

Outline

THE RUSSIAN PRINCE

by Ken Follett

100,000 words

18 August 80

D3

' ... confidential correspondence between the Russian Embassy in London and its foreign office in St Petersburg was regularly communicated to the German government by an Embassy official ... '

- Sir Robert Ensor: England 1870-1914

## Prologue

Two young tourists from the US, Peter and Lizzie, are visiting Walden Park in Surrey. Walden Park is England's answer to Disneyland: a stately home with a fabulous ornamental garden, a safari park, and a car museum. Peter and Lizzie tour the eighty-room house, explore the landscaped garden, then wander through the woods. Three miles from the main house, on a slight rise, they come across a 'folly': a small building like a miniature medieval castle, obviously built at some rich man's whim. The place is overgrown, almost hidden, and locked up, but Peter finds an open window and they go in. Inside, the folly is fitted out like a full-size doll's house, with a tiny old-fashioned kitchen, a living-room and a bedroom. A staircase leads to the battlements, from where there is a beautiful view across the valley. Peter and Lizzie smoke a joint, enjoying the ambience and imagining the lives of the incredibly rich people who used to live at Walden Hall. Then they make love, pretending to be Lord and Lady Walden and giggling a lot. A little later they hear a voice: 'I heard heavy breathing so I waited outside.' In walks a woman who must be eighty years old. Peter realises they are out of line and begins to apologise. The old lady has a twinkle in her eye. 'Don't worry, there was a time when I used to get laid in here.' Peter and Lizzie give each other a look which says: 'She's an original!' She tells them the miniature castle is called Lady Walden's Folly, after her grandmother for whom it was built. 'But I suppose I perpetuated the name. I nearly got killed in here.' She is the current Lady Walden, and this is the story she tells:-

## One

(i) It is 1894, and the seventh Earl Walden is dying. He is a typical Victorian aristocrat of the huntin', shootin' and fishin' variety, and what he is dying of is sixty years of good living. Today he insists on getting up. Wearing a heavy coat and well muffled up, he walks - attended by anxious servants - through the woods to Lady Walden's Folly. His late wife had this built, ostensibly for her daughters; but she had two sons and no daughters, and she was less than perfectly sane, and she used to play here herself. The old Earl walks around, remembering her, and finally rests on the battlements, exhausted and close to death, gazing at the view she loved so well. His younger son George arrives. The Earl asks for Stephen, his elder son. 'He's in St Petersburg,' George says. The Earl grunts: 'He won't get much shootin' there.' Then he dies.

(ii) The belle of St Petersburg society in 1894 is Lydia, the daughter of a count. Aged 19, she is beautiful in a frail, colourless sort of way, and terribly respectable: modestly dressed, obedient to her parents, respectful to her elders, a devout churchgoer, hopelessly impractical, and liable to faint at the slightest suggestion of impropriety. However all this is to some extent an act, for she is secretly conducting a mad passionate affair with an anarchist student named Feliks Murontsiv.

At the age of eleven Feliks discovered that the solid Moscow shopkeepers who brought him up were not his natural parents. In fact he is the son of a now-dead peasant girl and an unidentified young aristocrat. He grew up thinking of himself as something special, a V.I.P. temporarily lodging with the petit-bourgeoisie. He developed a commanding manner and an intuitive grasp of the

psychology of dominance. He first learned to despise the aristocracy (to which he fancies he belongs) when they failed to pay their bills in his foster-father's shop. He looks undernourished: tall, thin as a rail, with a gaunt white face and large, staring eyes. He is fiery, passionate, idealistic and mad as hell at the whole world. At the University he has become an anarchist. The intellectual rationale for his political views is reasonable enough, but his fervour comes from his personal confusions and hatreds.

This evening Lydia snatches an hour with Feliks on her way to a reception at the British Embassy. As always, when they make love she shouts 'Help!' at the moment of climax.

She arrives at the Embassy looking happy and delectable, and she captures the heart of a visiting Englishman, Stephen Walden.

Young Walden is like his father the seventh Earl - so much so that they cannot live together. Stephen was born in 1864. He learned to ride before he could walk and to shoot before he could write. He went to Eton, where he misbehaved, and Oxford, where he surprised everyone by graduating (in History). In 1887 he made his first trip to Africa where he fell in love with big-game hunting.

