

MICHAEL. No!

AMY (*big announcement*). So while we resolve this technical issue... London, this is 'Believe' by the global icon, Cher!

DAVE (*off*). No it isn't!

DAVE *bursts in, also in rehearsal-room clothes.*

Ha, ha! Thank you, Amy, but an a cappella Cher song will thankfully not be necessary. (*To audience.*) Rest assured, we're now back on track. Are we?

MICHAEL (*tapping keys*). I'm not exactly sure what's –

DAVE. There we go. Esteemed audience members, tonight you will bear witness to a startling and alarming revelation about H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* that will change the way you view the world. For ever. Now, I appreciate that most of you will have come here tonight expecting to be entertained. You need to let that thought go. My name is –

'Immigrant Song' kicks back in.

MICHAEL. We're sorted. Sorry, Dave.

DAVE. No, leave it on, it works. My name is Dave Wells: actor, writer, director and intellectual adventurer. Dave... Wells!? A coincidence? No! Because I am in fact... actually turn it off, it's really distracting.

MICHAEL *cuts the music.*

Because I am in fact the great-great-grandson of Herbert George Wells himself.

MICHAEL. Aka H. G. Wells.

DAVE. Yes indeed.

AMY. You can close your mouth, sir.

MICHAEL. The resemblance is actually uncanny.

DAVE. This is Amy Tymes – actress.

AMY. Actor. And singer.

DAVE. And this is Michael O'Reilly – just actor.

MICHAEL. And company tour booker.

DAVE. They don't need to know that. People of Finsbury Park –

MICHAEL. And other London boroughs.

DAVE. Until a matter of weeks ago...

A few pieces of confetti flutter down from the flies. They all clock this.

Until a matter of weeks ago, the world had assumed that H. G. Wells's seminal time-travelling novel was a work of fiction. But no. We can reveal that it is in fact –

MICHAEL. Fact.

DAVE. Fact.

AMY. The events described within the book...

MICHAEL. Are real.

DAVE. Are real!

A theatre lamp blows and sounds real. A believable but augmented ting. They all look up. It's obviously a bit darker.

(To the audience.) Sorry, a light just blew. Is that safe?

MICHAEL. It's just a patching issue with the LED. It's fine.

DAVE. Is it?

MICHAEL. It's been PAT tested.

DAVE. Who's Pat?

AMY. Just carry on.

DAVE. Now. I'm not expecting you to comprehend what I've just told you straight away.

MICHAEL. We certainly didn't.

AMY. Nope. Seemed like total bullsh–

DAVE. So... in order to convince you of the truth, we need to begin at the beginning.

MICHAEL *starts pushing the covered chaise longue from SL to SR in front of the covered drinks trolley.*

AMY. A community centre near Ealing where we were rehearsing *The Importance of Being Earnest* – the show we'd actually, properly, rehearsed and were supposed to be performing here this week.

DAVE. But all that changed when I walked into rehearsals carrying a cardboard box.

MICHAEL. This was the moment our lives changed for ever.

DAVE brings on a free-standing door from the USSR wing and places it USSR. A sign that reads 'rehearsal room' hangs on it. AMY grabs a script, MICHAEL grabs props.

DAVE. And so that is the moment we must recreate for you first. Please be aware that everything you will see from now on is true. As it happened.

MICHAEL. This is verbatim theatre!

AMY. Using the actual words we used.

DAVE. More or less.

AMY. The actual words. With no extemporising by one of us in particular to make himself look good.

DAVE. Whatever. And action! (*He hides behind the door.*)

Scene Two – Rehearsal One

MICHAEL and AMY are sitting on the chaise longue, rehearsing.

MICHAEL (*reading*). 'I am known for the gentleness of my disposition and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature. But I warn you...'

He drops out of character on AMY's look.

What?

AMY. Just talk normally. It's not panto.

Scene Three – Dave Convinces His Fellow Actors

DAVE. So, we deliver my great-great-grandfather's message in a bottle that never went to sea.

AMY. Dave!

DAVE. We can even use the chair he used for lecture tours.

AMY. Dave!! Are you seriously suggesting we contact *every* single theatre that's booked *The Importance of Being Earnest* – how many's that, Michael?

MICHAEL. One.

AMY. One?!

MICHAEL. Oh, and Lumpton Marsh Village Hall are a yes if we run an over-sixty-fives' movement workshop – (*He gives a hopeful thumbs up.*)

AMY....*all* of those theatres, and tell them we want to replace our presentation of arguably the most enduring of British comedies with a book where not a lot really happens.

DAVE. 'Not a lot really happens'?!

AMY. Action-wise.

DAVE. He travels through time, Amy. How much more action do you want? And it's all true!

AMY. But Dave, will this evidence alone really convince discerning theatregoers?

MICHAEL. It will in Lumpton Marsh.

AMY. But a cultural hub like Wolverhampton? Or Finsbury Park?

MICHAEL. Love the Park Theatre – such a friendly and sophisticated audience.

DAVE. No, Amy, you're right. We'll need more. Testimonials, eyewitness accounts, anything we can get a hold of.

MICHAEL. Let's do this. And so we began an extensive period of verification.

MICHAEL *pushes the plant stand backstage.*

Scene Four – Research

DAVE *wheels himself to the door and turns the rehearsal-room sign around to read: 'Verification HQ', and dials a mobile. He gets out of time with the SFX keyboard sounds. An old house phone rings. AMY appears USL.*

LADY ZSA ZSA ZSA. Lady Greta Zsa Zsa Zsa.

