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An Amazing Complete Novel

DONOVAN HAD A DREAM

By JAMES MacCREIGH

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The Tongue Cannot Tell

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

John Latimer came back from the Moon—but what he saw there proved to be too alien for man's understanding!



SO MUCH had been said, written and theorized about John Latimer and by comparison, so little about Elspeth Dawes, that this one account may well begin with her—begin in the parlor of her New York apartment at mid-afternoon on June 18 of last year, which year

already bears in sensational journals the awesome title of the Year of the Conquest of Space.

She sat, serene and fine-chiselled and gray-eyed, by a table littered with tea-things. Her natural and constant dignity made her seem taller and older than the was. From across the table gazed Michael Stone like a handsome and adoring hound.

"I wouldn't suggest that I was better than John, or more worthy or attractive," he was saying, "but you need somebody to take care of you."

She smiled, showing none of the weariness she felt, and reminded him that he had said the same thing every day for months.

"Since last June," nodded Michael. "Since the anniversary of the day John kissed you goodbye and got into his rocket and fired himself away toward Mars. Now another year is gone. Two years in all. You know he'll never come back and marry you."

She touched his hand, a motherly gesture, though Michael was older than she. "Don't think I'm not flattered, darling. But I don't love you."

"That would come," pronounced Michael confidently. Many women would jump at the chance to love him and he knew it.

Elspeth tilted back her head in one of the reveries he found both charming and baffling.

"Two years. I wanted to go in that rocket. So did Dr. Vinkelmann and the others. There was room for two—more than two—but John flew away alone."

"He had a fixation on all the glory of the flight," burst out Michael. "Lord, Elspeth! When you told him you loved him how could he leave you, even if all the planets were solid gold?"

She chose to consider that a rhetorical question. "I watched at the Mount Wilson telescope," she went on. "The rocket sailed by the Moon, then curved behind it and never came out again. It was never seen to crash."

"It must have finished him," argued Michael. "Not one of the Earth-Mars or Earth-Venus attempts ever went so near the Moon for fear of just such a crash. Even if John survived a fall like that, how long would he last without air?"

She looked at him once and there was silence until the telephone's ring broke it. Elspeth picked up the instrument.

"Yes," she said. "Oh. How are you, Dr. Vinkelmann? . . . What?" Her voice rose in sharp protest at some unthinkable news. "No! You're joking. That—that's impossible!"

Michael started up. "What's happened? Can I help?"

"You—you've seen him?" Elspeth was saying into the telephone. "Actually seen him? You swear that? Thank God, thank God!"

She set the telephone down and sat there. She did not move, nor did she appear to see or hear until Michael touched her shoulder. Then she rose and moved almost violently away from him.

"John's rocket has landed at the Staten Island port," she said. "He's alive. He's safe."

Contemporary newspapers tell about the excitement over John Latimer's return, the gathering of scientists, reporters and throngs of the curious. They report fully on the returned voyager. The photographs reveal him as dressed in tattered garments, marble-white and marble-quiet, looking at nothing. When he did not reply to questions his inter-



Elspeth stooped quickly and caught up the severed bolt head

viewers were piqued and made a mystery of it.

"His eyes," said one eloquent rewrite man, "appeared to hold viewpoints of their own, beyond and above the city and everybody in it." Twice he refused to speak into radio microphones that were thrust into his very face. His longest vocal observation was to the mayor of New York, who came among the first.

"It's not worth this trouble," he said gently. "May I go to a hotel?" And police

escorted him to one. He registered and went to his room. Presumably he slept. Elspeth telephoned him seven times, Dr. Vinkelmänn nine. They got no answer.

IN THE morning of June 19 Dr. Vinkelmänn, bullying his way through a cordon of police and hotel employees, roused Latimer, dressed him in fresh clothes and hurried him in a taxi to Elspeth's apartment. During the night she had been miserable, then hysterical, then angry. Now she was

deliberately calm.

"Well, John." She greeted him with studied cordiality. "Home is the sailor."

He waited before answering, giving her nervousness time to steal back. Then, brightly, "Hello, Elspeth. How nice to see you." He might have been only an hour away. No, not that. He might have been centuries away, have forgotten her.

