

Outline notes 2

16 October 2002

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STEEPFALL

A: The back story

Arthur Woombe, born 1873, was a metalworker in Birmingham. At the turn of the century, he started a small factory making bicycles, and prospered. He saw his bikes as a means to freedom for the working classes, and called them Liberty Cycles.

His son Sidney, born 1893, qualified as an engineer and joined the Independent Labour Party. In 1913, Sidney went on a fraternal visit to Germany, for meetings with the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SDP). He stayed at the home of the SDP's Berlin secretary, Rudolf Braun, and his wife Margaretta. There he fell in love with the Brauns' beautiful daughter Marthe. He married her and took her to live in Birmingham a few days before the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in 1914.

Sidney and Marthe had two children: Annabel, born 1917, and Roger, born 1918. Marthe spoke German to them at home so both grew up bilingual.

In the twenties, Sidney began manufacturing motorcycles, then motor cars. He prospered, and by 1930 he was a millionaire.

In the thirties Rudolf and Margaretta Braun, still running the Berlin SDP, got into trouble with the Nazis. Sidney and Marthe tried to persuade them to flee to England, but they insisted on staying to combat Fascism, as did Marthe's brother and sister, Peter and Jutta.

In 1937, Annabel started at the London School of Economics. Because of her German connections, she was especially interested in inflation, particularly hyperinflation.

In 1938, Roger went up to Cambridge. There he met Jack Baxter, who like Roger was reading French and German.

Jack's grandfather was a coal miner, his grandmother the local midwife. Jack's

father, a bright boy, won a scholarship to medical school and became a doctor and a passionate advocate of public health reform—drainage, clean water, public baths. abattoir inspection, and so on. At Cambridge, Jack became secretary of the Socialist Society. There he met Roger Woolcombe.

In the summer of 1939, Roger brought a group of university friends home for a weekend to the Baxter family home, Steepfall, a large, comfortable house on a cliff on the English south coast. As well as Jack, the guests included::

Professor Arnold Daisy, historian and (secretly) recruiter of spies for the KGB. For some time he has been working on two of the other guests, Sinjean and Trumps.

Ronald Trumper, called Trumps. Trumps arrived at Cambridge looking for a religion. He became a buddhist, briefly, then a communist. He is a romantic idealist but not without determination.

Healy Jones, also a communist.

Bill Sinjean, languid upper-class rebel.

Peter Osborne, slippery, untrustworthy type of no particular politics.

They discussed Germany. Trumps analysed the rise of Hitler as a contradiction within capitalism. Jack blamed it on the harsh conditions of the Versailles Treaty, which kept Germany impoverished and weak, until Hitler offered defiance and hope.

Jack fell in love with Annabel. But she, a passionate idealist, scorned his clean-water socialism, and fell for the romantic Trumps, and lost her virginity to him that Saturday night.

On the Sunday, Prof. Daisy recruited both Trumps and Sinjean. He tells both they must have nothing further to do with each other or with anyone on the Left. Trumps must drop Annabel.

On Sunday afternoon Sidney Woolcombe produced a camera, and they all lined up on the lawn for a picture. At the last moment Sidney's secretary, Joan, appeared, and he gave her the camera so that he could be in the picture. (He was also having an affair with Joan.)

Trump dropped Annabel heartlessly. She did not see him again until after the war. But she spent many nights weeping over the photograph.

Trump dropped communism and became a jingoistic Tory, even proposing a motion in the Cambridge Union: "Communism is an experiment that failed, deservedly".

During the Second World War, Sidney turned his factory over to producing armoured cars. He made his foreman Managing Director and became Minister of Production in Churchill's government. Although Churchill was a Conservative, normal party conflict was suspended during the war: there were no elections, but Labour men were made ministers in a coalition government. In the British system, a minister has to be either an MP or a Lord, so Sidney became Lord Woolcombe.

Rudolf Braun, still fighting Fascism, was imprisoned by the Nazis and died in a concentration camp. Margaretta died in an RAF air raid.

Roger Woolcombe and Jack Baxter fought side by side in North Africa. In the battle of Tobruk, Roger was killed and Jack injured, losing his right hand and right eye. Jack became an intelligence officer, using his languages (French and German) to interrogate prisoners, and ended up in London working for the Joint Intelligence Staff.

