull staring sightlessly up at him.

BUT it was not the skeleton of what had once been a slender young woman that brought a gasp to Jason Grant's lips. Nor was it the vacuous look of a lonely skull that brought a tremor to his face.

For his eyes were riveted on a narrow, wedge-shaped piece of wood, a stake, that stuck in a half-upright position between the ribs of the skeleton. A stake that at one time must have pierced through skin and flesh and bone into a beating, pulsing heart.

"Do you see what I mean, sir? That stake . . . What does it mean?"

Grant motioned quickly for the man to replace the lid of the casket. Then he turned his back, waiting.

The foreman came around him, holding the piece of wood in his hands.

"What shall I do with it, sir?"

Grant's eyes bulged as he saw the piece of wood.

"You fool! What did you remove *that* for?"

The man took a backward step at the anger in Grant's voice.

"Did I do something wrong? It didn't seem right that this should remain there . . ."

Grant forced himself to curb his anger. He knew suddenly that this man would not understand. And he also knew that he was not sure he under-

stood himself. As he stared at the stake in the foreman's hand his mind raced back over his family history. *May she rest easier in her tomb than they who put her here . . .*

Marta Boronna. Distant member of the Grant dynasty. Marta Boronna, who had been accused of witchcraft and vampirism by the narrow 19th century minds of Kenton, Massachusetts. Marta Boronna who had been attacked one solemn night by a masked mob. Attacked and killed. Killed and quietly buried.

It had only been in recent years that he had removed the casket from its dank grave and placed it beside other members of the family in the great mausoleum he had built thirty years before. He had felt pity at that time, for he had known of her tragic death, though the newspapers had not mentioned the incident at length. Nor had the savage killing of Marta Boronna received other notoriety. It had been hushed up, a thing to be spoken of only in whispers. Sure was the fate of the woman accused of being a vampire.

Now as he stared at the stake that had pierced the heart of the woman, he found that he no longer felt pity stir him. It was as if a strange fear took a grip on his soul. A thing he did not understand. A thing he wanted to ignore, forget.

He sighed finally and looked at the foreman.

"No matter. Throw the stake away. And forget about this. One of the men probably got curious and lifted the lid. The stake might be his idea of a practical joke. But certainly in bad taste."

The foreman pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"I can't see why any of the men would do a thing like that. . . . But if you don't want me to press the matter . . ."

"Drop it," Grant said decisively.

He followed the foreman out of the tomb and after a few instructions to the waiting workmen to complete the repairs on the roof of the mausoleum, he strode quickly away to the gates of the cemetery and his waiting automobile.

As he got behind the wheel of the car he shut the incident from his mind, remembering that he had planned on dropping over to his nephew's laboratory. There were things he had to say to Hal Grant.

He thought of them as he drove.

HAL GRANT turned from his work tables, topped with strange retorts, tubes with bubbling liquids, and weirdly constructed electrical apparatus.

The knock came again at the door of the laboratory.

Hal walked swiftly over to the door and opened it. He stared down from his six foot height at the impatient face of his uncle, Jason Grant.

"You took your time in answering," Jason Grant said irately.

Hal smiled. "Still the old bull dog." Then, apologetically, "I'm in a crucial stage of my experiments, I—"

"Experiments!" Jason Grant snorted the word out. "I don't mind telling you, Hal, I'm getting a little tired of all the expense your *experiments* are costing me! This last bill—a thousand dollars! For what!"

The younger man stroked his bearded jaw and shrugged.

"I needed the chemicals. They're expensive, I know, but—"

"Expensive! That's putting it mildly! And for what? In your own words, to reproduce the seventy-nine cents worth of chemicals in the human body! Hah! What I mean is—seventy-nine thousand *dollars!*"

A trace of anger touched Hal Grant's eyes.

"I don't think that's quite fair, Uncle Jason. If you couldn't afford it it would be a different matter. And you know how much this experiment means to me."

The anger left Jason Grant's face. In its place was a studied look of exasperation. He waved his hand around the laboratory.

"Afford it? There's a limit even to my generosity! All this tom-foolery to produce a human body from its chemical components! All this wasted money and effort to satisfy a childish theory and imagination fostered by science-fiction magazines! It's about time you grew up and took your place in the business world!"