Abashed and hurt, Elspeth glanced at Dr. Vinkelmänn. The doctor's heavy moustache drooped and his pince-nez flashed sympathy over Latimer's shoulder. One stubby finger tapped a temple. But the dumb show was not convincing and Latimer did not look in the least demented.

"Two years. . . ." began Elspeth.

"So they tell me," nodded Latimer. "May I sit down?" He did so. "That's hard to believe. I figured a month at most." Then his lean face lighted with a triumphant grin.

"Oh, that's it. The lunar day's a month long. Twenty-four or five such days would be two terrestrial years, almost exactly." He looked from one to the other. "The lunar day," he said again, "is the length of a terrestrial month."

Vinkelmänn fiddled with his moustache. "You knew that long ago, John," he said.

"On the moon," replied Latimer, "you don't think of it. A day's a day, neither more nor less. That's why the time seems less than a month."

Elspeth, staring hard, realized that the change in him was as tremendous as it was undefinable.

To them, without much coaxing, he told his story. He told it casually save for certain perplexed pauses.

He said that he had felt languid during the flight from Earth and that his observations, vague and inaccurate, were not worth keeping or discussing. As he approached the Moon he realized that its gravity pull would catch him but he did not feel panic—nor was he greatly relieved that he did not die at the end of the fall. As his course curved he did study, with some reawakening of natural curiosity, that rear half of the Moon that man had never seen before.

"The early flights that smashed on the Moon hit the airless side we see from here," he reminded them, "and flights beyond have been made only when the Moon was not near at hand to observe. Now, from behind. . ." He paused. "The Moon's like a bitten apple, shown best side out. From Earth it looks

round." Again he paused. "But it isn't."

"Isn't?" repeated Vinkelmänn. "How do you mean?"

"A bite's gone, I say. A great chunk, a big crater on the other side. Perhaps a thousand miles across and fully half as deep."

That was not so unfamiliar a concept as to surprise either Vinkelmänn or Elspeth. The doctor's moustache began to bristle.

"Of course!" he cried. "When the Moon was still soft Earth pulled the Moon's center by power of gravity—"

"And the rear surface caved in to match," added Elspeth, proud to cap a scientific theory properly.

"Then the Moon's gravity would be greater at the bottom of that hole so close to its center," continued Vinkelmänn. "Just as in the old fanciful stories, eh? There might be atmosphere—water—even life!"

"There are," Latimer informed him calmly. "All three."

They stared and he continued with no apparent sense of shocking them. He explained that the ship had gone out of control as it struck and that he had sprained wrist and knee. He had lain for some minutes, then opened the hatch and crawled out.

"But the atmosphere," broke in Vinkelmänn anxiously. "You did not test it."

"I didn't bother," said Latimer.

"That's not like you, John," scolded Vinkelmänn.

"Anyway," said Latimer, "I could breathe it."

Elspeth was feeling faint and light as though some terrible danger impended, ready to loosen itself at the very sound of Latimer's voice.

"You saw the living Moon," she prompted tensely. "What was it like?"

For the first time Latimer scowled as he fell silent. At length he shrugged a little, as in defeat.

"That I can't tell you," he said.

He did try to tell, tried hard. "It was. . ." he said, and again "It was—well, Elspeth calls it the living Moon. It lived. Very much it lived."

"Was it a jungle?" Vinkelmänn tried to prompt him, and Latimer caught at the word with a little nod and smile of thanks.

"That's something like it. It was jungly, in a way. Yet. . . ."

ANOTHER stop, like a child caught without having studied his lesson.

"You've seen the imaginative paintings of prehistoric forests? Or a tangle of pond-bottom weeds through a microscope?"

"It was like that?" said Vinkelmann.

Latimer shook his head. "I can't say. But I thought of both those things when first I got outside and looked around. The sky. . ."

"What color?" asked Elspeth.

He gazed at her with something of shy apology. "It was a new color."

"You mean, not in the spectrum?"

"Spectrum? No, not in that. Quite mild and clear. You should have seen it." He sighed. "Anyway, I made myself a crutch. . ."

"From the vegetation?" Vinkelmann was prompting him again.