On that first African trip he picked up a manservant who was to be with him for the rest of his life. Pritchard, then 16 (Walden was 23) was the intelligent, cynical son of a London shirtmaker. He had run away to sea and then jumped ship in Zanzibar. A close bond was forged between the two men on safari. Pritchard is intensely loyal to Walden while at the same time despising the British ruling class in general. In turn Walden, who is always aloof with servants, talks to Pritchard - when they are

alone - the way a company president might talk to his chief executive.

When in London Walden pursues loose women. Last year (1893) he had a fairly notorious affair with a singer, Bonita Carlos, known as Bonnie (real name Maudie Jenks). He even gave her a present of a small house in St John's Wood, the area of London which was at that time Mistressville. But Bonnie threw him over when the Prince of Wales took a fancy to her.

Even before that Walden found England suffocating and spent little time there. He is a restless young man who lives for kicks. He goes on safari once a year and travels the world in between. Being the heir to an earldom, he is entertained by England's ambassadors in the world's capital cities. The diplomats, having heard of his reputation as a hell-raiser, are surprised to find that he is intelligent and knowledgeable about international politics and has a flair for languages. In fact he is laying the foundation for what will later be a considerable expertise in foreign affairs.

Tonight at dinner he is placed next to Lydia. She is much too demure to be his usual type, but nevertheless he finds her enchanting. He thinks: If I wanted a wife ... but I don't. She, secure in her passion for Feliks, flirts with him just a little.

That night a cable comes from England informing him of the death of his father. The news has an odd effect on him. He does not shed tears, but he cancels a gambling date and sits up all night, thinking.

(iii) Next morning Lydia's father, the old Count, tells her he has found out about Feliks. He is wild with rage. Lydia dashes out of

the house and goes to Feliks' lodgings, determined to run away with him. But Feliks is gone - arrested, says his landlady, for being an anarchist.

Meanwhile Stephen, now the eighth Earl Walden and addressed by everyone as my lord, calls on the count and formally asks permission to pay court to Lydia. The count says Yes, come back tomorrow.

Lydia returns and accuses her father of having Feliks arrested. The count admits it. Furthermore, he says, Feliks is at this minute being tortured by the Ochrana, the Czarist secret police, in an attempt to make him reveal the names of other anarchists. Lydia is frantic. She first screams, then pleads with her father for Feliks' release. 'I'll do anything,' she says, 'anything you want!' Her father says: 'Will you marry Stephen Walden?'

## Two

It is 1914. The British rule half the world, and of course they do not know (except perhaps subconsciously) that for them this is the beginning of the end. The playboy king, Edward VII, died in 1910, but this is still the Edwardian era: the wealth, power and prestige amassed during the sixty-three solemn years of Victoria's reign are being spent with gusto. People eat and drink hugely. Houses are enormous, entertainment is lavish, clothes are gorgeous. Small fortunes are made by the Bond Street and Savile Row outfitters who supply the many clothes necessary for different social occasions and even different times of day. The rules of etiquette have attained unparalleled complexity - for example, brown boots may not be worn closer to London than Ascot. Fancy dress parties are all the rage. This is the time of

Diaghlev's sensual ballet, suffragettes, ragtime, scandalous mixed bathing, the tango, and the shock of post-Impressionism.

There is, of course, another England. The slums of Edwardian London are worse than they were in Dickens' time. They are characterised by dirt, disease, awful poverty, drunkenness and fierce exploitation. One in three babies dies before its first birthday. When school medical examinations are introduced one child in six is found to be too starved, verminous or sick to learn anything. In many homes people eat standing up because there are no chairs. The official overcrowding level is 214 people per acre, but Whitechapel has six thousand per acre.

This year the weather is unusually sunny and warm. Almost no rain falls in April, May and June. The temperature in London on 1 July will be 94 degrees. It is the last long summer of the British Empire.

(i) After the death of his father, Stephen Walden married Lydia, brought her back to England, moved into Walden Hall, took his seat in the House of Lords, and settled down.

He found the family fortunes somewhat diminished because of the late-Victorian collapse of agricultural prices. While other country landowners clamoured for tariff protection, Walden switched money into London property and railways, and he is now richer than his father ever was. To look after himself, Lydia, and their teenage daughter Charlotte he employs more than 100 servants at his four homes - Walden Hall, a town house on the edge of St James's Park in London, a shooting-box in Scotland and a villa in Monte Carlo. He is now fifty, and is one of those men who are in their prime at that age. His big, beefy body has yet to collapse into fat, although he has a gouty leg and walks with a cane. His



jolly, hearty manner conceals a sharp intelligence. He thoroughly enjoys life. He likes hunt balls and society parties, the opera and the music-hall, bitter ale and vintage port, the company of young men and mature women, any game from chess to poker. He hunts fox in Surrey and shoots grouse in Scotland, but it is not the same as big game, and late at night he and Pritchard often sit in the gun-room over a glass of port, surrounded by the stuffed and mounted heads of lion, elephant and rhinoceros, and reminisce about the African days.