Hal's cheeks colored. "Maybe I did read science-fiction magazines when I was younger. And maybe they were all imagination. But then, maybe the atom bomb was also imagination. And rocket flight, and radar, and—"

Jason Grant waved his hand. "We've been through all that before. I'll try and put some sense in your head another way. Just how long do you think Betty Starrett is going to tolerate all this? There's a limit to her patience, just as there is to mine. But she'll have to live with you—if she ever does marry you!"

"Betty understands the importance of my work," Hal said quietly.

"Does she? Then maybe I heard her wrong yesterday when she told me I should use my influence and have you stop meddling with all these fool chemicals!"

"I don't believe you," Hal's voice was sharp.

"Then ask her yourself. She knows as well as I do that it's all a waste of time and money. I—"

"I wouldn't be so quick about saying

that," Hal interrupted hotly. Then he paused and a note of eagerness entered his voice. "My experiment is in the final stage. This afternoon I produced a perfect female head—in that retort on the bench! The next and final step is only a matter of hours!"

Jason Grant took a deep breath. "Then you won't stop this nonsense. You're bound to continue making a fool of yourself?"

"Nothing could stop me now," Hal Grant said firmly. "And if it will be any relief to you, there won't be any more bills. As I said before, my work is nearly completed."

Jason Grant snorted. "You're damned right there won't be any more expense! But I'm not through with this discussion. We'll continue it later tonight. I'll be waiting in my study."

He turned on his heel then, and strode from the laboratory, slamming the door as he went.

THE afternoon hours dragged interminably onward. Long shadows started to creep from the open windows in the west wall of the laboratory as Hal Grant worked ceaselessly before a long cloth covered table. His fingers delicately added chemical after chemical to a long metal receptacle that lay on the table. With each addition he adjusted dials and switches on electrical apparatus connected to the metal vat.

Faint traces of smoke rose from the bubbling mixture as he watched and worked, and the hum of an electric governor grew louder as more current was generated and utilized.

Finally he straightened and took a small test tube from a rack. He stared hopefully at the bright blue liquid inside it. Then, his lips forming a grim line, he slowly tipped the test tube and emptied the contents in the vat.

There was a sizzling sound as the chemical struck the bubbling mixture in the vat, followed by a thick cloud of acrid smoke.

Hal Grant stepped back in sudden alarm from the violently reacting chemical mixture.

Then slowly the dense smoke began to fade, and he could see the vat again. He stared open-mouthed, his eyes not daring to believe what he saw.

He was looking at a body.

She lay in the now suddenly still vat, the bubbling liquids dissipated, the hum of the generators a barely audible sound. She lay, a perfectly formed body, from the pinkness of her small well-shaped toes, to the long, flaxen-like auburn hair.

Hal Grant stepped slowly forward, his feet numb on the floor of the laboratory, his hands trembling with awed excitement.

"I did it—I *did it*" his voice whispered hoarsely. And a look of wild triumph entered his eyes as his gaze swept over the still body in the vat.

Slowly his fingers reached down and touched one cheek. Soft flesh depressed under his touch. Flesh that was cold.

Some of the triumph died from his eyes at that. Her flesh was cold, cold as inanimate marble. Flesh that should have been warm. Flesh that should have been filled with the hot breath of life.

He adjusted the generators again. A loud hum grew into a roar of power. The vat shook with the force of the current surging through it. Then Hal Grant shut off the current and stepped to the vat again.

His fingers touched the cheek once more. And the flesh was as cold as before. As lifeless as it had been.

In swift movements he pushed the table to the far side of the laboratory. He pulled a fluoroscope screen down across the vat and turned the switch.

Then he peered into the screen.

Surprise shone in his eyes as he stared at perfectly formed bone structure. But that was all. Where there should have been the shadows of internal organs, there was nothing. Nothing but flesh and bone. Flesh and bone . . .

He stared for another long moment into the screen, then he shut it off and stepped back, an ironic laugh shattering the stillness of the room.

"I succeeded! I've made a body—a perfect human body! But a body without a heart, without a single vital organ! A body of flesh and bone—seventy-nine cents worth of chemical flesh and bone!"

He listened to his voice utter the words of irony. He listened to his own shattered hopes well out of him in a frustrated laughter.

He sat down in a chair and held his head in his hands, a great weariness sweeping over him . . .