"If it was vegetation. A stem, soft and strange. I could hobble on it. I started to explore." His eyes glowed briefly, as though crowded with wonders. Then they grew dull and once again he faltered.

"I'm afraid I'm no good. I wasn't prepared. Nobody could be prepared. We have only Earth words, coined to name and describe things of Earth. And this was the back of the Moon."

Vinkelmann tried again to help with questions and Latimer made progress for half a dozen exchanges before he grew inarticulate again. When Vinkelmann asked about animal life, Latimer mentioned things that flew.

"They floated like toy kites," he elaborated a little. Beyond that he could not or would not go, though he had seen them often and close at hand. Other things, clumsy and huge, lumbered on the ground surface.

"What were those things like?" put in Elspeth. "Elephants?"

"No," he fairly snapped, "they weren't like elephants. Wait, I'm sorry to be rude. But you can't question me. Speaking of elephants, remember about the blind men fumbling around and each one getting a different impression of the elephant? I was like that.

"Someone with me might have caught something else. Enough people with me might have done what the blind men did—gathered a number of details and put them together into something that could suggest a little of the truth. But those things—well, they didn't even walk."

"You said they moved through the jungle," Elspeth reminded him.

"I said nothing about jungle," he insisted. "I took the word jungly because it was the

best I could do and let me assure you it isn't good enough. As for the things, they didn't have legs. Not as we know legs. Nor heads as we know heads. I don't even know their substance. I can't describe it. Their shape—well, if I could draw. . ."

She brought pencil and paper. Latimer began to sketch a series of uneven curves, like a boy's crude impression of a cloud. Then he crumpled the sheet and threw it away.

"No good," he said. "How about lunch, you two?"

Vinkelmann tried to withdraw but Latimer insisted that he come along. It was a good lunch and Latimer ate as if starved.

"What food did you have on the Moon?" ventured Elspeth. Latimer laid down his fork and concentrated for a moment.

"I don't remember," he said then. "No, not exactly that." Another brief silence and he spoke with great earnestness. "You must try to understand that I'm different again. Earthy. Things that were clear on the Moon are vague here."

"You're certainly nothing like the John Latimer who flew away two years ago," she could not help saying.

"Naturally I'm not," he agreed solemnly. Yet again a pause, half diffident and half lofty. "It's a little as though I'd bobbed in and out of another dimension and still have some of it sticking to me."

Lunch over, Latimer paused at the cashier's desk to make change. Vinkelmann caught Elspeth's hand and spoke quickly and softly.

"I'm leaving you with him. Remember the important things he has said—that he is unable to make us understand in words we know the things he has experienced. He is terribly distressed. He has a mighty cargo of secrecy, and he cannot unload it. But you—he was your lover. Love is a great and wide language, and perhaps. . ."

Vinkelmann was gone. Latimer joined Elspeth. Together they returned to her apartment and Latimer spoke rather embarrassedly.

"I'm sorry we're alone. Because you're going to say something unpleasant."

Elspeth drew herself up, as though she expected cold rain to fall. "I may as well say it. Somebody—Michael Stone—wants to marry me."

Latimer seemed neither surprised nor worried. "Now that I know how long I was gone I wonder you didn't marry before this."

"You wouldn't have cared!" protested

Elspeth sharply.

He took her hand and with an impersonal kindness that made him seem old, drew her down beside him on the divan.

"I'm going to try again," he said. "Try to tell you about the Moon."

FOR the better part of an hour he talked, of colors unknown in any Earthly spectrum, of living, moving beings whose patterns of shape and behavior were unknown among Earthly creatures, of sounds and voices inimitable and indescribable. Sometimes he spoke swiftly and eloquently, sometimes with stumbling unease. Finally he smiled.

"Now do you understand?"

Slowly Elspeth shook her head. "I can't grasp it, John. Nature has another face unseen on Earth."

"It's not that simple. On the Moon there are no faces. A face is not a lunar concept." Latimer's smile faded. "Now you begin to see that I'll never write these things for a scientific bulletin nor lecture clubwomen about them."

She steadied herself again. "What about Michael Stone?"

"If you marry him, you might do very well together."

"John, you don't care!" she cried out again.