Annabel joined SOE, learned the violent tradecraft of a secret agent, and was assigned to Section X, which dealt with Germany. She was parachuted into Germany near the end of the war to take photographs of Peenemunde. On the run, she threw herself on the mercy of her cousins Peter and Jutta. They sheltered her at the risk of their own lives, and shared with her their starvation rations. Afterwards, Peter was arrested and killed. Annabel will never forget that.

Ronald Trumper and Bill Sinjean both joined MI6, the Secret Intelligence Service. At his interview, Trumps was asked about people he knew at Cambridge, and in a moment of panic he said he had never met Sinjean. He got away with this unnecessary lie, but it would come back to haunt him.

Both men passed information to the Kremlin throughout the war.

After the death of Roger Woolcombe, Sidney took a paternal interest in Jack Baxter. As the war drew to a close, a general election was announced for 5 July 1945. (Because ballot papers had to be brought to England from soldiers overseas, the votes were not counted until 26 July.) Sidney Woolcombe knew that the Labour Party branch in the town of Harbourmouth, near Steepfall, was looking for a bright young candidate,

and he steered Jack that way.

The Labour landslide surprised the world. Churchill was defeated, and Clement Attlee became Prime Minister. Jack was elected. Healy Jones became the MP for the mining town of Aberfair, one of a handful of communist winners.

In the same year, Annabel returned to LSE to write her doctoral thesis on hyperinflation. It was published as a book titled Currency Degeneration. Peter Osborne became a hack journalist.

At the end of the war, most British and American politicians (though not all) envisaged a future in which the victorious Allies—the USSR, the USA, Britain and France—would continue to work together in harmony.

In countries liberated from the Nazis by the Red Army, the Soviets were quick to reintroduce political parties and elections. National communist parties were electorally strong in most European countries. However, it soon became clear that they were not strong enough to win power in free elections. Yet Stalin was not willing to give up control. During 1947, leading non-communist politicians were arrested, exiled or executed in Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland. Such tactics were not possible in western Europe, but the communists remained electorally strong and politically unscrupulous in France, Italy and Greece, and Stalin was not totally without hope for those countries, especially in the post-war chaos and poverty.

Germany stood between the two extremes. The country was divided into four zones, one controlled by each ally. The Soviet zone was the largest and contained the capital, Berlin, which however was also divided into four.

The Soviets were the first of the allies to permit political parties and local elections, and Annabel's cousin Zusanna was elected to the city assembly as an SDP councillor.

Jack Baxter believed that the way to prevent the rise of another Hitler was to help Germany become a prosperous, democratic country. This point of view was difficult for war veterans to accept, so Jack, with his medals and his war wounds, made a persuasive advocate.

Stalin took the opposite view. Germany had invaded Russia twice in fifty years,

causing heartbreaking destruction of all that the Russian people had worked so hard to build. The only way to make sure there would be no third invasion was to keep Germany weak and poor.

Stalin also nurtured a hope that continued chaos and starvation in Germany might lead the people to turn to Communism in despair. The Soviets therefore used their veto in the Allied Control Council to block all moves for regeneration in Germany.

In furtherance of the Baxter point of view, President Truman backed the Marshall Plan, an aid package to Europe. However, the plan was in trouble in Congress, where right-wing Republicans opposed handouts. Stalin also opposed the plan, seeing it as a way of extending American economic imperialism into the heart of Europe. He forced all countries under Soviet influence to refuse Marshall Aid.

At the end of 1947 (25 Nov to 15 Dec) the four foreign ministers met in London and failed again to reach agreement on the regeneration of Germany. The British foreign minister was Ernie Bevin, a strident anticommunist socialist, a boy from a background of poverty who rose up through the trade union movement (and is now seen as one of the most brilliant foreign secretaries in British history). He loses patience with the Soviets and decides it is time for the West to develop its own plan for west Germany.

Around the same time Peter Osborne, who is not much of a journalist, decided in desperation to write a "Lost Generation" type piece about the group of friends who met at Steepfall just before the war. His sickeningly sentimental prose was to be accompanied by the photo taken on the lawn.

Trump got wind of this and panicked. Now a very highly-placed spy in the Foreign Office, he remembers the lie he told at his interview about never having met Sinjean. If the photo of him and Sinjean is published, someone is sure to remember. He sees Osborne, gets the photo from him, and has it doctored so that Sinjean is wiped out.

