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**Invaders  
From Sirius**

by **ED EARL REPP**

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# *SHE WALKED ALONE*

by  
JOHN RUSSELL FEARN

First published *Fantastic Adventures*, July 1939.

*“Don’t kill it!” my wife screamed as the bat-thing flew at me. Why should she prefer the life of a monster to my own? What horrible secret did she hold?*

I met Elaine Dodd for the first time in a country road in the Mid-west of America. She was seated on a grass bank at the side of the road, trying to do something with the heel of her shoes. In a moment or two my swinging walk brought me to her. I paused, surveying her with all a young man’s ardent admiration.

For a few moments she did not seem to notice me and I stood taking in the slim attractiveness of her figure in its flimsy summer dress.

“Trouble?” I volunteered at last; and she looked up. For the first time I saw her face.

How am I to describe it to you? Can you imagine a face which is both young and beautiful, and yet unaccountably tragic? Conceive it as I saw it—satin smooth, with regular features and provocative lips, and with eyes which though so intensely blue, were yet the mirrors of a soul ridden with unspeakable despair. They looked at me through a mask like eyes out of a dream. I felt I was looking into her very being, onto the unexplained.

“I think,” she said gently, in the oddest, far-away voice, “that my shoe heel has come off.”

Shoe heel! So mundane a thing! I was jerked back to the prosaic and took the slim creation of soft leather she held out to me. Sure enough the heel had come off, ripped clean—but the nails were still there. In another moment I had my hiker’s kit in the dust and pulled out a wad of tools. I guess my cobbling was pretty raw, but I did get the reward of her strange eyes as she tested her weight on the heel.

“Thank you so much. I rather thought I’d have to hop all the way home—back there . . .” She jerked her golden head to nowhere in particular; unless it was that great solitary residence I could see in the middle distance. Then she turned to look at me questioningly.

“Douglas Ward’s the name,” I volunteered, buckling my pack on again. “Lawyer in an up-and-coming way. Right now I’m on a hike; that’s my idea of a vacation.”

“Alone?” she murmured.

I nodded slowly, wondering what made me say, “At present—yes . . .”

“Strange,” she smiled. “In this modern world of 1960 there are so many things one can do that make for company; so many friends one can have. And yet you, like me, choose to walk alone . . .”

I reflected that I could not imagine why a girl so lovely and altogether desirable should walk alone, unless it was because a genial destiny had singled her out especially for me. Presumption? I am not so sure. I think you would have thought the same thing in my place.

“Maybe we have common interests?” I suggested.

She hesitated at that, then— Well, why must I dwell on the wealth of detail? We started to walk together. She explained that her home was indeed the one I had noticed, that she had lived there all her life—alone. Queer, such a rambling old place for such a young person. She

had been out for a walk—as usual, alone. This was the first time she had spoken to a stranger for many years. Servants she had in plenty.

She stimulated my interest enormously. And those eyes of hers. . . . She was something more than just a girl. With the vaguest hint of hesitancy she told me her name was Elaine Dodd. I did not quite know at the time whether to believe it or not. Anyway, her name did not matter.

There was something rapturous about that walking with her down the long dusty road. There were no harsh sounds, no whirl and rumble of the city; only the sighing of the warm breeze, the twitter of birds, the faint hum of insects. The sky was unbroken blue—blue as Elaine's eyes. The sun shone through her hair and turned it to a golden halo.

"Life," she said, "is so precious . . ." And she said it with such unwonted somberness, with such wealth of meaning, that I record it here in the hope it will impress you as it did me.

But that hint of tragedy? Why did she walk alone? That puzzled me immensely, but to all my carefully placed questions she had an evasive answer. But I did begin to feel she liked me. . . .

Later, I was sure of it.

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We were married two weeks after our first meeting. It was one of those whirlwind romances, and yet we were both in deadly earnest about it. I still had plenty of vacation left, and I had done pretty well in business, so we spent our honeymoon flying to different countries by swift air routes. . . . Throughout that honeymoon my love for Elaine deepened, even if I did not fully understand her even then.

She was, I found, unselfish, impulsively generous, given to intensely serious moods for no apparent reason; and yet I always felt there was something deep down inside her that wanted to find expression and could not. Try as I would I could not thoroughly focus her in my mentality. She gave me the impression of being fanatically determined to enjoy herself at all costs, and that demanded plenty of money. At least she had that. . . . Funny, but she was like a butterfly clinging to an ephemeral day.

I must admit to being astounded when she suddenly decided to cut short our honeymoon by three days. She suddenly became almost frantic in her insistence that we return to America, to her isolated home in the Middle West. Rather disappointedly I agreed, secretly disturbed at the haggard lines of anxiety that had come to her young face. Nor did those lines vanish throughout the journey home. She hardly spoke to me at all; and even when we reached her great rambling place in the country she was anything but sociable.

I had seen her home before of course; a legacy, I understood, from her parents. It was one of the few old-world residences left in the land. It was big and rambling, with monstrous cold rooms, vast expanses of grounds, and a staff of servants who seemed as mute as the grave except on domestic matters. A leathery old gnome by the name of Murdoch was the chief butler. In a way I liked him—but I did not like the house. It gave me the creeps. For the life of me I could not figure out why Elaine preferred to live in it. . . .

We were seated at dinner when I felt explanations were due.

"Just why did you cut things off dead when we were having a good time?" I asked her bluntly.

She looked up at me over the long length of table, gave a shadowy smile that somehow looked ghastly. Her face had gone incredibly wan. Then suddenly she got to her feet and came around to me, laid a hand on my arm.

"Douglas, you do love me, don't you?" she asked, very quietly.

"But of course I do!"

"Enough to trust me when I do not explain things which puzzle you?"

"I'm only a man, Elaine," I said simply. "I have my curiosities; my jealousies, if you like. . . . You're my wife. Some things, I know, are forever yours—but other things should be shared. Your behavior in the recent hours needs explaining. Why did you come back to this gloomy old dump? Why don't you come to town and let me fix up a good apartment? Sell this place!"

"No, dearest. . . . I can't do that." There was adamant decision in every line of her drawn face.

"Then what *is* the matter?" I insisted. "If you're ill, let me fetch a doctor. You look pale, over-anxious. . . ."

"I'm not ill. Just a bit tired. . . ."

"It's this damned place!" I exploded. "It's depressing! It must affect your health . . . !"

I wondered why she smiled at that. I thought of the noise and lights of the city I loved, glanced around the barren, looming walls of the dining room. I did not want to be annoyed with Elaine, Heaven knows, but after all— Impatiently, I got up from my chair and strolled to the window, pulled back the curtain and stood staring out on the rising moon. I could feel Elaine's eyes upon my back.

"Elaine," I said slowly, without looking at her, "please try to see it my way! There's nothing here for us. Look at this view! We're shut away from the world! Open country, moonlight—"

"It's hideous!" she cried suddenly, in such a vicious tone that I swung round.

"What? The moonlight?"

"Yes—the moonlight. Everything!" All of a sudden she was worked up again, started pacing to and fro with one slender fist thumping into her left palm. "Why, of all women on earth, should this have to fall to me," she breathed, half aloud. "Why should I have to just snatch at life instead of enjoying it to the full? Why should—" She broke off, aware of my astonished gaze. Slowly she came toward me.

"Douglas, I thought when I found you that you at least would understand," she said, low-voiced. "I thought you would accept me without asking questions—that you would love me for love's own sake. God knows, love is what I need more than anything else in the world. . . . Ask nothing, my dearest, and accept as much as I am prepared to give. Strange bargain, perhaps, but . . . *Please!*"

It was not possible for me to snap out a cold refusal when confronted with that beseeching look. I could sense something in her manner that was unbearably tragic; something that matched her anguished eyes. She stood waiting for me to speak; I could see she was trembling.

Gently I put an arm round her quivering shoulders.

"I make only one condition," I said quietly. "Someday, when you are ready, when it no longer matters, you will explain?"

"I promise," she whispered, her lips dry.

I did not tell her that I had made up my mind to probe to the very bottom of the mystery surrounding her. Nothing, I avowed, could so hold Elaine in bondage without answering to me. She was mine now. . . . Mine!

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When we retired for the night I had made up my mind to keep awake to see if anything untoward happened. Somehow I felt instinctively that something *would* happen. Whether it was the general ghostliness of the old house or Elaine's distraught, inexplicable mood I do not know.

But I do know that I failed in my good intentions. Perhaps it was the traveling, or else the heavy meal I had eaten: anyway, I found sleep claiming me irresistibly. Once or twice I did awake, too comfortable to move, and was conscious in these intervals of strange impressions.

The moonlight was streaming full into the bedroom through the partly drawn curtains, and on one wakeful occasion I was convinced that I saw Elaine's slender form silhouetted, fully dressed, against the radiance as she gazed out into the night. I was about to speak when she moved away. Again I must have slept, aware through a blur of dreams of whispered words close by my ear, one sentence of which I could clearly distinguish. . . .

“. . . pray God that you will never know, my dearest. Trust in me—always! With that trust I may yet live, as I am entitled to live . . .”

Those words haunted my troubled slumber all through the night, and the next morning I questioned her about them over the breakfast table. But she swore I must have dreamed them; the effect of our conversation the previous night, perhaps?

I knew otherwise, but I did not argue with her. She was in a happier mood again, her eyes bright once more, even though the tragic look had not gone out of them. But at least her morose preoccupation and nervousness had left her. Maybe it was wrong of me, but as I sat tacitly studying her I dared to wonder if she took drugs. Had I, by some chance, married a girl addicted to weed chewing or something?

Damned silly notion! Annoyed with myself I left by fast car for the airport five miles away, intent on my first day's return to business. And thereafter for two months I found Elaine her old cheerful self. I forgot my original fears and suspicions and imagined she had probably had a fit of nerves or something. Several times she came with me to the city. We did numberless things; but no power of my devising could talk her into leaving that rambling old house in the wilds. Even to the expense of traveling she turned a deaf ear—so I gave it up.

It was two months to the day when I returned home an hour earlier than normal. Business transactions had finished sooner than usual and the remembrance that the car had behaved badly in the morning made me anxious to have time in hand in case it broke down going home from the airport. Sure enough it did, in the village.

I left it at the garage and set out to walk the remaining two miles home, arriving as the short autumnal dusk was settling upon the landscape. I could not imagine why, but my soul was weighed down with a grim, somber gloom. I felt a sudden aridness in the whole business of living; an intense fear for Elaine. . . . Then it passed. I decided it was the general heaviness of the air and the sight of that grim old house limned against the western sun.

Half way along the broad drive leading between the trees to the house itself I stopped dead, astounded to behold Elaine's head and shoulders, apparently disappearing into the ground two hundred yards ahead of me between the trees. It was a startling sight in that cold, pallid twilight. I dodged behind a clump of bushes and watched her entirely disappear.

I cautiously advanced to where she had disappeared and found myself looking into a black opening with eroded stone steps below it. I hesitated a moment, then with infinite care stepped down them, crept softly into a pitchy darkness to find myself in a tunnel about six feet high and four broad. At the far end of it was a line of yellow light.

I listened, straining every nerve; could hear faint sounds.

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After a long wait I moved toward that yellow line with cotton wool quietness, noting as I went that the main tunnel had several smaller ones leading off it, handy for sudden concealment, anyway. . . . I reached the yellow bar at last and found it to be the light from two candles streaming through the crack between partly closed teak door and frame. Beyond was a cavernous dungeon, its walls glistening with mildew.

And there was Elaine, busily cleaning out a series of bowls like those used for goldfish. Around the bowls were instruments which I easily recognized as chemical retorts, burners, and similar paraphernalia. She worked with exacting precision, obviously determined that each bowl should be immaculate.

From this enigma my eyes wandered to something else by the far wall. I nearly betrayed my concealment with a sudden cry of horrified amazement. There in a glass case exactly fitting his body like a coffin, standing upright with his arms at his sides, was a man. He seemed to be clothed in leather jacket and breeches like an air-pilot—but his waxlike face and coldly staring, unblinking eyes told me in an instant that he was dead. And unquestionably he was human and not a model. What damnable alchemy was my wife engaged in?

Once or twice as she worked she glanced across at him—but there was no horror in her eyes, rather an immense tenderness and sadness. Even a faint smile plucked the corners of her mouth. Elaine, *my* Elaine, full of compassion for that embalmed thing? Rage, fear and horror all tried to get the mastery of me, but before I could take any action or burst in upon her demanding explanations she came to the end of her cleaning.

She looked once round the cavern, blew out one candle and picked up the other, headed for the door. Instantly I fled like the wind to the nearest tunnel and concealed myself.

She passed by the tunnel mouth, totally unaware of my presence, the flame of her candle flickering in the draft and sending bobbing shadows along the curved walls. I heard her footfalls recede, then there was a soft thud which proclaimed the lowering of a stone over the external opening.

Breathing hard, I yanked out matches and made my way to the teak door. To my surprise it was wide open. I had expected it to be impregnable locked? Was she going to return or was it left thus for somebody else? I did not know. I entered the dungeon slowly and lit the solitary candle, stood looking round.

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The first thing I did was go to that glass case. The man inside it was flesh and blood all right, but he was preserved in the most flawless state. Somehow, as I stood there contemplating those firm, strong lips, fearless blue eyes, and shock of crisp fair hair—yes, crisp even in death—I was no longer afraid. Instead I was filled with admiration and suddenly conscious of my own shortcomings. Here was a man who had been young, intelligent, and a conqueror of unknown lands perhaps . . .

But how he came to be preserved like this? That was something beyond even the masterful science of 1960.

I moved away and looked at the workbench, at the immaculate bowls and apparatus. But there was no clue, and being no chemist, I could not understand the inscriptions on the bottles. There was nothing else save a chair and— My eye alighted on something on the wall, a huge blueprint transfixed with stainless drawing-pins to a drawing board.

The more I studied it by the light of the spitting candle the more puzzled I got—for it looked exactly like the theoretical designs I had seen from time to time of possible space ships

of the future. The firing tubes were there in the design, the control room, the sleeping quarters. . . . Everything!

A space ship? Was it possible that Elaine had somehow been into space? Done something still two hundred or more years ahead? I suddenly recalled her bitter declamation of moonlight . . . Then the man in the case? For me the puzzle was assuming fantastic proportions, the place of honor of that blueprint and the elaborate efforts to keep it free of mildew and stain made it a dominant factor. But on the other hand, if Elaine *had* been into space why did not the whole world know of it? Had something she had seen in space given her that look of tragic horror? So I stood there speculating on high-flown theories, but gradually becoming certain of one thing. She *had* been into space—and something malignant was after her. That was it! It was something that demanded the presence of those glass bowls.

Queer how I talked myself into that belief; and yet how natural an assumption! I knew now why she would not leave this old house; at least that was one mystery cleared up! And it was certain that on that other night two months ago she had been down here. She *had* said those words to me in the night . . . Trust in her always! Trust *this*! For the first and last time in my life I felt an overwhelming hatred against her. Then it died. She was, I was convinced, enslaved by something against her will. Finally I resolved that I would say nothing but act when the moment arrived. This very night perhaps! And I would not go to sleep. On that other occasion Murdoch must have drugged my coffee.

I left everything exactly as I had found it, emerged from under the stone into the cold darkness of the night. It was about time for me to arrive home in the ordinary way in any case . . .

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I soon discovered that Elaine was back in one of her jittery moods, just as she had been when she had cut our honeymoon off short. I pretended not to notice her gloominess, her lack of conversation over dinner, the inhuman paleness of her face. I observed that her hands were trembling violently as she held her knife and fork. She ate little. Murdoch brought the coffee, but by various surreptitious methods I got rid of mine without Elaine noticing. Remembering my symptoms on the last occasion I began to feign an increasing weariness, aware all the time that her tragedy-ridden eyes were watching me with feverish brightness.

"I think," I said at last, getting up and stifling a yawn, "I'll go ahead to bed. Had a pretty heavy day today."

"Yes . . . Yes, I'm tired, too." She said that rather hurriedly; too hurriedly to be convincing.

So we retired. But by this time I was all keyed up, thoroughly alert, my heavy breathing only a disguise for my half closed eyes as I watched her bed next to mine. The light of the full moon once again shafted between partly drawn curtains. Outside the night air was dank and oppressive.

I felt again that grim premonition of the afternoon. Something was ahead of Elaine—I was convinced of it. I lay watching her twisting and turning incessantly, whether from over-anxiety or actual physical pain I could not determine.

Evidently she was quite convinced I was asleep for she started talking to herself in a low voice.

". . . and the waiting—the endless waiting. The eternal hours. If he should not come this time of all others; what then? That life should hang by a thread because I have dared to do what no other woman has ever done . . . Why should it be so . . . Why? There must come a surcease from this endless struggle . . ."



I forgot to breathe deeply in the surprise of my listening. She turned abruptly to regard me. I managed a cough, a grunt, then I rolled over with my back to her and started to breathe heavily again. It was damned annoying because now I could not see what she was doing . . .

At long last she was plainly satisfied I was asleep for I heard her clamber out of bed. I could hear her dressing with swift, soft movements. I lay with my eyes wide open staring at the opposite wall—and for the briefest moment I saw a mighty black shadow cross the wall like the silhouette of a bat. From somewhere outside . . .

My heart was beating fast now. There had been something other-worldly about that shadow— The door closed softly. Elaine had left the room. In twenty seconds I was dressed, opened the door, and hurried out into the passage. Then I stopped as lights gushed on and old Murdoch stood there, also fully dressed, an automatic in his gnarled hand.

“What in— What the hell’s the idea?” I bellowed at him. “Put that thing down, man! Help me to find my wife—”

“It’s better you don’t try and find her, sir—just yet.” His voice was still respectful, but very firm. His dark eyes watched me intently from his parchment of face. “You’re not leaving this corridor while I am here, Mr. Ward.”

“Just what is all this about?” I asked him bitterly. “What’s the matter with my wife? What is the secret that’s wrecking our lives? Don’t you realize man that I’ve got to know? I’ve got to!”

“I can’t tell you anything, sir. She will herself later on, I don’t doubt. As God’s my judge, sir, it’s better that you find out nothing! Leave her just this night— Then there will be no more secrets.”

“You bet there won’t!” I roared suddenly—and lashing up my fist with all my power I snapped his jaws together like a rat-trap. He dropped heavily to the floor.

I did not hesitate an instant. Snatching up his gun for my own use I pelted down the wide staircase, but to my amazement the rest of the staff had emerged from unexpected quarters. Lights blazed on; but I was ready this time. With my gun leveled I forced the lot of them into the kitchen regions, slammed and bolted the heavy old door upon them. Then I was out in the dark grounds, ploughing through sodden leaves and broken branches to that trapdoor stone. With some difficulty I found it, wrenched it up, and tumbled down into the tunnel. I took five paces toward the yellow light at the tunnel end—then I stopped in my tracks with my skin prickling as though electrified.

Something inhuman, ungodly was in the tunnel in front of me! I saw it come sweeping up against the yellow at the end. The reflected light shone into two green circles of blazing fire that I confusedly interpreted as tigerlike eyes. I was aware of an intense, overwhelming cold that struck to my very bones.

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Never have I known terror so complete and awful. Unsupported, touching neither roof nor ceiling, the black horror sailed toward me. I had a vision of something that appeared to be half-octopus and half-bat—then I was fighting for my life in the midst of smothering, leathery folds.

God, how I fought! I fired the automatic time and again, blindly, staving off the death I knew was trying to reach me. I felt frightful claws miss my vitals by inches; my hand stung suddenly under the impact of merciless teeth. From somewhere the voice of Elaine was screaming—in a strange language! Only one word stood out amongst the jargon—

Ulsifa! I had not the least conception what it meant. Then she was imploring me.

“Douglas, don’t! Don’t kill—! Don’t!”

Don’t kill! She wished that I should die and let this thing be victorious? Her voice came again, hoarse with anguish.

“Ulsifa! Ulsifa—!”

Her voice broke off in a sobbing moan as my last bullet found a vital spot. I staggered to one side, drenched suddenly in yellow fluid. The vile thing flapped weakly, released me, sank down like a deflated bladder to the tunnel floor.

Dizzy, smothered in cloying moisture, my hand lacerated pretty badly, I staggered to the doorway of the candle-lit dungeon. I stood looking at Elaine, nursing my hand. She was slumped in speechless despair in the solitary chair, her head buried in her arms as she rested them on the chemical bench. Her shoulders were shaking with spasmodic sobs.

“Elaine . . .” I whispered at last, “Elaine . . .”

“You fool!” she screamed suddenly, springing to her feet with eyes ablaze. “How did you ever find your way here? Why did you have to *come* here? Why didn’t you trust me? You didn’t have to kill Ulsifa.”

“It was that, or my own death,” I retorted.

Her anger died suddenly. With a face gone deathly white she stared in front of her. She reeled unsteadily as I caught her arm.

“Douglas,” she said, in a voice so low I could hardly hear it, “you have killed me . . . too!”

“I’ve what!” I shouted.

She sank down on the chair again.

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“How do I begin to make you understand?” she muttered. “Why did I not tell you in the first place—tell you that between me and death there lay two visits from Ulsifa? Now—it is too late!”

I caught her shoulders, forced her to look at me. I was afraid. I never saw anybody alive look so dead.

“Ulsifa was the only means I had of defeating death,” she went on tonelessly. “Elaine Dodd is not my real name. I’m Helen Burke—and the man in the case there is Ronald. He was my husband. This was our home. . . . On July 10, three years ago, we went to the moon. We went with a small crew; now they’re my domestic servants. . . .”

I glanced toward the blueprint on the wall.

“I never heard the name of Burke before, in that connection,” I said quietly.

“It was mentioned in the press once or twice; for that reason I changed it on returning to earth. Ronald was one of the cleverest scientists that ever lived—and for that very reason he was sensitive to ridicule. He kept his invention as secret as possible until it had been proven a success. Only intimate friends knew about it. . . . So we went to the moon. . . .”

“Oh, Douglas, I cannot begin to describe to you the horrors of space travel! I cannot detail the agonies we endured, or the even greater horrors we encountered in the deep, unplumbed caverns of the moon. Deep down in those caverns there is air of sorts. We got our ship down into one of them and were able to explore. It strained our lungs—but we managed. In the course of our adventures we were attacked by strange lunar insects, monstrous in size. Ronald died from the effects of venom, and I was pretty nearly gone too despite the efforts of our friends to put things right. Then I felt a sudden revival of energy. . . .”

Elaine paused and reflected, looked up at me steadily.

"A friendly creature, hideous in appearance but fairly intelligent and with the loyalty of a dog, had found us. Ulsifa was his name. I was frightened of him at first. . . . Then gradually I realized, as I began to understand his language, that he was the truest friend I had. He even hoped, one day, that union of earthly and selenite races might come about. . . . But most important of all he had the right antidote for the poison affecting me—a curious yellowish substance which he carried in a natural pouch on his body.

"Nature always devises ways and means to protect her creations, and Ulsifa's protection against the venom of his mortal enemy was a natural antidote for use when necessary. All his race was similarly equipped. The substance, which I found I had swallowed, had not entirely eliminated the poison, but it had at least temporarily stopped its ravages. . . ."

"Then?" I whispered, as she stopped.

"I found that in order to be thoroughly effective on flesh and blood the antidote needed refining chemically, a process I worked out with Ulsifa and the crew. My one hope of life lay in surviving long enough to refine some of the substance and having it in its raw state at two-monthly intervals. Only Ulsifa, of all his race, was prepared to help me. He, able to fly through the void and cold of space if need be, vowed he would come to Earth at two-monthly intervals and keep me alive while I worked the formula out with earthly chemicals.

"Then his first visit was when you cut our honeymoon short?" I asked quietly. "When you drugged me to sleep?"

She nodded drearily. "I had forgotten the date in the joy of our experiences; then suddenly I remembered. Ulsifa entered by one of the side tunnels and I left this door open for him. The side tunnels have an exit out in the fields. Tonight would have been his last visit. Everything was ready. Then you came! Ulsifa thought you were going to attack me. You fired a bullet into that antidote sac and . . . With it went my last hope of life. Look at the stuff—all over you!"

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I glanced down my smothered sleeves and suit. The stuff had caked in, was streaked in dye from my suit.

"Useless!" Elaine whispered.

"But—but where is this space ship of yours?" I cried suddenly. "Let me find another Ulsifa and—"

"There is no longer a space ship. We destroyed it when we came back, determined that nobody should ever endure what we had endured. Space is no place for a tiny experimental ship. It needs liners—the power of the future. It needs men of Herculean strength and endurance. . . . Not a woman.

"Oh, dearest, how truly I spoke when I said I walked alone. I knew I was facing death, but when I met you I resolved to take a chance and snatch at some of the good things of life in case Ulsifa failed to come. If I could keep my secret until the formula was worked out you would never have to know that you'd married a dying wreck, and not a woman. . . ."

"In Heavens' name, Elaine, why couldn't you have told me? I would have understood. Even as it was I found out—"

"I know," she said slowly. "But I was afraid you would misunderstand. I believed you would think I had married you as a last resort, and I did so want nothing to interfere with our love. . . ." She broke off and gave a hollow laugh. "So, I pay the price for curiosity," she sighed. "I gambled with death, Douglas; I tried to be a pioneer. Yes, I walked alone— And lost!"

Her voice stopped. She still sat there looking at me steadily. I began to feel my flesh creep a little. Not a movement of her face, not a tremor of her eyelids.

“Elaine!” I screamed suddenly. “Elaine—!”

But even as I seized her, frenziedly felt for her heart, I knew the truth. There was no heart-beat; no breathing. And yet her body looked alive. As I stood there looking dumbly at her dead, beautiful face I heard sounds behind me. I turned stupidly as old Murdoch came quietly in, the rest of the staff behind him.

He took one long look at the girl, then he compressed his lips and glanced at me.

“She told you?” he asked quietly.

“Everything,” I groaned. “If only I had known. . . . That thing in the passage there. Murdoch, we’ve got to do something! She’s got to be brought back to life—!”

He shook his gray head. “It’s all over, sir, and perhaps it is better so. I have seen space; I know too what she must have gone through. The mental and physical anguish. . . . Maybe she’s with *him* now. . . .”

“I have a letter signed by her, ordering in the event of her death that her body be placed beside her husband’s in a case, both of them to be turned over to science for examination if necessary. All the facts are given, and the blueprint is there for engineers to work out better schemes. That girl and her husband gave their lives in the cause of science, Mr. Ward. You married a very brave woman. . . .”

“Of which the world knows next to nothing!” I breathed. “I shall never rest until the facts are given. Never!”

Slowly, still dazed, I turned toward the dungeon doorway.

THE END

[The end of *She Walked Alone* by John Russell Fearn]