He did not even draw himself tense to her mood. "It isn't that, exactly," he said. "My sense of proportion is all scrambled. I spoke about an extra dimension."

She drew sudden bitterness from the reminder. "You feel a new fullness, I suppose. And everything I represented to you seems flat."

"Earth itself is flat," he amended quietly. "Columbus was wrong and the scoffers right. Earth, taken alone, is as flat as a cold pancake. As flat as old coffee."

Elspeth's brief anger was gone. She began to weep, hating herself for it. Latimer rose and made a little bow.

"I'll go now. I have to think and plan."

"You don't care," she charged for the third time.

"That's an indictment and by Earth standards I must deserve it," he said thoughtfully.

"Oh, if only you were sorrowful or hurt or stunned!" she babbled passionately. "If only I could *do* something for you."

"You can't . . . so do nothing," he bade her gently and in some wise helpfully. "Believe me, Elspeth, I'm not warped in spirit or mind. I've only been to the Moon."

"Certainly, certainly!" She was ironical again. "And the experience increased you to such a gigantic and lofty stature that—"

"The experience humbled and confused me so that I must fight every instant and with every weapon to endure and comprehend it, if I ever do."

He left. The following day Professor Vinkelman telephoned Elspeth to say that Latimer was reconditioning his rocket for a new flight into space.

Michael Stone drops from the story at this point. Elspeth refused him, finally and more than a little sternly. But she saw nothing of Latimer, even when he sent her a note inviting her to visit his workshop on Staten Island. Vinkelman came to see her after a few days.

"John will be in trouble," he said, "if he is John."

"Part of him is John," said Elspeth at once. "Do you mean he's sick, or. . . ."

Vinkelman shook his head. "The newspapers didn't like his treatment of them. Neither did some scientists. There's a theory going around that this is an imposter. Someone who looks like John, and has evolved a story fantastic enough to impress us all."

"You're one who believes the theory," said Elspeth at once.

He shook his head but too slowly for absolute denial. "You must admit he's very strange."

"But wouldn't he be? Can't you see that he'd be bound to change greatly after such an experience?"

Vinkelman nodded almost ponderously. "John, yes. That stands to reason—reason of a sort. But why should his rocket change as much as it has changed."

Elspeth stared. She did not understand and Vinkelman saw her mystification.

"We have had only the briefest of looks at the rocket in which he came. It landed and he got out and everyone was interested in him—at once. Before he left he locked the panels but some of us remember the rocket in which John Latimer flew away. This one looks like it enough to resemble pictures and specifications. But it is not the same."

"Then," said Elspeth, "you think this is a duplicate John Latimer in a rocket similar to the original. But he returned from the moon."

"He says he did. It's as shallow and simple as that. He dropped out of the sky by daytime and seemed to be John Latimer. Every-

one was so moved and amazed at what seemed to be John Latimer's return—well, and now he has moved his rocket into his workshop, admitting nobody.

"Remember, my dear, that John Latimer left a fortune in banks when he flew away. It might be worth the while of a clever imposter to botch together a rocket craft—after all, many men can do that, and power it with atomic, even though the government still holds most formulae—and come along to appear as John Latimer, drawing his money out.

"As a matter of fact, the bank accepts him as John Latimer and has honored several checks. True, the sums have been spent for materials and tools—we have checked that. But later he may make a large withdrawal and vanish. After all, nobody has been in his new workshop, and he will not allow. . . ."

"He invited me," said Elspeth.

"You?" You know nothing about rockets and space flight. Why . . . but of course!" Vinkelmann brightened. "He could trust the limitations of your mind where he would not dare admit an engineer."

"Why would he want me at all?" Elspeth demanded. "When he met me he seemed casual—on guard. . . ."

"This fills out the picture," pursued Vinkelmann. "Casual, on guard, yes. As a stranger posing as John Latimer he was not interested romantically in the girl John Latimer loved. But you were alone together, eh? He changed his mind. Perhaps he wants to take other of John Latimer's possessions than the money deposited in banks."

ELSPETH stared again. When Vinkelmann had entered he had been baffled, of two minds, about whether or not the returner from the sky was John Latimer. Now he seemed to have come to a decision, and was offering one new argument after another to clarify that decision.