Then Peter submits the story to a society magazine.

B: The story

1. It is Christmas 1947. Economics professor Annabel Woolcombe, 30 and single, arrives at Steepfall, the home of her parents, Sidney and Marthe. It is a large, comfortable house on a cliff on the south coast of England.

Sidney Woolcombe is a wealthy car manufacturer. He tells his daughter about a new, ultra-modern car he is about to launch, the Woocombe Wonder, which will bring reliable, comfortable motoring within the reach of millions of ordinary people.

Marthe Woolcombe, who is German, is worried about her relations in Berlin, her sister Jutta and Jutta's daughter Zusanna, who is a city assemblyman there. This is the third winter since the war ended, and it is a bitter cold one all over western Europe. Germany is chaotic and impoverished, economic activity minimal, the Reichsmark worthless and the population reduced to barter.

In fact the situation is reminiscent of the twenties. Annabel remembers the horror stories she heard as a child of the conditions in which her German relations were living. Those memories led her to study hyperinflation at university, and she is now one of the world's leading experts in currency management, her book "Currency Degeneration" the text book on the subject.

The local MP drops in for cocktails. he is Jack Baxter, 29, son of a doctor in a northern town. Jack was the best friend of Annabel's brother Roger, who died in the war. Jack lost his right hand and right eye in the same battle.

Jack is a Labour MP and an admirer of the pugnacious foreign secretary, Ernie Bevin, an anticommunist socialist. Jack agrees with Bevin that the way to prevent another Hitler is to avoid the mistakes of the Versailles Treaty, which impoverished and crippled Germany in the twenties, and instead to rebuild Germany as a prosperous, democratic country.

Jack has brought with him a copy of the latest issue of Chat, a society magazine, which contains an article by Peter Osborne, who was at Cambridge with Jack and Roger. It shows a photograph taken here at Steepfall in the summer of 1939, a few months before the outbreak of war. Roger had invited a group of friends from Cambridge for the weekend, and they lined up on the lawn for a photo: Prof. Arnold Daisy, left-wing historian; Healy Jones, now the Communist MP for Aberfair; Bill

Sinjean, a languid upper-class rebel; Ronald Trumper, known as Trumps, who now works in the Foreign Office; and others. Four of the group died in the war.

But Annabel is transfixed. She is certain that Bill Sinjean was in the original photo, but he is missing from this. How is that possible?

The others say: Are you sure he was there? But Annabel is sure. She cried over this photo.

2. Jack is summoned to No. 10 Downing Street, and Prime Minister Attlee makes him a junior minister in the foreign office, under his hero Bevin. His area of responsibility will be Germany. (Jack now realises he was being sounded out at Steepfall.)

Germany is divided into four zones, each ruled by one of the four victorious allies: the USSR, the USA, Britain and France. Since the end of the war, the USSR has vetoed all plans for reunification and regeneration. Bevin is now planning to reunite the three western zones, and Marshall Aid will get the economy going again. Jack's job is to draw up a plan for this that Bevin can present to Truman.

He immediately asks: What about Berlin? Germany's capital lies deep in the Russian zone, but is divided into four sectors. The answer is: No one knows.

3. Nik Yudenich is a cultural attache at the Soviet Embassy in London and is the senior KGB man in the UK. He now has a meeting with one of his spies, codenamed Watchmaker. They discuss Jack's appointment. Watchmaker says he knew Jack at Cambridge and now gives correct details of Jack's brief.

Nik is concerned. The Soviets are terrified that they will lose the security they have fought so hard, and paid so much, to gain. Communists are losing ground in France, Italy and Greece. Communist rule in eastern Europe has been maintained only by ruthlessly eliminating noncommunist opposition. A strong, prosperous, western-oriented Germany threatens their security. It could so easily invade them yet again, this time perhaps with American backing.

Their only hope is an eastward-looking Germany, or one too weak to threaten

them, and preferably both. Jack has become the enemy.

4. Jack meets with a group of backbenchers opposed to aid to Germany. They are led by his college friend Healy Jones, now the Communist MP for the mining town of Aberfair. Healy parrots the Moscow line: Marshall Aid is American imperialism, Germany must be kept weak to prevent her invading Russia again.

After the meeting, Jack and Healy converse amicably about the old days. Jack mentions the Steepfall weekend, and Healy clearly recollects that Sinjean was there.