Walden has no real job apart from a ceremonial post in the royal household, but he is active in the House of Lords and friendly with several senior politicians, including the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, with whom he was at Oxford. Because of his great knowledge of foreign - especially Russian - affairs, he is occasionally used for confidential diplomatic work.

Viewed from England, Europe appears menaced by an increasingly wealthy and aggressive Germany. Germany's annual steel production, for example, has overtaken that of Britain and is still accelerating. England's navy, the guardian of the island's trading arteries, is supposed to be larger than the combined navies of the two next strongest powers - but Germany is catching up and refuses to negotiate an arms limitation treaty. In the past year her war preparations have become increasingly obvious. The government has imposed a one-off special tax to raise one billion marks - the largest levy in European history - and the money is being used to step up conscription (so that it now includes all fit men without exemption) with corresponding increases in military hardware. On the London money market German firms have been factoring credits, i.e. discounting bills for early payment, with the result that while the rest of the world is owed money by Germany, Germany has

collected all her debts. In short Germany is ready to fight.

The problem facing the German general staff is - as always - the danger of war on two fronts: against France in the west and Russia in the east. For this reason the aim of German diplomacy is to neutralise Russia. One attempt to do this almost succeeded, and Walden was personally involved in frustrating it. In 1906 the Kaiser persuaded the weak-willed Czar to sign the Treaty of Bjorko. It would have radically changed the Balance of Power if it had ever been respected by its signatories; but in fact it was forgotten as rapidly as it had been signed, and some of the credit for this is due to Walden, who was dispatched to St Petersburg to persuade the Czar to renege. Walden looks back on this as the triumph of his life.

Just as Germany wants to neutralise Russia, so England and France would like to extract from the Russians a firm commitment to join the Allied side when war breaks out. It is with this in mind that Sir Edward Grey - a weasel-faced birdwatcher - visits Walden in the spring of 1914. Grey explains that a young Russian general is coming to London to conduct secret military talks. He is Prince Alexei Andreivitch Oblomov, aged 30, a nephew and favourite of the Czar and a distant relation of Walden's wife Lydia. Oblomov will stay at Walden's London house and Walden, who speaks Russian, will represent Britain at the talks. To obscure the real purpose of the visit Oblomov, who is a very eligible bachelor, will be introduced to London society, and it will be whispered about that he is looking for a wife.

Walden is no stranger to the world of international diplomacy, but even he is somewhat awestruck by the importance of his task, which is no less than to get the Russians on our team. Of course he has strong personal reasons for wanting this: he loves Russia,

his wife is Russian, and he has a lot of money invested in the Trans-Siberian Railway. But more importantly, he believes that if Russia remains neutral, Germany will conquer Europe.

(11) Lady Walden's Folly is now a den for Charlotte, Viscountess Walden, the only child of Walden and Lydia. Charlotte is 18, though in some ways she seems younger. She is normally supervised by her strait-laced Russian governess Marya, but on Wednesdays Marya has an afternoon off and her place is taken by an easygoing maid called Annie. Annie meets her boyfriend in the woods while Charlotte goes to the Folly.

Today Charlotte has a guest: her cousin and childhood playmate Belinda (the daughter of George) who is also 18. This year both girls will 'come out' - that is, they will put their hair up, be presented at court, and go to the endless parties and balls of the London 'season' in order to meet suitable prospective husbands.

Charlotte is an only child who has grown up among adoring family and servants. She is too good-natured to be quite spoiled, but she is at least wilful (like her father). Back in 1894 both her parents in their different ways suppressed the libertarian sides of their personalities in favour of respectability, and the submerged drives have surfaced in the offspring. Whether they knew it or not, Walden and Lydia always smiled when baby Charlotte escaped from her crib.

Nevertheless her upbringing has been narrowly restricted. She has always been educated at home. Her only real friend is Belinda, who is in a similar position (although <sup>she is</sup> not an only child, Belinda's three brothers are very small). Charlotte has never seen poor people's homes - indeed she has never seen the servants' quarters of her own home - and she was never allowed to play with

the children of servants or tenants. (Lydia remembers the terrible temptations to which she succumbed when she encountered the common people in the shape of Feliks; and she is terrified that her daughter will suffer in the same way.) Charlotte's schooling has been heavily biased toward the impractical. She knows a lot about music and art, and she speaks Russian and French, but she knows little of history or geography and nothing of mathematics, science, politics or finance. She is therefore cultured and intelligent, but has a hopelessly one-eyed view of how the world works.