"Elspeth," said Vinkelmann, "you might do a great service by accepting that invitation."

"Go to his workshop!" protested Elspeth. "If he isn't John?"

"I'll tell you things to look for. Come back and report. Then we can be sure."

Elspeth fell silent. She realized that he must be acting and appearing like John Latimer, or whoever impersonated him, when he went into one of his quiet moods.

"I'll do it," she said.

The workshop was on a cleared knoll close to the south edge of Staten Island. It rose like a cylinder of steel-braced concrete, a silo or donjon in shape. Elspeth walked up the path to the doorway. She knocked.

"Who's there?" said John Latimer's voice—if it was an imitation, it was excellent.

"Elspeth."

"Who's with you?"

"Nobody."

"Wait." The door opened slowly upon a brightly lighted interior, and she stepped across the threshold.

Latimer wore coveralls. Out of its many pockets peeped tools. He looked at Elspeth and briefly showed such a smile as she remembered.

"I've been slow about accepting your invitation," she ventured.

"Slow? I didn't realize. Perhaps I'm still on lunar time."

Her eyes turned upward. The roof of the cylinder was open. Stars twinkled. Over the rim of masonry the Moon crawled like a pale, anxious face, peering down. The Moon, whose other side no man had ever seen, unless John Latimer—if this were John Latimer. . . .

"Excuse me if I keep busy." He turned back to his cartridge-shaped craft, standing on end in the middle of the metal-faced floor like an obelisk of pale smooth alloy.

From a bench he took a small automatic welding torch, and with this he skillfully sprayed brightness on a narrow rough patch, at the same time gouging with a flat blade. Bits of the metal oxidized away and then he stepped back, nodding in satisfaction at the new smoothness he had wrought.

"I've just granted an interview to the newspapers," he said. "My only one. I've announced my time of departure—August eighth, at eleven p.m."

"Departure," Elspeth repeated.

"My new flight will profit by the blunders of the first."

She was computing in her head. "August eighth. That's next month. No, only two weeks."

"Right. And I've much to do." He moved around the curve of the craft, producing a rather delicate wrench with which he prodded, then tightened, a small bolt head. When it was adjusted to his plainly exact taste he used the torch again. The bolt head dropped away, severed, and he carefully smoothed the roughness where it had been. Again he

moved, adjusting something else beyond. Elspeth took a step as if to follow.

"You're going back to the Moon? You'll stay there?"

He shook his head without lifting his eyes to her. "Not if I can make an adequate landing and leave my rocket in condition to fly. The Moon would flatten out, too, if I stayed too long.

"But there, with the reduced lunar gravity, I can retune this rocket once again and take off on a longer shot—a successful one, the first successful flight of history to another planet. Mars, or Venus."

He bent to his work. He concentrated on the blazing torch. Elspeth stooped quickly and, with her handkerchief, caught up the severed bolt head, which was still hot. She swaddled it and thrust it into the purse she carried.

"To Mars or Venus," she said. "That will take considerable planning and construction."

"And considerable money. All I have. I'm carguing this rocket with things I'll need for the longer try."

"All your money." She remembered Vinkelmann's suspicion. She touched the rocket. "This smooth plating—I never saw the like of—"

"Don't do that!" He whirled and shut off the torch. Fishing a soft cloth from his hip pocket, he carefully rubbed and polished the spot she had fingered. "Even a fingertip leaves perspiration and makes rust. The least micrometric unevenness may turn out a serious fault while I'm negotiating the atmosphere."

"John, are you making fun of me? You said that this rocket crashed on the Moon. That must have made tremendous unevennesses, and nothing micrometric about them." Glancing up at the faultless sheen, she found herself forced to speak her thoughts. "There certainly isn't any evidence that this is the craft in which John Latimer left Earth and landed on the Moon."

"No more it is," he said.

She turned on him, feeling the blood flow out of her face and away down past her heart. She felt light-headed, feeble-kneed. She wished she could sit down.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "this was made on the Moon. My wreck was the pattern."

"But how? How?"

"It was made. I had help?"

"Intelligent help?"

HE SHRUGGED. "When you use the word you mean Earth intelligence, the formal development by Earth's schools and customs and traditions. I won't use the word, which is an Earth word. But I had help."

