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presents...

"Poetic Justice"

Standard version for 8 females and 8 males

by Stephanie Chambers

Second edition
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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.

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.

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.

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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 twotone 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.

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.

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.

Sarah Bernhardt – I'm a French actress but I have performed world-wide 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 script writer. 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.

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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.

Amelia Earhart – I'm an American and I love to fly in my flying machine. My life was exciting, very exciting. Even from my quick whiz through my life during the time travel, I could tell that I loved being an aviator. I want to live that life. *Dress suggestions:* Dress in your leather jacket, leather pants, leather bonnet & goggles. Maybe bring a paper aeroplane.

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.

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.

Lyle Pad – (English host) I'm a hip young guy 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.

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Background Information

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Background Information

Cut out each character's background information and attach it to *The Suspect* pages when you send 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 successnot 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.

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.

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.

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 Manhatten.

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.

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.

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.

Amelia Earhart (An American aviator who loved to fly in her flying machine.) I felt like the odd one out at the soiree as I am not at all literary. But I did perform a few loop de loops in my plane as I arrived, so in that sense I performed. During the time travel, I saw my life to date. I was born in Kansas. I developed a great passion for flying planes. I saw my future. I became an aviator and was the first woman to fly solo over the Atlantic Ocean. This was in 1932 and I became famous as a result of it. Then in 1937, I attempted the first round-the-world flight via the equator with my navigator, but my plane mysteriously disappeared after takeoff from New Guinea.

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 Chatanooga, 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.

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.

Lyle Pad (English host) 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.

Name Tags

Dame Agatha Christie

James Joyce

Virginia Woolf

William Yeats

Mae West

Thomas S. Eliot

Isadora Duncan

Dorothy Parker

Ezra Pound

Sarah Bernhardt

William C. Fields

Rudolph Valentino

Amelia Earhart

Bessie Smith

Charlie Chaplin

Lyle Pad

Merri Mysteries presents...

"Poetic Justice"

by Stephanie Chambers

These are the clues for:

Dame Agatha Christie

Dame Agatha Christie - Act One

During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 I hadn't met H. G. Wells before. 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".
- 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.
- 3 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 particular part just wasn't available anymore.
- 4 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.

Dame Agatha Christie - Act Two

During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 HG was a gentleman in the true sense of the word. He probably wouldn't have put up much of a fight had his life depended on it. Which it obviously did.
- 2 This reminds me of a line from "The Mysterious Affair at Styles" where Poirot says "If I had told you my ideas, the very first time you saw Mr. Alfred Inglethorp that astute gentleman would have in your so expressive idiom 'smelt a rat'! And then, bon jour to our chances of catching him!"
- 3 Mr Wells was very interested in one or two of the ladies in the group. I think he liked the idea that he had plucked them like peaches from their normal lives and now they would all have to spend a lot more time with him.
- 4 H. G. Wells was jealous of my success as a writer. Why my novels took up practically the whole of Lyle's bookcase! And when he heard I'd been translated into 103 foreign languages and made a Dame, he got all huffy and refused to speak to me again.

Dame Agatha Christie - Act Three

During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 From my research into psychology, it appears to me that if the circumstances had turned out differently, sometimes people wouldn't have become murderers. Perhaps there is also more of a leaning towards evil, but the situation, the events are important.
- 2 Time travel would drive most people towards contemplating either suicide or murder. It was a choice of killing yourself or killing the person causing the pain. I spent time outside in the courtyard thinking about this. The courtyard is off the lounge room.
- 3 Then of course there was that awful period when I couldn't remember who I was. A lot of cruel people thought I'd made that up too. Amnesia is a disease, like a stroke probably, and certainly not a character fault.
- 4 When I saw my future, I had a taste of that inner knowledge of my own soul that I would gain by spending time in the desert alone. I wanted to go back to be able to have that experience.

Merri Mysteries presents...

"Poetic Justice"

by Stephanie Chambers

These are the clues for:

James Joyce During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 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.
- 2 Pound, Yeats and Eliot were at the party, so at least I knew some of the people which helped.
- 3 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!"
- 4 After the soiree Mr Wells invited us all to take a seat in his Time Machine. Mrs Woolf only agreed to do so if we had smelling salts handy. 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.

During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 I agree with Eliot, Wells was something of a barbarian. He wasn't interested like me in playing with words. He only wrote to make money. In fact ... I had a strong sense that he planned to make a killing out of all this time travel business.
- 2 A few other lines from "Ulysses" are appropriate tonight: "And what is death, he asked...? ...It's a beastly thing and nothing else. It simply doesn't matter."
- 3 Pound, Eliot, Yeats and I formed a close bond. Allies are always invaluable in crises such as this.
- 4 Just because we are writers, doesn't mean we can't be men of action when we need to be.

James Joyce - Act Three

During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 When we found Wells' body in the bathroom, there was no blood to be seen.
- 2 I was delighted to find that my novel was no longer banned in most countries. People in this new Millennium seem to be much more accepting of life and death.
- 3 Some other lines from "Ulysses" which are appropriate are: "wasn't she the downright villain to go and do a thing like that of course some men can be dreadfully aggravating drive you mad".
- 4 Maybe it wasn't a man but a woman that committed this crime. Women don't like blood generally and this was a bloodless murder.

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These are the clues for:

Virginia Woolf

During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 I have never been interested in science fiction, so I couldn't see why H. G. Wells had invited me, but I came because so many other literary people were coming.
- 2 You and I are friends, aren't we, Tom? My husband and I had published some of your work.
- 3 As is so often the case at parties, I banded together with some of the ladies Dorothy and Agatha. Miss West was with her male admirers. Some of the other men preferred their own company. And their port and cigars. Yet another of the put downs women are expected to endure.
- 4 But Dorothy and Agatha are intelligent, literary women, so we had a lot in common. We shared a strong desire return to our own era. There were far too many of us to share only one loo. The "loo" is what we British call the "toilet". We certainly can't call it the "WC" today can we? Not with William C. Fields in our midst.

During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 Mr Wells was very cold towards me. I really have no idea why he invited me. He obviously objected strongly to most of my feminist views. Which was his problem entirely.
- 2 A line from "Jacob's Room" which is appropriate is: "Some tumors have to be cut."
 - By which I mean, sometimes we have to do things we don't like for the common good.
- 3 The status of women seems much improved in the modern world and I was pleased to hear how I had contributed to that progress.
- 4 The trouble is that if I remain in the present the emancipation of women might be delayed because a lot of my writing won't be there to kick it along.

Virginia Woolf - Act Three

During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- This afternoon, I felt so upset by what had happened I went to the spare bedroom for a good cry. It sometimes helps. Although not often.
- 2 I'm afraid I again felt quite suicidal and if it hadn't been for the support of dear Dorothy and Agatha, I might have been tempted to drown myself again. I wonder if by drowning myself twice, I'd go to Heaven? You know – two wrongs making a right and all that. Probably not, I suppose. In any case – the bath was already occupied.
- 3 While I was laying in the bedroom, I heard through the wall various visitors to Mr Wells' room.
- At one point I heard Mr Wells arguing with a man and later I heard a woman's laughter.