Jack repeats this to Annabel.

5. Watchmaker angrily tells Niki to shut Healy up. That damn photo could ruin me. Niki sends a message to Healy via the Communist Party GB.

6. Annabel sees Healy and asks him about Sinjean and the photo. Healy vehemently denies that Sinjean was there.

Annabel goes to see Peter Osborne and asks him about the photo. Shifty as ever, he at first denies that it was doctored. Annabel tells him she has another copy (which is not true). Then he claims that the picture was doctored by MI6.

Annabel presents her plan for German currency reform to Jack. It involves setting up a new West German bank and printing new banknotes, called Deutschemarks.

She also tells Jack what Osborne said about MI6.

7. The Foreign Office has jurisdiction over MI6 (known as "the friends") and Jack asks why they doctored the photo. They reply that he does not need to know. This irritates him. Who are the masters? He also suspects that MI6 is politically Conservative and does not serve the Labour government with the same loyalty it gave to the Conservatives. But he knows better than to fight them on their choice of ground, so he backs off.

He speaks to his old friend Trumps, now a civil servant in the FO. Trumps tells

him that MI6 hate to see photos of their people anywhere, and always prevent publication if they can.

8. Annbel uses SOE tradecraft to locate Sinjean, easily circumventing MI6 security precautions. Sinjean denies that the photo was doctored on his account.

9. Watchmaker tells Nik about the second photo. They burgle Steepfall but do not find it.

10. Jack presents his plan for Germany, and Bevin approves.

11. Watchmaker gives the details to Nik, who is scared. He says: Baxter must be discredited.

12. Annabel speaks to Trump. He tells her the following story. AT his MI6 interview, Sinjean foolishly said he had never met Arnold Daisy or Healy Jones, both famous Cambridge communists. He got away with this lie at the time. Then, when he learned there was a photo in existence that showed him with both of them, he pnaicked and persuaded Osborne to let him doctor the photo.

13. Nik tells Watchmaker to have MI6 mislead Jack about Czechoslovakia. Then Nik briefs Healy to ask Jack about it in the Commons.

14. Jack tells the Commons that the FO considers the government of Czechoslovakia safe from Soviet interference.

15. Annabel goes to Frankfurt to supervise the distribution of Deutschemarks.

16. Jack is humiliated by the Soviet-back coup in Czechoslovakia. He confronts MI6 and demands to know how this happened. Another junior minister backs him by

demanding to know how much money and how many staff they employ Kremlin watching.

17. Watchmaker blackmails the other minister, who backs off.

18. Annabel goes to Berlin and is horrified by conditions there. She swears to her relatives that the west will not abandon them.

19. Pieck tells Stalin that the KPD cannot win the Berlin city assembly elections scheduled for October. Stalin orders maximum pressure on the SPD to amalgamate.

20. Annabel persuades Jack not to abandon Berlin.

21. Jack persuades Bevin to back the SDP's independence. But Bevin warns that he will not go to war over Berlin.

22. Watchmaker, cock-a-hoop, passes to Nik Bevin's no-war declaration. Stalin decides to starve the Allies out of Berlin. This will secure the safety of West Germany. On 1 April he begins stopping trains.

On 3 April, Truman signs the Marshall Plan.

The battle lines are drawn.

23. Sinjean leaves MI6 but Jack suspects a leak still. Experimentally, he tells Trump something no one else knows. Next day, he gets it back from Healy. He concludes there is a leak in Trump's office.

24. On 18 June, the new currency is announced for the trizone. Jack tells Trump a lie: the Allies will not insist on the DM for Berlin.

25. Trumps, alias Watchmaker, passes this to Nik.

26. Annabel starts flying Dms into Berlin.

27. On 22 June, the Soviets announce that the Ostmark will be the only currency in all of Berlin. They do not have clear authority to make this rule, so they order the city assembly so to rule.

Annabel stiffens the spine of Zusanna.

28. Jack misleads Trump again, saying the council will cave in. Nik organises a demo.

29. Annabel distributes the Dms.

30. Nik is devastated by the radio announcement of Dmark convertibility in West Berlin. Stalin greenlights the blockade.

31. Dmarks become legal.

32. Jack tells Trump one last lie: the West *will* go to war if planes are shot down or turned back.

33. The airlift begins.

Epilogue: Tito defies Stalin.