"From the Moon's creatures," she said, and irony forced itself into her voice. "Which were they, John? Those lumbering surface beings, or the flying ones like toy kites?"

"Neither."

"Then you're going to say the Moon has people. Who was right about the people of the Moon, John? Edgar Allan Poe or H. G. Wells?"

"I say nothing of people or intelligence. I had help and it was good help. It made possible the building of a craft and the powering of that craft so that I could return. Things on the Moon gave me that."

Her hand, straying into her purse, touched the bit of metal she had filched. She changed the subject. "Why did you ask me here, instead of scientists who might represent help on Earth?"

"They'd fail me and I'd fail them. Let's try another feeble comparison. Do you remember the war?"

"I was a child then."

"Men went to war and came back. They spoke or wrote about what they'd done; seen, felt, endured."

"Not very successfully," reminded Elspeth.

"That's what I mean," said Latimer. "They couldn't. Or think of a savage coming back to his far-off tribe and trying to explain how he had lived in New York. He couldn't. And those problems are tiny ones compared with mine. I've been away from this little planet, Elspeth.

"What happened to me when I was away I can't get across to those who stayed in words or reason or parallels or even emotions. Mind and heart are mute. But the spirit. . . ."

"I hoped to get an echo, at least, in you. Somebody must be left who understands me if not understanding what I've seen or done. Now I'm fumbling around again. Aren't you bored?"

"Probably you are," she said.

"I'm sorry. I should say that, shouldn't I?"

"Don't distress yourself saying anything," she bade him, and walked out and toward the lights of the suburb beyond.

It was midnight when she walked into Vinkelmann's study and put on his table the bolt head from Latimer's workshop.

"There it is," she said. "A sample from his rocket. You said that you could test it—tell pretty surely if it was the same material that went into the rocket that flew away."

Vinkelmann turned the thing over and over. He weighed it in his palm, then on a small scale.

"Hmmm," he said. "Hmmm." He became almost as rapt as Latimer. With a small gouge he worked, as carefully as a jeweller, to detach a tiny particle from the bolt head.

Elspeth watched, without word or gesture lest she detract him. She thought about the man who looked like John Latimer but who seemed more strange than a ghost returned. Vinkelmann produced chemicals, tested the particle, then tested other particles in other ways.

"Hmmm," he said again. He took off his spectacles and gazed up at Elspeth. "This changes things."

"It's the same?"

"No. It is very much not the same. Very, very different. Somewhere I get the sense of doing John Latimer a great injustice. He didn't bring back a clumsy imitation. He brought back an immensely important opposite."

She waited for him to continue.

"This," and he lifted the bolt head, "is an alloy we don't know. It has metals in it that we're aware of—iron, aluminum—and at least two elements that I, at least, cannot at once isolate or comprehend. If it came from his rocket. . . ."

"It did," Elspeth assured him.

"If so, then John Latimer has in his possession an alloy that would make him wealthy out of hand, beyond the limits of the fortune we fancied an imposter was trying to steal. Emphatically that is not the same rocket in which he flew away. Emphatically again it is a scientific wonder beyond the knowledge of John Latimer before he left Earth, beyond my knowledge too."

"And what does this mean?"

"It might mean myriads of things. The simplest explanation is that we have the real John Latimer, really back from the Moon, on which he achieved or was given a new metal—and a host of other experiences which he finds himself incapable of explaining." He rose. "I had better get in touch with—"

"With nobody," said Elspeth quickly.

He had been reaching for the telephone but he drew back his hand.

"You're right," he agreed. He looked old

and perplexed. "With nobody. I begin, a little, to understand John. A very little as he might hope to be understood."

Again he turned the bit of metal over, studying it. "Light," he said. "Strong—stronger than any practicable alloy. Elastic. And almost entirely free from friction. Friction! John is trying to be free of friction himself."

"He's trying to be free," said Elspeth. "Free, period, as the wisecrackers say. I begin to understand too."

THEY sat down together. "John cannot spend his time and energy on those who don't want to grasp his experience," said Vinkelmann.

"Marco Polo was called a liar. Captain John Smith was doubted. And Cagliostro, reputed to be a master charlatan—suddenly I begin to wonder if he might not have told truths nobody could appreciate."