Wilful, cultured, overprotected ... she has one more crucial trait: idealism. She realises that only white European aristocrats are entitled to be wealthy, powerful and idle, but she knows of no reason why the whole world should not be fed, clothed and happy. And all the people she comes across are relatively fortunate, for her father is the archetypal paternal country squire who provides for his tenants in bad times (while collecting fat rents from them) and takes care of his servants (while paying them next to nothing in wages). But Charlotte is ignorant of the downside: all she knows is that old servants get a cottage and a pension, newly delivered mothers are sent a basket of provisions, and in a hard winter everyone gets hot soup.

Finally, Charlotte is as beautiful as her mother. At present her beauty is entirely natural: an innocent smile, a clear complexion, a graceful walk. But soon she will learn how to dress like a woman, and then she will be ravishing.

She recently asked Marya: 'What will I do after I get married?' Marya replied: 'Why, my child, you will do nothing.' Observing her mother and other Edwardian ladies, Charlotte realises that while they are always busy with social affairs nevertheless it is true

that they do nothing. She feels, like any teenager, that she is faced with a decision about what kind of person she is going to be, and she is not at all happy with the prospect of a life spent doing nothing. This is Charlotte's personal version of the perennial adolescent identity crisis; and in confronting it she will, as her parents did in 1894, face a choice between freedom and responsibility.

Charlotte and Belinda talk of these things in the Folly, and eventually the conversation turns to sex, a subject upon which they are (by modern standards) breathtakingly ignorant.

(The Victorian conspiracy of silence about sex cannot often have been as completely effective as it is in this case. The children of the poor sleep in houses too small for secrets; middle-class children learn about sex from school friends; aristocratic boys go to boarding schools; even aristocratic girls learn from older brothers. Real ignorance is possible only for protected, isolated girls like Charlotte and Belinda.)

They realise that babies grow inside women but cannot imagine how they come out. Charlotte knows where eggs emerge from chickens, and Belinda once saw a cow drop a calf; but they agree that their own bodies have no apertures big enough for a baby. They wonder whether they suffer from a congenital deformity. There is no one they can consult about this. They do not consider the question of how a baby gets started - they assume it happens spontaneously around the age of 21, and for them this explains why girls are pressured to marry at 19 or 20.

(iii) Dieter Hartmann, senior aide to the German Ambassador in London, has a picture of the European situation rather different from Walden's. He is proud of his country's uphill struggle to greatness; and where, he asks, is it written that Britain shall

rule the world and Germany shall always be a second-class power?

The problem is that Germany is in danger of being cut off from the rest of the world - notably the US, Africa and the Far East - because of the policy of encirclement masterminded by Britain. Germany is largely surrounded by hostile nations: France, Belgium, England and Russia. Italy is wavering and the Balkans are turbulent. Germany's only route to North America is via the North Sea, where Britain rules the waves (so a naval limitation treaty, which Britain keeps proposing as though it were the essence of sweet reason, would simply maintain the status quo and keep Germany trapped). Her route to Africa and the Middle East is via her ally Austria-Hungary and the Balkans, which is why Germany encourages Austria's aggressive domination of the Balkans. Her only way to the East is via Persia, a territory which England and Russia have just carved up between them (Britain incidentally securing Persia's oil, the fuel for the new generation of fast warships). Germany wants colonies like everyone else, but each move she makes in Africa is denounced as troublemaking by the Powers which are already sitting on rich possessions. Is there any way for Germany to avoid being suffocated? Hartmann, a pessimist, sees only one: war.

Hartmann learns of the forthcoming visit of Oblomov through a well-placed spy in the Russian Embassy (see opening quote). Just as Walden sees the need for a firm alliance between Russia and England, so Hartmann is desperate to drive a wedge between the two - and now he sees, in the visit of Oblomov, what may be his last chance of doing this.

In the East End of London the poorest of Englishmen mingle with even poorer immigrants from Eastern Europe. England is the

only European country with no restrictions on immigration. Consequently London is a haven for political refugees from Russia, Poland and Germany. The anarchists are particularly strong, with their own clubs and their own newspaper. The open-door policy is a cause of friction between Russia and England, for these expatriate revolutionists constitute a permanent, if distant, threat to the Czar. However, public opinion, and the conscience of the governing Liberal party, will not allow dissidents to be sent home for imprisonment, torture and execution by the Czar's bestial police.