BETTY STARRETT walked up the steps to the door of the laboratory. She paused a moment and surveyed herself. Her blonde hair was primly set, her make-up just right, and her summer dress new and snug fitting. She had spent quite a bit of time preparing for the evening, and she wanted Hal Grant to notice it.

She knocked at the door.

After a long silence she heard footsteps approach, and then the door opened.

She stared into the weary eyes of Hal Grant.

"—Oh, hello, Betty."

"Well, I must say, that's hardly the greeting I expected! Have you forgotten we have a date tonight?"

A bleak smile crossed Hal's face. "No, I haven't forgotten. Come in."

She frowned at his dispirited manner

and stepped into the laboratory. He shut the door behind her and motioned to a chair.

She moved over to it and sat down, watching him closely.

He paced up and down the floor, endlessly, and finally she asked:

"Hal, something's wrong. What is it?"

He turned to her, his face a mirror of dejection.

"My experiment, Betty. It—it's finished . . ."

A wave of relief flooded her features.

"Oh, Hal, I'm so glad to hear you say that! I was afraid to talk to you myself about it—did your uncle tell you?"

He nodded dully. "Yes, he did. But that's not exactly what I mean."

"It isn't? But you just said it was finished. Don't you plan to take your place in your uncle's business?"

He shook his head. "You don't understand. I said my experiment was finished—completed."

"Completed?" A frown wrinkled her eyes. "You mean you failed . . . I'm so sorry, Hal, honestly . . ."

He laughed then. A harsh, bitter laughter.

"Failed? Yes, I suppose you could call it that. You know what Uncle Jason was always saying about my producing seventy-nine cents worth of chemicals in the human body? Well, I've done that—and *only* that!"

"I, I don't understand you, Hal," the girl said puzzledly.

"Come over here," he said. "Look for yourself."

He walked to the far side of the room and stood beside the long table. He pushed the fluoroscope screen away and Betty Starrett walked slowly across the room and stared into the vat.

A sharp cry of astonishment broke from the girl's lips. She stepped back

from the vat in a startled movement.

"Hal! It's a body! A *body!*"

A faint smile pulled at his mouth. "There's nothing to be afraid of, Betty," he said. "But you're right, it is a body. And *only* a body!"

The girl looked at him with awed eyes. "You mean—you mean *you* created this . . ."

He nodded. "Yes, I created it. But I failed. For what you see is only flesh and bone. Flesh and bone incapable of life. There isn't a single internal organ. Nothing to promote or sustain life. I failed . . ."

THE girl stepped forward and took his arm gently. Her eyes were tender.

"But you didn't fail, Hal! You succeeded! You showed us you were right. Does your uncle know?"

He turned away from the vat and the body lying in it.

"No, not yet. And I must admit, the last laugh will be his. I've spent all these months to produce a perfect body, when I thought I could produce life along with it . . ."

The girl shook her head slowly, and there was a firmness in her voice as she spoke.

"You must forget about that, Hal. Men were not meant to delve into mysteries like that . . . life is God's business."

He shrugged. "I suppose I'm learning the hard way. I guess you and Uncle Jason were right all along."

Her eyes softened. "Let's forget about it for tonight, Hal. Let's walk out of here and just think about—us. . . . Do you still want to take in a movie in town?"

He looked at her and suddenly smiled. He could see the earnest look in her eyes. The earnestness that was trying to soften the miserable failure

he felt in his heart.

"Yes, Betty, I think that would be what I need right now. I'll be ready in a minute."

She watched as he took off the long white coat. She watched as he ran his fingers through his heavy hair, combing it back with his fingers. Then he put on his suit coat and she took his hand. She stared at the coat pockets, strangely bulky, and laughed.

"You still carry most of your laboratory with you! What dire chemicals are in your pockets tonight?"

He flushed and started to reach for his pockets. "I always forget . . ."

"Never mind," she told him. "You know movies always give me a headache. Maybe I'll need an aspirin—or something."

For the first time a genuine smile lit his features.

"I'm afraid these wouldn't accomplish the same purpose. They're part of my experiment."

She moved toward the door. "Well you wouldn't feel normal if you didn't have *some* bottles in your pockets, so we'll take them along!"

He laughed and followed her from the room, switching off the lights as he went.