"Think of Galileo," murmured Elspeth. "Think of Darwin."

"Now John finds himself among fools and doubters and stay-at-homes. To try to convince them, even to impress them, he must wear out his tongue, his mind, his life." Vinkelmann studied the bolt head again. "This came from the Moon, Elspeth."

"He says he had help there," she nodded.

"Help on the Moon," mused Vinkelmann. "On his native planet he despairs of getting help. No wonder he hurries to leave. I feel sick for myself and my colleagues—we cannot help even if we want to. All we can do is not hinder."

"And I?" asked Elspeth.

"Do not hinder him either," said Vinkelmann gently. "He has only two weeks. He leaves before midnight of August eighth. The newspapers will make a Roman holiday of that. How could John endure it?"

"He doesn't intend to," replied Elspeth. "I suddenly understand something else."

It was 10 o'clock on the night of August 7th when Elspeth knocked again at the door of Latimer's cylindrical work building.

"It's Elspeth," she called to him. "Dr. Vinkelmann is with me."

"You can come in," he said from the other side of the door. "Tell Vinkelmann he must wait."

Elspeth's heart was beating fast. "If you want me. . . ."

"I told you why I wanted you." He opened the door a crack.

"Let us both in," she begged. "You need us both. Please let me explain—inside."

She pushed against the door and after a moment he yielded. She and Vinkelmann entered. John looked at them for a silent moment, then walked back to the rocket. He began to stow things inside the open port—packages, tins and tools.

"So you knew," he said to Elspeth.

"That you meant to go tonight, and avoid tomorrow's crowd and hullabaloo? It wasn't hard to guess that."

Latimer's eyes turned toward Vinkelmann. "I never invited you."

"He knows why," appealed Elspeth. "He feels embarrassed at being here. But I persuaded him to come and say goodbye to both of us. I want to go with you."

Latimer paused in the act of gathering up another armful of supplies. "You don't understand what you're asking."

"You don't understand what she's offering, John," put in Vinkelmann. "You need her. You admit that your single understanding and sensation have not been enough for the demands put upon them. It is like one eye trying to comprehend the depth of the third dimension. With Elspeth you will have two minds. Two viewpoints giving depth to the awareness of a single heart behind them both."

"It'll be like the blind man," said Latimer. "With another blind man, both of them scrambling clumsily around the elephant."

"Touching it in two places and comparing touches and impressions," said Elspeth. "The blind lead the blind—and they don't always fall into the ditch. Sometimes one pulls the other back from the brink when he begins to slip."

"Now, those words sound a trifle sensible," observed Latimer, turning again from his stowage work. "But I say you don't understand. If you come with me you'll never return to Earth."

"Earth is flat." She gave him his own words.

He smiled at that. "Think of the dangers. We stand a good chance of injury or death when we land."

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained," said Elspeth. "Lots of the old worn-out proverbs seem to make sense just now."

"Will you have so much if the venture is successful?"

Elspeth refused to let tears of earnestness come into her eyes.

"What you've seen and done, John—is it so big that you can't endure to share it? Or is it so small that it isn't enough for two? John, I won't hinder you. I'll help you."

Vinkelmann turned his back and walked to the door, looking out.

"If I took you," Latimer said to Elspeth, "you'd be a memory of what I reject here."

"What you keep," she insisted. "Earth, too, is a planet."

"Why," he said, "so it is." He gazed around him at the workshop and then to the open door and into the night outside, as if he found the things of Earth new and amazing.

"There's room for two in your rocket," said Elspeth. "And more than room for two in the universe."

He caught her hand.

"Get in," he said.

Vinkelmann looked around, in time to see Latimer following Elspeth in. The port clanged shut behind them. Vinkelmann left quickly, hurrying to a safe distance. From afar he saw the sudden fire-jewelled soaring away of the rocket.

That is the last Earth knows of John Latimer and Elspeth Dawes—except that telescopes hastily trained on their flight saw the rocket curve away behind the Moon. Days later it, or what must have been it, reappeared beyond, driving straight away to Mars as an arrow to a target. Most observers think it made a safe landing.