Hartmann sees how this friction between the two countries might be inflamed into a full-scale quarrel on the eve of war. For what if an expatriate Russian anarchist were to assassinate the Czar's favourite nephew in London? At a minimum the talks would be sabotaged. At best it could keep Russia out of the war.

Hartmann calls in an informant, Andre Barre, who poses as a French Bolshevik with the object of keeping an eye on expatriate German troublemakers who might be planning to return home in force. Hartmann asks Barre: Who is the leading Russian revolutionist in London?

Well, says Barre, now that little Joey Stalin has left, I suppose it's Feliks Murontsiv.

(iv) Feliks was released from jail the day after Lydia's wedding. He left the University and, dressed as a monk, wandered the Russian countryside preaching the anarchist gospel. Eventually he was arrested again and sentenced to life imprisonment in Siberia. After some years he escaped and made his way to England. He knows Lydia got married and left Russia, but he does not know where she went nor what her name is now. But he has not forgotten her: whenever he dreams about sex it is always with a woman who shouts

'Help!' in Russian at the climax.

Now aged 40, hardened both physically and in his convictions, he is a Rasputin-like character: intense, domineering, magnetic, manic. He is tall, thin, hairy and none too clean, but there is in him an animal energy which some women find irresistible.

Every few months he and a small gang of non-political villains burgle a house for funds. Most of Feliks' share goes to the anarchist cause, for his own lifestyle is frugal. Most evenings he is to be found at the Jubilee Street Anarchist Club in Stepney, drinking and planning Utopia. He dominates any group by his autocratic manner and the evangelical fervour blazing in his eyes. However he is secretly discontented, for in his three years in London he has done nothing to further the anarchist cause. Meanwhile Russia is in a turmoil: more than a million workers are on strike, the Duma (parliament) is a helpless sham, and the oil workers are literally at war with the Cossacks. The country is a powder-barrel waiting for a spark. Feliks wants to be that spark, but he knows that as soon as he sets foot in Russia he will be packed off to Siberia (as Stalin was) and what good could he do in Siberia? But what can he do in London?

Tonight Feliks' acquaintance Andre Barre comes to the Jubilee Street club, bringing with him a German anarchist called Dieter. Through a contact at the Russian Embassy Dieter has learned that Prince Oblomov is coming to London, and would Feliks be interested in helping to assassinate him?

### Three

(i) On 4 June Charlotte is presented at court. This is the biggest and most gorgeous ceremony of British royalty, when the aristocratic girls of the kingdom parade before the monarch at



Buckingham Palace. 'Court dress' is obligatory. For women this means a white dress with a low-cut bodice and a train three to four yards long, a tiara with three white plumes, and just about all the family jewels. Men wear velvet knee-breeches with silk stockings and all their medals. In the main part of the ceremony the King and Queen sit on thrones while the debutantes pass before them one at a time.

Charlotte's debut is marred by a (historically true) incident. The girl ahead of her in the line suddenly drops to one knee and says: 'Your Majesty, for God's sake stop torturing women!' She is hustled away by two footmen. The royal couple pretend not to notice, but Charlotte is flustered. She assumes the girl is completely mad, and for now nobody will tell her otherwise.

(ii) From the spy in the Russian Embassy Hartmann learns the date and time of Oblomov's arrival. He and Feliks go to Victoria Station to take a look. They hardly see Oblomov. He has travelled in a private coach (borrowed from the King, to whom he is related). He steps from that straight into Walden's Rolls-Royce. Feliks and Hartmann get a glimpse of a handsome, expensively-dressed young man. Feliks' thoughts are dark. Oblomov represents the regime which is responsible for torture, slavery and starvation in Russia - but he also represents an opportunity to bring that regime down. Two servants who have travelled with Oblomov load a mountain of luggage into the car. Feliks and Hartmann follow the entourage to a large house on the edge of St James's Park, the town home of Earl Walden.

Inside the house Oblomov is greeted by Lydia. She is 39 and still beautiful. Her public image is not much changed since 1894: she is still respectable, though Anglicised, and she plays the part

of an Edwardian lady with conviction. But what is happening underneath?

