

was a moving thing – against the red water of the sea. It was round, the size of a football perhaps, and long arms hung down from it.

‘Then I felt that I was fainting. But a terrible fear of lying helpless in that awful half-darkness gave me strength while I climbed back into the seat.

Chapter 15 Coming Home

‘So I came back. I think I fainted in the machine. When I felt better the change from day to night had started again, the sun was golden and the sky was blue. I breathed more freely. The shape of the land moved here and there. At last I saw again the shadows of houses, the signs of humans. These, too, changed and passed, and others came. Soon I began to recognise our own smaller and familiar buildings, and the hand of the thousands dial returned to its starting point. Then the old walls of the laboratory came round me. Very gently now, I slowed the machine down.

‘I think I have told you that when I started, before my speed became very high, Mrs Watchett, my cook, had walked across the room. She moved, as it seemed to me, very quickly. As I returned, I passed again across that minute and now all her movements appeared to be the exact opposite of the ones she had made before. And just before that, I seemed to see you, Hillyer, for a moment.’

The Time Traveller looked at me as he spoke.

‘Then I stopped the machine, got off it very shakily and sat down on my chair. For several minutes I shook violently. Then I became calmer. Around me was my old laboratory again, exactly as it had been. But not exactly! The machine had started from the south-east corner. It had stopped again in the north-west. This gives you the exact distance from my little lawn to

the pedestal of the white sphinx into which the Morlocks had carried it.

‘For a time my brain went dead. Then I got up and came through here, limping because my heel was still painful. I saw the newspaper on the table by the door. I found the date really was today and, looking at the clock, I saw that the time was almost eight o’clock. I heard your voices and the sound of plates. I smelled well-cooked meat and opened the door to the dining-room. You know the rest.’

He looked at the Medical Man.

‘No. I can’t expect you to believe it. Accept it as a lie – or as a guess at the future. Say I dreamed it in the laboratory. But as a story, what do you think of it?’

He picked up his pipe and began, in his usual way, to play with it in his hands. I took my eyes off his face and looked around at the others. The Medical Man was staring at our host. The Editor was looking hard at the end of his cigarette – his sixth. The Journalist searched in his pocket for his watch. The others, as I remember, did not move.

The Editor stood up and shook his head. ‘What a pity that you are not a writer of stories!’ he said, putting his hand on the Time Traveller’s shoulder.

‘You don’t believe it?’

‘Well –’

‘I thought not.’

The Time Traveller turned to us. ‘Where are the matches?’ he said. He lit his pipe, blowing smoke. ‘To tell you the truth, I can’t really believe it myself . . . But . . .’

His eye fell with a questioning look on the dead white flowers on the little table. Then he turned over the hand holding his pipe. I saw he was looking at some red marks.

The Medical Man rose, came to the lamp and examined the flowers. ‘This one is odd,’ he said. The Psychologist bent forwards