

'Strange Behaviour of a Famous Scientist,' I heard the Editor say, thinking of his newspaper.

'What's happened to him?' said the Journalist. 'I don't understand.' I thought of the Time Traveller walking painfully upstairs. I don't think anyone else had noticed his limp.

The Medical Man recovered from his surprise first, and rang the bell for a hot plate. The Editor picked up his knife and fork and the Silent Man did the same. The dinner started again. Conversation was slow for a minute or two because we were so surprised. Then the Editor said, 'Does our friend have another job, or just a strong imagination?'

'I feel sure it's this business of the Time Machine,' I said, and continued the Psychologist's story of our earlier meeting. The new guests were very surprised and the Editor said, 'What is this time travelling? A man couldn't cover himself with dust by doing something impossible, could he?'

The Journalist, too, refused to believe it, and started to make a joke of the whole thing. 'Our Special Reporter in the Day after Tomorrow reports,' he was saying – or shouting – when the Time Traveller came back. He was dressed in ordinary evening clothes and nothing except his tired look reminded me of the change that had shocked me.

'Well,' said the Editor, laughing, 'these men say you have been travelling into the middle of next week.'

The Time Traveller sat down without a word. He smiled quietly, in his usual way. 'Where's my meat?' he said. 'How nice it is to stick a fork into meat again.'

'Story!' cried the Editor.

'Later,' said the Time Traveller. 'I want something to eat first. I won't say a word until I get some food into my stomach. Thanks. And the salt.'

'One word,' I said. 'Have you been time travelling?'

'Yes,' said the Time Traveller, with his mouth full.

'I'd give a pound a line for the story in your own words,' said the Editor. The Time Traveller pushed his glass towards the Silent Man, who was staring at his face. He jumped a little, then poured him some wine. The rest of the dinner was uncomfortable. The Journalist tried to relax us by telling funny stories. The Medical Man smoked a cigarette and watched the Time Traveller closely. The Silent Man seemed nervous, and drank a lot of wine.

At last the Time Traveller pushed his plate away and looked round at us. 'I suppose I must apologise,' he said. 'I was so hungry. I've had a most interesting time.' He put out his hand for a cigarette. 'But come into the smoking room. The story is too long to tell over dirty plates.' And he led the way.

'You have told these men about the machine?' he said to me, sitting back in his chair and naming the three new guests.

'But the thing's just a trick,' said the Editor.

'I can't argue tonight. I don't mind telling the story, but I can't argue. I will,' he continued, 'tell you the story of what has happened to me, if you like, but you mustn't interrupt. Most of it will sound like lies, but it is true – every word of it. I was in the laboratory earlier, and since then . . . I have lived eight days . . . days like no human being ever lived before! I am very tired, but I shan't sleep until I have told this thing to you. But no interruptions! Is it agreed?'

We all agreed and the Time Traveller began his story as I have written it down. He sat back in his chair at first and spoke slowly. Afterwards he got more excited. As I write it down I feel the limits of pen and ink, and my own limits. You will read, I expect, with enough attention, but you cannot see the speaker's white, honest face in the bright circle of the little lamp, or hear his voice. Most of us listeners were in shadow. At first each looked at the others. After a time we stopped doing that and looked only at the Time Traveller's face.