DAVE. Lady Zsa Zsa Zsa, this is Dave Wells. H. G. Wells's great-great-grandson.

LADY ZSA ZSA ZSA. What can I do for you, sugar?

DAVE. You say that you remember your mother telling you that she remembers *her* mother, your grandmother, telling her that she remembers *her* mother – your mother's grandmother, telling her that she remembers H. G. Wells turning up at her door and proposing to her *after* he had died.

LADY ZSA ZSA ZSA. Yes, that is all true, darling!

She hangs up.

DAVE *(to the audience)*. Proof! Case file two.

Another phone rings. MICHAEL answers. Underscore of The X Files.

DR BINKLEY. Dr Evan Binkley.

DAVE. The President of the Society for Historical Conspiracy Research? Is this a good time?

DR BINKLEY. No, I'm watching *The X Files*. Or as I like to call it – the real news. Who is this?

DAVE. This is Dave Wells, H. G. Wells's great-great-grandson.

DR BINKLEY. Well if your intention is to mock me... my career is in ruins after his visit here last year!

DAVE. A visit from H. G. Wells? Last year? Seventy-three years after he had died?

DR BINKLEY. Look, I didn't believe it at first. Not until he made me study the photographs. *But* the closer I looked, the clearer it became – often just the back of his head or a blurry chin, but at every significant historical event he's there...

AMY holds up blown-up pictures.

The World War One Christmas Day football truce – there right at the back. The fall of the Berlin Wall. An extra disciple at the Last Supper!

DAVE. We did ignore that last one. But more proof. And finally, Finsbury Park – don't say it, Michael – we have one more surprise for you. In town for one night only and here to confirm our findings, please put your hands together for the one, the only, Professor Brian Cox!

Pause. AMY appears.

AMY. He's not coming.

DAVE. What? Can we get him on the phone?

AMY. He's blocked all my calls.

DAVE. Amy, do we have anything?

AMY. We've got this.

MICHAEL produces a life-sized cut-out of the celebrity physicist, Brian Cox.

MICHAEL (impression). I'm Brian Cox.

DAVE. That'll do. Proof!

AMY. The further we looked, the more compelling the evidence became.

DAVE. I began the arduous but necessary dramatisation of the events my great-great-grandfather had witnessed. But interpreting his scribbles was no easy task.

MICHAEL. The rehearsal room, three weeks later.

Transition to rehearsal room.

DAVE (on sitting). Morning, guys. So you love my first draft, that's excellent.

MICHAEL. No, wait –

AMY. Verbatim theatre, Dave, we agreed. Exactly what was said...

DAVE. Fine! (On sitting.) Morning, guys. What do you mean, 'it's a piece of shit'?

MICHAEL turns the page on a flipchart. His complicated diagrams have titles above them.

MICHAEL. The Grandfather Paradox.

SFX: EastEnders (massive UK TV show set in East London) dramatic DUFF DUFF DUFF theme tune. Underscore establishes. DAVE enters as FRANK (a very recognisable character from the show).

What's happening now?

FRANK. Pat? Pat?!

PAT (*off*). What'chu Brussels-sprouting about now, Frank?!

FRANK. Who'd ya get that flippin' time machine off've from?

AMY enters as PAT BUTCHER – also a very recognisable character from the show – leopard-print coat, wig, cigarette and big hoop earrings.

PAT. The Mitchell bruvvers. You got a problem with that?

FRANK. Nah. Course not, princess.

PAT. Good. Cos I'm gonna go back and witness the time my grandparents first met. Don't wait up.

DAVE hits the laptop. AMY spins on the spot. Lights and sound signify time travel. We're on a train platform.

Blimey, it's all so different a hundred years ago, or so. There's my young grandmother getting off the Walford steam flyer. And there's my young grandfather. They're about to have their chance meeting!

DAVE sticks a hat on MICHAEL and a sign round his neck that reads 'Young Grandad'.

FRANK. Oh, Friar Tuck me! What if Pat accidentally stops her grandparents from meeting by distracting them or summat!?

PAT. Alright, sweetheart? After a bit of Posh 'n' Becks?

MICHAEL. What? Seriously? I'm your grandfather!?

PAT. Grandfather!

SFX: EastEnders TV show dramatic DUFF DUFF DUFF theme tune. AMY exits.

DAVE. Alright, thank you, Amy. On reflection, that probably needed a smidge more rehearsal. But the paradox being, that you could go back in time and apparently get off with your grandad and stop yourself from being born. Is that about the nub of it?

MICHAEL. Oh my God.

DAVE. Close enough. Alright, Paradox Two.

MICHAEL turns the page on the flipchart.

MICHAEL. The Hitler Paradox.

SFX: The Muppet Show underscore. AMY enters with an upright bed (cloth on a stick).

I'm so sorry. I really have no idea what is going on.

DAVE. Michael. Pillows. Now!

MICHAEL stands behind AMY with pillows. MISS PIGGY (AMY dressed up) is revealed in an upright bed.

MISS P. Kermy? Kermy!?

KERMIT (*Kermit puppet pops up from under the sheets*). Er... yes, Miss Piggy?

MISS P. I thought I'd use the *Sesame Street* time machine to go back in time and kill baby Hitler.

KERMIT. Did Bert and Ernie put you up to this?

MISS P. No! I can think for myself, thank you! Smash the patriarchy.

She produces a gun.

KERMIT. A gun?! Where did you...

MISS P. Fozzie Bear.

KERMIT. But Miss Piggy. If you go back in time and kill Hitler prior to his atrocities, won't you be removing the reason you're going back to kill him?

MISS P.... Do

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