A BRIGHT bulging moon shed a silvery light over the Kenton Cemetery. Its somber glow played softly through the trees and across the endless rows of tombstones, beating an iridescent path to the silent mausoleum.

Only the faint whisper of the night wind rustling the leaves of the trees stirred the silence. Then even the wind suddenly died away and there was nothing.

As if the wind's departure had been a signal, a sound suddenly broke the night air.

It was a grating sound. The sound

of stone being moved. A heavy wearisome sound. Startling and dread in the silence.

Then there was another sound. A low uttering wail of agony. A sound that crept from the bowels of space. A sound that was not of life.

The wind was still silent. It was as if it had run in fear of what was about to occur. As if it had had a warning.

A cloud drifted across the face of the moon, obscuring its light. And as the heavens themselves seemed to turn away in sudden fear, a strange rustling whisper drifted from the stone mausoleum.

And with the whisper came a strange vaporous shape, floating through the iron grating of the tomb's door. It was wispy, the fragmentary shape of a thing indescribable.

Again the low wail echoed hollowly through the night.

For a long moment the wraith-like shadow floated before the door of the tomb. Then, as if it were being carried by the silent wind, it moved.

Out across the tombstones. Through the shuddering limbs of the frightened trees. Across the wall of the cemetery.

It moved more swiftly now. Over fields, across roads, past houses where light streamed from friendly windows.

And finally it reached its destination. It hovered in the air over a brick building, studying it.

Then it slipped lower and hung searchingly beside an open window in the west wall.

It seemed to be peering into the room. It seemed to be studying the rows of benches with crucibles, retorts, and electrical apparatus.

And then it seemed to see a long table with a metal receptacle.

And again the low wail smote through the night.

Then there was silence and the

wraith floated through the window and over to the vat.

A body of flesh and bone lay cool and quiet, staring up at the wraith with sightless eyes.

A sound came again. But no longer a wail. It was now a sound of sighing content.

The wraith lowered itself into the vat.

. . . And shortly, the body moved.

IT WAS very late when Hal Grant turned his key in the lock of his uncle's home. As he moved into the hall and closed the door behind him he glanced at his wrist watch. It was well after three in the morning.

But strangely he did not feel tired. He felt buoyant, almost exuberant. Already the thought of his laboratory failure to produce life to the chemical body seemed nearly unimportant. Betty had done that.

He smiled to himself as he recalled the pleasant hours he had just spent with her. And the thought was even more pleasant, of the many years ahead that were waiting for them both. For he had asked her to marry him. And her eyes had lit up with a lover's light and she had fallen into his arms, whispering into his ear the things that lovers whisper.

And then he had left her at her home, the house her parents had left her when they died. It would soon be their house. He smiled at the thought. He would have his own home then. And Betty . . .

"Hal? Is that you?"

Hal's thoughts ended abruptly as he heard his uncle calling from the library. He frowned to himself as he heard Jason Grant's voice. Surely he hadn't sat up all night waiting for him to come home? Was he really going to continue the discussion of the afternoon?

"Hal! Come in here!"

There was an urgent note in Jason Grant's voice. Something that made Hal Grant hurry from the hallway and into the library.

Jason Grant was pacing nervously up and down the long luxurious rug of the library, his hands gripped tightly behind his back, his face a worried study as Hal looked at him.

"Is anything wrong?" Hal asked quickly.

Jason Grant stopped his nervous pacing and faced his nephew. Now Hal could see the older man's eyes. They were wide, almost fearful.

"That is putting it mildly," Jason Grant replied. "The town of Kenton has suddenly gone mad!"

Hal looked at him puzzledly. "What are you talking about?"

The older man's lips narrowed in a grimace. "In the past two hours a wave of killings have broken out! Four men are already dead—and all of them were employees of mine!"

A startled look crossed Hal's face. "*Killings?* Four men? . . . But who?—and why? . . ."

"That's just it! The police don't know! All of them were found near their homes—dead or dying—from loss of blood!"

"You mean they were stabbed?"

Jason Grant shook his head. "No, they weren't stabbed—at least not with a knife. Each man had teeth marks on his throat, where something had bitten them and drained the blood from their bodies . . ."

Hal looked at his uncle closely. "If this is your idea of a joke . . ."

"Joke!" Jason Grant gasped the word out. "I only wish it were! For what I'm thinking is so utterly fantastic that I'm frightened with the very thought! If I'm right, I'm the only person who knows the truth behind these deaths—and I may be on the list my-

self!"