She has never ceased to feel terribly guilty that she doubly deceived Walden when she married him, for of course he thought she was (a) a virgin and (b) in love with him. This burden of guilt has prevented their having a warm, candid relationship. She has grown fond of Walden, indeed she would say that she loves him, and she would never be unfaithful to him. Yet she has nourished the memory of her adolescent passion for Feliks, and her nonconformist impulses are not dead, only dormant. Oblomov, who was a ten-year-old boy at her wedding, is an uncomfortable reminder of all this.

Oblomov speaks good English. He talks about Russia; and this pillar of the Czarist regime turns out to be something of a radical. He speaks earnestly of the need for change in Russia: for land reform, mechanised agriculture, industry and parliamentary democracy. He is a rather appealing young man.

When Charlotte appears we find out why this charming, incredibly wealthy prince is still a bachelor at thirty: he is chronically shy with girls. As soon as Charlotte walks in (looking ravishing) he turns into a nervous wreck, dropping his teacup, suddenly acquiring a thick Russian accent, blushing and stammering. But now Charlotte's hidden talents begin to emerge, and with her unique naive charm she begins to put him at his ease.

Outside, Feliks and Hartmann walk in the park and discuss what they have seen. It seems that Oblomov is reluctant to show himself in public: he will not be an easy target. (Perhaps the possibility of assassination has occurred to him, too.) Somehow we'll have to get into the house, says Hartmann; but how?

I have the answer to that, says Feliks; and he shows Hartmann an item in the society pages of a magazine: Walden is

giving a fancy-dress ball to introduce Oblomov. That's when I'll kill him, says Feliks.

#### Four

(i) Walden and Oblomov exchange information on mobilisation and military planning, and begin to discuss joint campaigns. The talks are given added urgency by the news that the Germans have completed the widening of the Kiel Canal (mid-June), enabling their Dreadnoughts to pass between the North Sea and the Baltic. This is a strategically vital project without which they could not win a naval war.

(1) But now Oblomov drops a bombshell.

Russia's great long-term aim is to have a warm-water port. She has her Black Sea coast, but the Black Sea is connected with the Mediterranean by a narrow strait, the Bosphorus, off Constantinople. Both the European and the Asia Minor banks of the Bosphorus are held by Turkey. Russia has been supporting Slav nationalism in the Balkans in the hope that when the Slavs throw out the Turks Russia will have free passage through the Bosphorus. But better than Slav control of the Balkans would be Russian control; and Oblomov now announces that if Russia is to fight on the Allied side in the coming war, the price of her co-operation will be Britain's recognition of the Balkans as a Russian sphere of influence.

Of course Walden is not mandated even to discuss this, and the talks adjourn while he puts the question to the Foreign Office.

(ii) For the first time in her life Charlotte is reading the newspapers, and she learns of the suffragette movement. She disapproves strongly of women who break windows and slash paintings. She talks to Pritchard about the deb who made the scene at the court.

Pritchard explains the reference to torture: suffragettes who are jailed go on hunger strike, and consequently are force-fed by a degrading and painful process. Charlotte refuses to believe this.

But she does not give it much thought, for today is the day of the fancy-dress ball, and the house is full of people all day long. The ballroom is being turned into a Sultan's palace. Charlotte is to go as Little Bo Peep, and out in the stable is a darling fluffy white lamb which will complete her costume.

Meanwhile, Hartmann buys and tests a pair of duelling pistols, and Feliks rents a Dick Turpin outfit complete with mask.

At the start of the ball Charlotte, Lydia, Walden and Oblomov stand in line, in a reception room off the ballroom, to welcome the guests.

Feliks arrives in his costume. He bluffs his way through the front door (for he has no invitation) and gets to the door of the reception room. There he gives his name as Dick Turpin, and so the usher announces him. Everyone laughs. Ignoring the line, he approaches Oblomov and draws his pistols. Everyone still thinks it's probably a joke. Feliks shouts: 'Your death will free Russia!' Lydia screams 'Help!' in Russian - just as she used to when Feliks made love to her. Feliks is frozen by shock. He stares at Lydia, recognising her. In the instant for which he hesitates, Walden lifts his cane and whacks Feliks across both wrists. Feliks drops the guns. He stares at them a moment longer, then turns and runs out.

For a second everyone is too stunned to move. Then Walden picks up the dropped pistols and unloads them. 'Blanks,' he lies. 'A joke that didn't come off. Wonder who the blighter was?'

And the ball goes on.

Five

(i) Feliks broods over Lydia. He is sure he could seduce her all over again. But what he feels for her is not love. He daydreams that she is naked and begging him to make love to her, and in his fantasy he refuses. He also thinks about Walden. So that gouty old squire is the one who stole Lydia! