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Party games for 8 to 100 guests

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presents...

“Poetic Justice”

Play (murder) version
for 10 to 17 guests

by Stephanie Chambers

First edition

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“Merri Mysteries” was formerly known as “Tailor Made Mysteries”.

Although some of the characters in this mystery are based on real people, the events depicted in this mystery are totally fictional.

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The Suspects

A group of cultured people from the 1920s have materialized in a modern apartment in London. H. G. Wells had been testing his novel's time machine at a soiree. Now he is discovered dead in the bathroom. Who killed him? Was it James Joyce, Isadora Duncan, T.S. Eliot, Mae West or another of the visitors? Agatha Christie herself is present to help solve this crime. The key to this puzzle may appear in a line of verse or it may not. But in any case, we must achieve justice, poetic or not. The luminaries HG assembled were:

Dame Agatha Christie – I'm a British writer of mysteries mainly. I was made a Dame, would you believe it? It was a happy and fulfilling life. And H.G. Wells has made me miss out on all of that. All I got was a quick zip through it. I felt cheated. It was like seeing the menu without being allowed to order or to taste the food. **Dress suggestions:** As a young English lady in the 1920s would have dressed (eg silk blouse, tweed skirt & coat or fake fur or in a Charleston type dress with no waist or a dropped waist & pearls & lots of beads).

James Joyce – I'm an Irish poet and novelist. To live is better than to miss out on living. Wells had stopped me from being able to do that. **Dress suggestions:** Dress as a dapper young man of the 1920s would have dressed (eg two-tone shoes, white trousers, white jacket and white striped shirt). Joyce liked to wear bow ties and he had reading glasses and wore an eye patch over one eye. He also had a moustache and a goatee beard.

Mae West – I'm a movie actress and I often write my own scripts. I was only just getting started in show business before H. G. Wells whisked me off here into the future. He made me miss out on all that fun. **Dress suggestions:** Dress in curvaceous flamboyant outfit with long gloves & a handbag. She was buxom so add padding. She liked to cut the top out of her hats so her curls wouldn't be crushed. She also wore lots of feathers & diamonds.

Thomas S. Eliot – I'm an American born, English poet and playwright. I saw my future. I wrote various poetry collections and plays, although I was not as prolific as you, Mrs Christie. H. G. Wells had no right to bring me into the future. No right at all. **Dress suggestions:** Dress as 1920s young man (eg two-tone shoes, trousers, jacket and knitted vest). Eliot liked to wear ties and he wore his hair parted in the middle and slicked back.

Isadora Duncan – I'm a US dancer – one of the first to use dance steps based on natural movement. I saw in my future, that in 1927 I was strangled by one of my long scarves after it caught in the wheel of my sports car. Lucky, I suppose that I had written my autobiography before I died. You can't imagine what it feels like to watch yourself die and to die like that – strangled by my own scarf. I think H. G. Wells has left me with permanent emotional scars. **Dress suggestions:** Isadora often appeared barefoot in a simple cotton tunic. At other times she draped herself like a Greek goddess. You might also like to wear a long scarf like the one that killed her.

Charlie Chaplin – I'm a comedian, writer, director and movie producer. I saw my future. I made lots more movies. Wells has interrupted my movie making career just as it was starting by this time travel nonsense. **Dress suggestions:** The "Little Tramp" with moustache, twirling cane, bowler hat, tight black jacket & baggy pants.

Sarah Bernhardt – I'm a French actress but I have performed worldwide and I have managed several Paris theatres and opened my own theater. In 1915 I had my right leg amputated after a fall, but I continued to act. I don't want to have my final curtain call here. I find this modern world bereft of style and glamour. **Dress suggestions:** Wear a flamboyant garment (eg a long velvet dress with long sleeves which are loose at the top & tight towards the bottom). Hop as she was elderly by this stage and had had a leg amputated. Bring crutches if you can.

William C. Fields – I'm the US actor with the raspy voice and I'm a scriptwriter. My life was a barrel of laughs. H. G. Wells has taken me away from all that. People in this age probably won't appreciate my humor. **Dress suggestions:** Dress as 1920s young man (eg two-tone shoes, trousers & jacket). Wear a top hat & bow tie. Carry a hip flask as WC's main hobby was sipping from it.

Dorothy Parker – I'm a US critic, poet and short story writer. I'm known for my satire, terse style and acid wit. I saw my future. Although my life appears to have been as acerbic as my poetry, it doesn't mean there weren't some good times. H. G. Wells shouldn't have denied me those times. **Dress suggestions:** Dress as a young 1920s American lady (eg a Charleston type dress with no waist or a dropped waist and pearls and lots of beads). You may also like to wear a headband complete with feather.

Rudolph Valentino – I’m a Hollywood actor known for my sultry charms. I saw my future. I saw my early death in 1926 due to a perforated ulcer and the mass hysteria caused by it. I was shocked to die so young. Like Isadora, I found it was very jarring to see myself die. Nobody should be confronted with that, surely? **Dress suggestions:** Dress like he did on the big screen (eg as an Arab like in the Sheik by donning a striped sheet & a turban). He had very dark olive skin & slicked back hair.

Background Information

Staple their background information here

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These guests are not suspects as they were out of the apartment at the time when the crime took place:

Virginia Woolf – I’m a British novelist. It was such a sad life (sob sob). I hated having to see it flash before my eyes. H. G. Wells had made me suffer so much. I can’t tell you how much. **Dress suggestions:** As a young English lady in the 1920s (eg silk blouse, tweed skirt, tweed coat or fake fur or in a Charleston type dress with no waist or a dropped waist and pearls & lots of beads).

William Yeats – I’m an Irish poet, dramatist and politician. I saw my future during the time travel. How could I let a man like Wells rob me of the joy of receiving the Nobel Prize for Poetry? Can you imagine my joy at finally putting Ireland on the literary map? How could I let him do that to me? **Dress suggestions:** As a young man of the 1920s (eg two-tone shoes, trousers, jacket & vest). Yeats (pronounced “Yates”) liked to wear ties and he had reading glasses & was clean-shaven.

Bessie Smith – I’m a US blues singer. They say I was important to the development of the blues. But I ain’t going to sing none of those tunes now. How can I when I’m not in the time where I belong? Wells has wrecked all that. **Dress suggestions:** Dress in a dazzling outfit and wear your hair up. She was a buxom lady so you may need to add some padding.

Ezra Pound – I’m an American poet and critic and leader of the European literary avant-garde. I saw my future and although I regret what happened as a result of the war, I had a poetic life and I would like the opportunity to live it. What hope is there now that Wells has cast me here? This is worse than any lunatic asylum. **Dress suggestions:** As a young man of the 1920s (eg two-tone shoes, trousers & casual jacket). Pound lived in Europe a lot so you may like to add a cravat instead of a tie. Add a red beard. He was shy but liked tennis so bring a racquet.

Georgia O'Keefe – I'm an American painter mainly of flowers, still lifes, desert landscapes and sometimes abstracts. I saw my future. My life was satisfying in its own way. As most of you are poets and writers, you may not appreciate just how good it feels to capture nature in a painting. H. G. Wells had denied me the pleasure of living the life I saw. **Dress suggestions:** A dark outfit with a white shirt complete with a leather hat. You may like to add a cow horn or skull. She liked to paint outdoors so her skin was dark brown in color. Bring along a sketchpad & a small bag.

Edward E. Cummings – I'm an American poet, novelist and painter. After a printer's error made my name lowercase, I went on to deliberately explore unconventional typography and punctuation. H. G. Wells brought forth a fullstop to my life by plonking me in the future. **Dress suggestions:** Dress as a young man of the 1920s would have dressed (eg two-tone shoes, trousers, jacket and vest). Cummings was in the army so you may prefer to don military garb and some medals.

Lily Pad (*English hostess*) – I'm a groovy young chic who was about to go out to a party when this lot dropped in. I haven't gotten to see my future, but it sounds really cool. H. G. Wells was a bossy one. Took over the place as if he owned it and treated it as if it were a movie set. He was a real creep. **Dress suggestions:** Wear fake tattoos & colored hair & a fake nose ring. Bring a small clutch bag.

Background Information

Cut out each character's background information and attach it to their invitation.

Dame Agatha Christie (*Writer of mystery novels and more profound novels under the penname Mary Westmacott. She wrote almost 100 novels.*) At the soiree, I read from "Absent in the Spring" which I wrote under my pseudonym Mary Westmacott and published later: "Trying to remember and recite poetry hadn't been a success—not at all a success. The truth is there was something very upsetting about poetry. It had a poignancy—a way of striking through to the spirit..." During the time travel, I saw my life. I saw my childhood, my marriage to Archie, the birth of our child. During WWI I worked as a hospital dispenser, which taught me a lot about poisons. I'd just published my first book "The Mysterious Affair at Styles" in 1920. It starred Detective Poirot. Then I saw my future. I was shocked as Archie and I divorced. I just focused on my writing. Then I met an archaeologist called Max Mallowan. He was younger than me and we married and I followed him to desert places.

James Joyce (*Poet and novelist who used a stream of consciousness technique in "Ulysses".*) At the soiree, I read from my new novel "Ulysses": "Sooner have me than some poet chap with bearsgrease, plastery hair lovelock over his dexter optic." During the time travel, I saw my life so far. I grew up in Dublin, the eldest of ten kids. My dad was a tax collector and a drinker and always in debt. I had a Catholic upbringing. I studied languages at University. I met Nora. Then we had two children and then we married in 1931. We went to live in Europe where I taught languages. I saw my future. I started going blind and I saw my daughter suffering from mental illnesses. I published various works but none received the enthusiastic response "Ulysses" did. We left Paris at the outbreak of war and moved to Switzerland where I died after surgery.

Mae West (*Movie actress who also wrote many of her scripts, known for her wit.*) At the soiree, I sang some lines from the first song I had written called 'The Cave Girl': "I learned to dance, When I saw the tiger prance". During the time travel, I saw my life so far. I was born in Brooklyn, New York and I had a career in burlesque and later on Broadway. People liked my wit. And men liked my curves. I'm not like those toothpicks you get in restaurants. I saw my future. I saw my Hollywood films. I wrote my own plays like "Diamond Lil" and so on. Even in old age, I was still starring in films.

Thomas S. Eliot (*American born, English poet & playwright who influenced modern poetry.*) At the soiree, I read from “*The Wasteland*” which had only just published: “*Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long. But at my back in a cold blast hear The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.*” During the time travel, I saw my life so far. I was born in the USA. I studied literature and philosophy at Harvard and then at the Sorbonne and at Oxford. With the outbreak of WWI, I took up permanent residence in England. I married Vivien and worked as a teacher, a bank clerk and published a magazine and poetry. I saw my future. My wife went insane and I became a director a publishing company. I joined the Church.

Isadora Duncan (*US dancer – one of the first to use dance steps based on natural movement.*) My husband is a poet. But at the soiree, instead of reading poetry, I danced. Everyone seemed to enjoy seeing my new flowing Bolshevik steps. During the time travel, I saw my life so far. I was born in San Francisco. I invented my own free style of dance based on natural movement and performed barefoot in flowing tunics in Europe, the US and Greece. I visited Russia and I influenced the reform of ballet there. I had love affairs with a stage designer and a millionaire and I had a child by each of them. But unfortunately my children drowned when the automobile they were in went into the Seine in 1913. Last year I visited the Soviet Union and I married Sergei Yesenin. In my future, I saw that Sergei wasn’t as understanding as I thought he was. He left me in the next year, I mean 1923. Then he committed suicide in 1925. I returned to France. In 1927 I was strangled by one of my long scarves after it caught in the wheel of my sports car. I’ve never had much luck with automobiles.

Charlie Chaplin (*He made comedy an art-form.*) At the soiree, I performed as the “*Little Tramp*” – the character I am most famous for. That is why I am dressed as I am. During the time travel, I saw my life so far. I was born in a London slum. My parents were music hall performers. I started out as a clown and was “discovered” whilst touring in the US. In 1914, I made my first movie. In my second movie, I performed as the Tramp for the first time. I also learned to direct my own films. Later I helped co-found United Artists movie studio. I saw my future. I made more and more Tramp films and a parody of Hitler called “*The Great Dictator*”. I married 4 times. I refused to accept US citizenship. I was accused of Communist sympathies and denied re-entry into the US, so I settled in Switzerland with my last wife Oona and our 9 children. In 1972 I received a special achievement Academy Award and in 1973 another Academy Award for my score to “*Limelight*”. In 1975 I was knighted by Queen Elizabeth.

Sarah Bernhardt (*French actress who performed world-wide. She also painted, sculpted & wrote.*) At the soiree, I performed a soliloquy by Lady Macbeth about having blood on my hands. I was wonderful. As I am old, during the time travel, I saw most of my life flash by. I was the illegitimate daughter of a Parisian courtesan. I began training to be an actress at age 13 and made my debut when I was 18. I acted in numerous countries. Then I managed several Paris theatres and opened my own theater. The Belgian aristocrat I loved deserted me when I became pregnant with my only child. I was unconventional. Some thought I carried a coffin with me to sleep in. In 1915 I had my right leg amputated after a fall, but I continued to act. I saw my future. I published a treatise on acting and died the next year.

William C. Fields (*US actor known for his misanthropic humor & raspy voice. He also wrote scripts.*) At the soiree, I told them a few funny lines like: “Madam, there’s no such thing as a tough child - if you parboil them first for seven hours, they always come out tender.” During the time travel, I saw my life so far. I was born in Philadelphia as William Claude Dukenfield. I started as a comic juggler and then did stage reviews. In the 1920s I started doing silent movies. I saw my future. In the 1930s my raspy voice and crazy persona made me popular and I starred in sound films. I wrote some myself and some with you, Mae. The characters I played were known for their dislike and fear of children, their duping of old ladies and other socially prominent persons and officials.

Dorothy Parker (*US critic, poet & short story writer.*) At the soiree, I read from my new poetry collection called “*Enough Rope*”. Here are a few of the lines I read from “*Testament*”: “*Death will not see me flinch; the heart is bold That pain has made incapable of pain.*” During the time travel, I saw my life to date. I was born in New Jersey. I was Vanity Fair’s drama critic from 1917 to 1920. I saw my future. I became the New Yorker’s theater and book reviewer. I also published poetry and short story collections and Broadway plays. I married Edwin Pond Parker II and later we divorced. Then I married the actor-writer Alan Campbell. We went to Hollywood as a writing team and went through a tempestuous marriage, separating, divorcing, getting back together and remarrying until he died in 1963. Then I took to drink and died alone in a hotel room in Manhattan.

Rudolph Valentino (*A Hollywood actor known for his sultry charms, flashing smile & presence.*) I write poetry myself, so at the soiree I read a few of my poems. I later published these in 1923 as a collection called “*Day Dreams*” and it sold well. During the time travel, I saw my life to now. I was born in Italy. I changed my name from Rudolfo d’Antonguolla to Rudolph Valentino. Although I studied agriculture, I ended up becoming a dancer when I came to the US and then an actor in Hollywood’s silent movies. This year I starred in “*The Sheik*” and “*Blood and Sand*”. They were all a bit silly really. I have been married twice and my second wife is Natacha Rambova. Her real name was Winifred Hudnut. I saw my future. I saw myself star in three more movies. Then I saw my early death.

Virginia Woolf (*British novelist known for her innovative stream of consciousness & interior monologue.*) At the soiree, I read from “Jacob’s Room”: “I am very beautiful,” she thought. She shifted her hat slightly. Her husband saw her looking in the glass; and agreed that beauty is important; it is an inheritance; one cannot ignore it. But it is a barrier; it is in fact rather a bore.” During the time travel, I saw my life so far. Because of my delicate health, I was educated at home and spent a lot of time in my father’s extensive library. We had people like R. L. Stevenson and Thomas Hardy as visitors. I started contributing to the Times Literary Supplement. My father’s death caused my first nervous breakdown. I moved to London and married Leonard and we began Hogarth Press. I published 3 of my novels. I saw my future. I published more innovative novels and also critical essays. I suffered from nervous exhaustion and acute sensitivity. In 1941 with the advent of war and feeling another breakdown coming on, I drowned myself.

William Yeats (*Irish poet who received the Nobel Prize for poetry.*) At the soiree I read from “Down by the Salley Gardens”:
*“She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.”*
During the time travel, I saw my life so far. Like Joyce I was also born in Dublin. I have always been one for Irish national identity. I published collections of my poems. I married Georgianna. In my poetry I tried to fuse history, philosophy, mysticism and psychology. I purchased a Norman fort. In 1922, I had just become a senator of the Irish Free State. I saw my future. In 1923, I received the Nobel Prize for Poetry. I continued writing.

Bessie Smith (*US blues singer known for her forthright approach & uninhibited performances.*) At the soiree, I sang “*Down Hearted Blues*”. I sang it really well. During the time travel, I saw my life so far. I was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee. I began my career as a singer in honky-tonks and tent shows. I saw my future. In 1923 I went to New York for my first recording session. I created quite a stir and for the next ten years I made lots of records. I became known as the “*Empress of the Blues*”. I performed with artists like Louis Armstrong. Unfortunately, I died in an automobile accident in 1937 just as I was about to make a comeback and Edward Albee wrote a play about me called “*The Death of Bessie Smith*” in 1960.

Ezra Pound (*American poet, critic and translator and leader of the European literary avant-garde.*) At the soiree, I read from one of my earlier poems:

“I who have seen you amid the primal things

Was angry when they spoke your name In ordinary places...”

During the time travel, I saw my life to date. I was born in Idaho. I studied literature. I moved to Europe where I met and married Dorothy. I was interested in Chinese poems. I founded Vorticism and contributed to its magazine. In 1921 we moved to Paris. I saw my future. I had a daughter from an affair with an American violinist and my wife had a son. Some thought I was anti-Semitic because I could see bankers destroying the world and a lot of them were Jewish. But that’s not true. I don’t care what race bankers are, but finance is the root evil in this world. During WWII, I made the mistake of supporting Mussolini and was indicted for treason. But I was unfit to stand trial in the US and was confined to a mental hospital for 12 years until I was released as incurable. Then I returned to Italy and died at age 87.

Georgia O’Keefe (*American painter*) At the soiree, I read from Thoreau as I have always admired him. I was born in Wisconsin. I studied art and taught it. I moved to New York and Alfred gave me his support and allowed me to exhibit my paintings at his gallery. I saw my future. I started painting flowers. I saw Alfred divorce his wife and marry me. I became famous and my paintings sold for large amounts. I left New York to return to painting in the desert. I died in 1986.

edward e. cummings (*American poet, novelist and painter*) At the soiree, I read the poem “Buffalo Bill’s” from my collection *Tulips and Chimneys*.

The lines:

*“and what i want to know is
how do you like your blueeyed boy
Mister Death”*

are apt in this context. During the time travel, I saw that I had a productive life, having produced 2,900 poems, two autobiographical novels, four plays and several essays, as well as numerous drawings and paintings. And I am remembered as an eminent voice of 20th century poetry.

Lily Pad (*English hostess*) I was born in London. I’m a nobody really. I just work in a fish & chip shop. I wasn’t at the soiree. I was just sitting at home here watching the footie on TV. Footie, by the way, is what we call “soccer” in the UK. I haven’t gotten to see my future, but it sounds really cool.

Suspect name tags

Dame Agatha
Christie

James
Joyce

Mae
West

Thomas S.
Eliot

Isadora
Duncan

Charlie
Chaplin

Sarah
Bernhardt

William C.
Fields

Dorothy
Parker

Rudolph
Valentino

Optional witness name tags

Virginia
Woolf

William
Yeats

Bessie
Smith

Ezra
Pound

Georgia
O'Keefe

edward e.
cummings

Lily
Pad

Merri Mysteries
presents...

“Poetic Justice”

by Stephanie Chambers

The Play

Poetic Justice - Act One

Note: *Although this is in play format, you do not have to take to a stage and act it out. You can just sit around a dining table and read out your lines or sit in a circle on sofas etc.*

Note: *The suspects have 3 lines each to say. If it says the line may be said by “Anyone”, we recommend that one of the optional witnesses take a turn to say the line. If there are no optional witnesses, then everyone should take a turn saying one of these lines, however, the person to whom the line is addressed should not say it (generally this is the person who speaks next). You may like to work out beforehand who will say each of these 21 “Anyone” clues and write their character’s name next to each one, so that everyone gets a similar number of lines to say.*

- Anyone: I want you to tell me how you came to be at the soiree. Why did Mr Wells invite you to this exclusive gathering? Had you met him before?
- Agatha Christie: I hadn’t met H. G. Wells before he invited me to his party. He said he wanted to gather together all of the great people of our time. I was flattered, as I had only just published my first novel “*The Mysterious Affair at Styles*”, so I hardly thought of myself as “great”.
- James Joyce: H. G. Wells was a scientist turned writer and I don’t think he really liked “Ulysses” as it was far too avant-garde for his taste, but he invited me to the soiree anyway. Why, I’m not sure.

Mae West: I don't know why HG invited me. Maybe he preferred blondes. But science fiction just ain't my style. There ain't nothing fancy about it, 'tis there? H. G. Wells wasn't my kind of man. He just didn't have enough muscles to my way of thinking. My Dad was a boxer. And as I say "a girl whose curves are knockouts has been known to win on points". But it sounded like it was going to be a fun soiree, so I said I'd come along.

T.S. Eliot: Joyce was going to the party, so I agreed to come along too. I'd met you, through Ezra Pound, hadn't I, James? Pound reduced "*The Wasteland*" by half and then it was published. In for a "Pound" not a "Penny" as he'd say. I prefer to read the classics like the Upanishads rather than science fiction. I had never even read H. G. Wells' work, but I came anyway.

Isadora Duncan: As my husband Sergei Yesenin is a poet, I wasn't surprised to be invited to the soiree. In fact, my brothers and sisters used to recite poetry while I danced to it.

Charlie Chaplin: I had met HG a number of times. And I'd also met Rudy Valentino. I was invited to the party, partly because HG wanted me to adapt "The Time Machine" into a movie. When I received this invitation from Wells, I thought it was about time to return to England for a visit, so I accepted.

Sarah Bernhardt: Although I had performed in London, Paris, all over Europe, North and South America, and even Australia, I had not heard of Mr Wells until I received his invitation. He may have seen me perform. Many people have seen me on the stage.

W.C. Fields: I love a party, so when Mr Wells invited me, I said I'd come. He promised me there wouldn't be any children, old ladies or dogs there.

Dorothy Parker: I can't remember meeting Mr Wells. But I was delighted to receive his invitation as it meant meeting other writers.

Rudy Valentino: I was invited to the party because of my fame. As you all know, I'm regarded as one of the first great movie stars. Even Mr Chaplin would have to agree. Will John Travolta have fans lining up for eleven blocks at his funeral? I'm known all over the world as "The Great Latin Lover" – and with good reason. Although Signore Wells was far too conceited to admit that he too was a fan.

James Joyce: Eliot was at the party, so at least I knew someone, which helped. I had met H.G. Wells through Ezra Pound. It was an interesting party. I was especially delighted to meet a lady of your literary talents, Mrs Parker.

Dorothy Parker: It was a pleasure to meet you at the party, Mr Joyce. And it was also a joy to meet you Mr Eliot. I have always admired your work.

T.S. Eliot: Yes. I was delighted to meet a lady of your poetical prowess, Mrs Parker. Perhaps I can also persuade you to see men in a more favorable light?

W.C. Fields: I remember performing on stage with you, Miss Bernhardt. It was an honor.

Sarah Bernhardt: Yes I remember when I was on stage with you, Mr Fields. Your antics were amusing although a bit trivial when compared to the majesty of my performance. But we didn't let that stop us from becoming friends, did it Billy? We had a very gay time. We theatrical people cling to one another like props. I think you mentioned to me at the party, Miss West, that you had seen me when I came to America.

Mae West: Yes. I had seen you on stage when I was much younger Miss Bernhardt and I very much wanted to meet you.

W.C. Fields: You are my little chickadee Mae. We always work well together, don't we?

Mae West: Funny that you were on the same bill as Bill, WC, here. This was when he was still trying to keep all those balls in the air. Miss B had a clause in her contract forbidding animal acts to be on the same bill as her. Lucky you didn't juggle any animals Bill.

Charlie Chaplin: I have always idolized you, Sarah. If it weren't for your little leg problem, I probably would have asked you to star in one of my movies. But maybe my little tramp could still sweep you off your foot?

Isadora Duncan: Mr Wells invited me to the party to entertain his guests by dancing to jazz music. I explained to him how I absolutely detest jazz music. He allowed me to dance to classical music instead. He didn't offer me very good wages. He was pretty stingy, but I agreed to come along because of all the famous people that would be there.

Rudy Valentino: Wells wasn't what I would really call a good sport. Too much of a scientist. He had no real idea how to make his party swing. Although I am not really a party-lover, I agreed to go to the party because my agent said it would be good publicity.

T.S. Eliot: Because most of my friends had been invited, I came along. I thought it peculiar that none of our spouses were invited. Even Noah took animals in pairs. But Wells only wanted the crème de la crème to journey with him into the future. A lot of writers had come to Europe where we felt there was more of the creative spirit and less materialism. Mr Wells, alas, was the kind of man from whom we had fled.

James Joyce: Mr Wells read from his novel "The Time Machine" at the party. It was full of cannibals. It reminded me of a couple of lines from "Ulysses": "Eat or be eaten. Kill! Kill!"

Charlie Chaplin: At the party, I told HG that I didn't really think that his novel was the type of stuff that moviegoers would want to see. Audiences prefer comedy to science fiction. Wells was furious. Told me I didn't know what I was talking about. His book had sold millions. I told him I'd think about it – mainly to shut him up.

Anyone: At the soiree, after a magnificent repast, Mr Wells led us into his large study and got us to sit in his Time Machine.

Anyone: Yes after the soiree Mr Wells invited us all to take a seat in his Time Machine. And of course we didn't expect to be going anywhere, so none of us had even a toothbrush. Except for Miss West who had her handbag.

Anyone: Mr Wells said the Time Machine was the same as the one in his novel and he just wanted to see how it looked with people in it.

Anyone: No sooner were we in the Time Machine than he *“took the starting lever in one hand and the stopping one in the other, pressed the first...”*. Just as he described in his novel, we “saw the sun hopping swiftly across the sky”.

Agatha Christie: When I found myself here in the future, I pleaded to Mr Wells that I really must be getting back as I have a book signing at Harrods on tomorrow. And of course I had yet to meet Max Mallowan, the lovely young archeologist, who was to become my second husband.

Anyone: Mr Wells seemed happy with the way things had worked out. He was fascinated with the advances in technology and in the way modern day society is organized.

Anyone: Mr Wells’ head was split open from his fall to the floor. He had slipped on some bath oil on the floor. Every inch of the bathroom floor was covered with the bath oil.

Anyone: The police found Mr Wells’ pocket watch in Mae West’s handbag.

Anyone: HG Wells is a man you couldn’t help feel sorry for, because he took his own work far too seriously and allowed this to distance himself from others.

Anyone: No. Wells was more interested in flogging books than creating literary works. The man had no soul. He was a barbarian.

Rudy Valentino: Mr Wells had been planning for us all to make our debut on the modern world. Although we all refused to do so, he was adamant that it was to happen tomorrow. He said he would contact the press.

Agatha Christie: I thought that Mr Wells, being a writer like myself would understand my need to get back. But he said something had gone wrong with his machine and there was no way to repair it as that part just wasn’t available anymore.

Anyone: Mr Wells’ diary made it quite clear that he intended to make millions from selling the story of our time travel exploits to the highest bidder.

Anyone: In Isadora Duncan’s autobiography she quoted John Keats’ “Ode to a Grecian Urn”:
*“Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”*
I believe these lines are appropriate as the key to our puzzle is in beauty.

Sarah Bernhardt: I once attempted suicide. But I generally have an infectious *joie de vivre* and an irrepressible gaiety about me. Today I feel as if I’m in the midst of one of Monsieur Sardou’s melodramas. I am used to living a life of style. I find this English apartment very drab accommodation. When is the next boat to Paris?

Anyone: In the bathroom, there was oil on the walls and on the towel racks – on almost everything! There had even been oil on the door handle, but it had been wiped off, probably after the murder.

Anyone: Most of the guests tried to avoid our hostess as if she had leprosy. They said that it was for her own good – that they didn’t want to affect the future.

- Anyone: Yes. It must have been strange for our hostess to have all these people in her apartment and all of them trying to avoid her.
- Anyone: Mr Wells, like so many of his kind, was an opportunist. They take what they want and spit you out like a cherry pip or in this case, leave you floundering in the future.
- Dorothy Parker: Mr Wells assumed that because I am a very independent, free-spirited woman, that I was also that way inclined in the romantic sense. I assure you, that I am not at all like that.
- Anyone: Someone told me that they heard the men in the study arguing about whether it is an evil to kill an evil man.
- Anyone: As you all know, Mr Wells married his cousin and then later eloped with, and subsequently married, Catherine Robins, his “Jane”.
- Anyone: Yes. HG was no stranger to scandal. The modern world certainly had not cured him of his wicked ways.
- Isadora Duncan: I came to the party in my simple cotton tunic – bare-foot and bare-armed as usual. As I had no money, I had no need for a handbag. I have known great sadness since the tragic death of my children. But I still want to teach my revolutionary new dance method and for that I simply have to return to my own era.
- Anyone: We all knew that Mr Wells had his bath at the same time every afternoon. But we don’t know who prepared the bathroom for his visit.