Hal Grant stepped forward and steered his uncle to a chair. Then he pulled up another chair and sat down facing him.

"Now maybe you better tell me just what you mean," he said evenly.

THE older man looked at him and sighed. "The men who were killed were members of a crew I had repairing the family mausoleum. You probably remember the family history about Marta Boronna? . . ."

Hal nodded slowly. "Yes, but—"

"Well, *her* coffin was open this afternoon. And the foreman removed a *stake* that had been driven into her heart—the treatment superstition says will end a vampire's existence . . ."

Hal's eyes looked shocked. "You're not trying to tell me you believe that a vampire—"

"That's exactly what I'm trying to tell you! Go ahead, call me insane! But then tell me how else these men died! And besides, there's proof . . ."

"What proof?"

"One of the men, the foreman, gasped out the fact that he had been attacked by a woman. A naked woman! A woman with long auburn hair—a woman whose flesh was cold when she touched him—when her teeth sank into his throat!"

Hal Grant sat unmoving in his chair. His breath had caught in his throat, and something tightened around his heart. *A naked woman!—whose flesh was cold . . . with long auburn hair . . .*

"My God!—It's impossible! . . ." The words gasped from Hal Grant's lips.

"I know it's impossible! And how can I tell the police?"

Hal looked back at his uncle. The dread feeling was great in him now as he spoke.

"I didn't mean about your vampire theory—I meant that the woman you just described is my own creation!"

"*Your what?*"

Hal blurted out in short, nervous sentences, the events of the afternoon. He watched his uncle's eyes expand in astonishment as he told of the partial success of his experiment. Finally:

"—but she wasn't alive! She couldn't have been alive! I would have known it!"

Jason Grant was on his feet. "Well there's only way to find out about this! If you're lying to me . . ."

"Why should I lie? I tell you I created a synthetic woman!"

"Very well, we'll see. We're going to your laboratory right now!"

Hal Grant nodded, and followed his uncle across the library floor.

HAL fitted his key into the lock and opened the door of the laboratory. He stepped inside and switched on the lights.

Behind him, Jason Grant walked into the room, his eyes searching.

"It's over there," Hal said, pointing to the far side of the room where the long table stood with the metal vat on it.

He lead the way over to it, and stopped a few feet from it, a hoarse cry leaving his lips.

"It's gone! The body's not here!"

Jason Grant edged around his nephew and stood staring at the empty vat. When he turned to his nephew his eyes were grim.

"You mean there was a body—a woman's body that you created—in this vat when you left here this evening?"

Hal nodded, the dread closing around him in a wave now.

"That's exactly what I mean! Betty was here—she saw it! But it was dead

—I know it was dead!”

“Dead bodies don’t get up and walk away,” Jason Grant said.

A horrified look entered Hal’s eyes. “Then the only other answer is that she wasn’t dead . . . I must have been wrong—there must have been life in her, life that fanned itself after we had left. Good heavens! Do you realize what I’ve done?”

Jason Grant looked from the empty vat back to his nephew.

“I realize that we’ve got to tell the police about this! Before anything else happens—”

His voice broke off as the telephone on Hal Grant’s desk began to ring.

The two men looked at each other for a long moment. There was something in both their eyes, a shadow of fear, a dread of the unknown. Finally Hal tore his gaze away and strode over to the phone. He picked up the receiver.

“Hello?”

“. . . Hal . . .”

The sound of Betty Starrett’s voice came across the wire, and the tension left Hal’s body.

He turned to his uncle. “It’s Betty.”

Then he spoke into the phone. “Yes, Betty? I thought you’d be asleep.”

“. . . Hal . . .”

His name again. And this time he noticed that there was a strange sound to the girl’s voice. A hesitancy about it, a tiredness, a—

“Betty! Is anything wrong?” Anxiety was in his voice.

“. . . Feel so strange . . . Hal . . . She was here . . . Attacked me . . . throat . . . feel strange . . . dizzy . . .”

Terror closed over Hal Grant. “*She?* Who, Betty? Who attacked you?”

“. . . Marta . . . your Marta . . . body you made . . . throat hurts . . .”

Behind Hal, he could hear Jason Grant swearing as he shouted into the phone.

“Don’t do anything, Betty! We’re coming right over! We’ll—”

His voice broke off as he heard a strange sound over the phone. It was barely audible, a weird sort of wail, but it sent a quiver of dread up Hal Grant’s spine.

And then he heard the girl’s voice again. Only now she wasn’t talking into the phone. Her voice seemed far away, and grew more distant as she spoke.

“. . . I am coming . . . Marta . . . I know . . . dawn is close . . .”

“Betty! *Betty!*” Hal shouted the words with a sob in his voice. But the line went dead. A click as the receiver was replaced on the other end.

Hal Grant looked stupidly at the phone in his hand for a single moment. Then he turned to his uncle.

“Betty’s been attacked! The creature is over there now!”

Then he was dashing to the door, and Jason Grant ran close at his heels.

HAL shot the car into the driveway of Betty Starrett’s home and pulled up sharply behind her parked coupe.

“Her car is here!” he exclaimed to Jason Grant.

The older man nodded as they piled out onto the driveway. “Pray God that we’re not too late!”

Then they were running the remaining short distance to the house. They could see that the lights were on in the living room on the ground floor, and as they ran up the steps, they could see that the front door was open.

Hal dashed into the house, shouting. “Betty! Betty!”

He stopped short in the front hall, Jason Grant panting close at his back. They stood then, listening, the sounds of their labored breathing breaking the silence. But that was all. No other

sound. Nothing.

Hal ran into the living room. The lamps were lit, but the room was empty. He ran back into the hall, shouting again.

"Betty!"

His voice echoed into silence. He shot a frightened glance at his uncle. Then he ran up the stairs to the second floor. In moments he had looked into each room, and always the result was the same. Finally he came downstairs again, as Jason Grant walked in from the rear of the first floor.

"She's not down here, Hal!"

"And she's not upstairs—she must have left the house!"

Jason Grant grabbed his arm. "Think man, when she spoke to you on the phone—did she say anything besides being attacked . . ."

Hal nodded dully. "She mentioned a name. Marta. But my creation didn't have—"

His voice broke off as a stunning realization hit him. He stared wildly at his uncle, and saw the same look of incredulous fear in the older man's eyes.

"Marta?" Jason Grant whispered the name. "Remember what I was telling you—remember Marta Boronna! Good Lord—"

Hal shook his head wildly. "But that's impossible! She said it was the body I created in my laboratory!"

"But she called it Marta!" Jason Grant shot back. "Why, man? Why unless—"

"I remember now!" Hal broke in tensely. "She was talking to someone else just before the line went dead! She said something about dawn approaching and she was coming—she mentioned the name Marta again! . . ."

Silence fell between the two men then. And their eyes locked in a look of disbelief. A look that gradually changed to one of horror.

It was Jason Grant who finally broke the silence. And when he spoke it was as if he were speaking to himself, his voice coming in a monotone of jerky thoughts.

"The dawn . . . of course! Marta Boronna was released—she found the body in your laboratory—she must return to her tomb before the sun—"

His voice ended abruptly. His eyes stared fixedly into Hal's.

"And Betty's gone!" the words ripped from Hal Grant's lips.

"We've got to hurry!" Jason Grant exclaimed. "She didn't take her car—we may still get there ahead of them!"

And with a sense of dread, Hal knew what his uncle meant. There was a tomb. A mausoleum in the Kenton cemetery. And in the mausoleum a coffin . . .

The two men left the house, running for the waiting automobile.

THEIR feet moved in rustling sounds across the damp grass of the cemetery. They moved side by side, their bodies touching, their eyes alert, tense and watchful.

The moon was setting in the distant sky. Its light a faint silvery path of iridescence.

Tombstones rose gaunt and naked in the dissipating night around them. And a soft wind, heralding the approaching dawn, whispered mockingly through the trees.

And then they both saw it ahead of them. Hal Grant fixed his eyes on it, and felt a tightness in his throat.

The mausoleum. Ghostly stone rearing its head through the shadows. A squat structure of death and foreboding.

Beside him, he heard Jason Grant whisper, "Look! The door is closed—we're here in time!"

They advanced upon the shrouded tomb and Jason Grant stepped up to

the grilled metal door. He pulled a key from his pocket and inserted it in the lock of the tomb. There was a rasping sound as the door opened then.

They stood on the threshold for a moment, staring into the musty interior of the mausoleum. And as they stared, Hal's eyes fastened on a wedge-shaped piece of wood lying on the floor just inside the door. Jason Grant stepped around him and picked up the stake. Then he walked into the mausoleum and Hal followed him.

They stood finally before the coffin of Marta Boronna. They looked through the murky shadows, breathing in the damp, musty air. Only the sound of their breathing broke the stillness now. And each breath they took had an odd weirdness about it.

Hal stared at the open coffin. Stared at the crookedly placed lid, hanging on an angle over the casket. A chill gripped him then. And he heard his uncle's voice beside him. Heard again the low monotone of sound from Jason Grant's lips.

"You may have a new body, Marta Boronna, but I'll drive this stake into your heart—and this time when you die, I'll do what should have been done decades ago . . ."

As Jason Grant's words trailed off, Hal stared at him. He looked at the stake in his uncle's trembling fingers. And then suddenly he remembered.

"The body, Uncle Jason—you can't kill it with a stake—"

Jason Grant turned to him in the murky light of the tomb. His voice came grimly. "This may seem like witch craft, Hal. But I know the truth—even if you refuse to believe it. The only thing that will end the life of this vampire is a stake through the heart . . ."

"But that's what I mean," Hal's voice whispered insistently. "The body I created has no *heart!* It's only flesh and bone—it's—"

Hal's voice died away as a sound crept through the greying night outside the tomb. He gripped his uncle's arm in warning and they turned to face the door of the mausoleum.

Outside they saw a vague shadow move. Then they both moved silently into a corner of the chamber, their eyes fixed in weird fascination on the open door.

A gust of wind eddied through the opening, swirling dry, scuttling leaves before it. And then the shadow loomed larger. It blocked the open door, a silhouette of greyness. And then it moved into the tomb, and a sharp cry locked itself in Hal Grant's throat.

It was Betty Starrett.

HAL'S eyes stared at her in a grim fascination. The girl was clad in a thin housecoat. Underneath it he could see she was wearing pajamas. Her feet were moving slowly forward into the tomb, scraping across the stone floor, her slippers making a scuffling slide of sound.

Beside him, Hal felt the tight fingers of Jason Grant close around his arm as he started to rise. He tensed then, in his crouched position, watching, his breath a barely audible sound.

"We are here . . . Marta . . . you must hurry . . . the dawn . . ."

Hal heard the dull words leave the girl's lips. She spoke as if she were in a trance. And her feet moved toward the coffin of Marta Boronna as if guided by some unseen hands.

Then the girl stopped. She stood in the murky light a few feet away from them, her back to them, swaying uncertainly on her feet.

In the sudden complete silence Hal felt the cry locked in his throat starting to slip out. He wanted to rush to his feet, gather the girl in his arms, shake the evil power that was holding

her from her body.

But he didn't move. He crouched in the grey light of the tomb, feeling the fingers of his uncle tighten again on his arm.

And then there was another sound. A sound that brought a chill of fear to Hal Grant's soul. It was the same sound he had heard on the telephone when he had talked to Betty. It was a wail, a low, moaning sound that rose on the early morning wind.

He felt Jason Grant tremble beside him in sudden tension. And then, as he looked back to the door of the tomb, Hal saw another shadow moving through the grey light.

Once again there was a rustle of swirling leaves in the tomb entrance. And then the shadow loomed into the opening, and stood there.

Hal's eyes bulged in amazement as he saw the shadowed contours of the body he had created in his laboratory that very day. He saw the long flowing hair falling down over bared shoulders. And the sound came again.

From the lips of the synthetic body it came. A weird wail of eerie tones.

And then the body moved into the tomb, advanced slowly upon the swaying figure of Betty Starrett. Advanced with upraised arms.

"We are in time, Betty Starrett. But we must hurry. Have no fears. You will feel no pain. Your life will ebb and you will be free. Your body will then be mine . . ."

Beside Hal, Jason Grant rose to his feet with a hoarse cry. He stepped forward, the stake raised over his head.

"Stop! You fiend—I'll send you back to the hell you came from!"

The words were a sharp cry, and then Hal was on his feet, tensing his body for a lunge forward.

The creature turned in shocked surprise. And as the two men took their

first steps toward it, a harsh laughter broke through the tomb, echoing hollowly.

One arm pointed toward Jason Grant and the older man stopped in his tracks, the stake still held grotesquely over his head. Hal took one more step forward, and then felt a pair of glowing eyes fasten on his.

He stared into the face of the body he had made, into a pair of eyes that seemed to swell and envelop him. He tried to tear his gaze away, but couldn't. And as he stared, a numbness seemed to creep through him, and his feet refused to move across the floor. His arms dropped to his sides like leaden weights, and he stood swaying on his feet, suddenly incapable of movement.

The laughter came again.

"Fools! So you know my secret! You who made this body I now possess! Well, it will avail you little! You will die like the others . . . but not before I possess the body of this girl!"

Her eyes burned into Hal's. "It is unfortunate that you could not have created a living body for me. And you," she turned her burning gaze at Jason Grant, "are fool enough to think your stake can end my life? Do you not know the body I possess has no heart?" the laughter came again, a triumphant sound that echoed in Hal Grant's ears. "There is nothing that can destroy me now! The world will learn of me—I have a score to settle with all mortal beings! I was killed as a vampire many years ago—but now I am free! Watch closely before you both die!"

THE creature turned from them then and advanced once more upon the swaying figure of the girl.

Hal Grant's eyes followed the slow deliberate movements as the body moved closer to the girl, as the arms of

the creature upraised, and the lips opened and white teeth flashed in the grey light.

He fought then. His mind roared with the force of his will. He must break the trance that held him. *He must break it!*

Time stood still then. And the thought pulsed through him, set his blood throbbing in his temples. And slowly his hand moved. Slowly, and then faster. It closed around a bottle in his coat pocket, and then it withdrew. Sweat stood out in cold beads on his brow as he forced his other hand to move.

Then his fingers closed around a glass stopper in the bottle. There was a grating sound as the stopper came away and fell with a clatter of sound to the stone floor.

The creature turned abruptly as its arms reached out to enfold the girl's swaying body. Its glowing eyes fastened on Hal Grant's fingers, swept up in startled fear to his face.

Hal felt those glowing orbs fasten on his. He knew that in a moment he would be engulfed by the terrible power of those eyes.

With every facet of his mind he willed his hands to move. Upward, out. Upward, out.

Slowly they moved. And as they moved, the creature let a cry of fear slip from its lips. The eyes burned a hypnotic force at Hal Grant.

But they were too late.

Hal's hands shot outward suddenly, and a spray of liquid left the bottle.

It engulfed the synthetic body and there was a sudden hissing sound. A cry of agony left the creature's lips and it staggered backward. Then the hissing grew in volume and wisps of smoke puffed from the flesh under the reacting liquid.

The smoke grew denser, obscuring

the body, and tiny licking flame tongues leaped through the grey light of the tomb.

Then the hissing faded away and the smoke vanished.

Hal Grant stared at a small wavering mass of ash in the air before him. Then even that dissipated. Until there was nothing.

Nothing but a distant wail. A tortured sound of a lost soul. An agony of sound that receded into the abyss of eternity.

And silence.

A hoarse sob brought Hal Grant to his senses. He wheeled, seeing the figure of Betty Starrett collapsing to the floor. He reached out with his arms and caught the girl's falling body. Then he held her close to him.

"It's all over, Betty. You're all right now. It's all over . . ."

Beside him, he saw Jason Grant wiping his brow with his hand. There was a dull look in the man's eyes, a look of disbelief.

The girl stirred in Hal's arms.

"I knew what was going on—oh, Hal, it was terrible! I couldn't control my body . . ."

"I know," he said gently. "But it's all over. You're safe. She's destroyed forever."

Jason Grant's voice came hoarsely. "But how . . ."

Hal smiled grimly. "I dissolved her. I carried a chemical reacting agent in my pocket . . . an old habit of mine . . ."

The girl stirred in his arms, her eyes tearful. "It was horrible, that creature . . ."

Hal nodded and tightened his grip around her. "I know, Betty, but I've learned that you can't dabble with science—like I did. Man wasn't meant to learn such things . . ."

"Then you won't experiment again? You'll join your uncle, and you and I

will—”

“If Uncle Jason still wants me, yes.
I promise you.”

And beside them, Jason Grant
sighed, relief and sudden content in
his eyes as he smiled down at them.

THE END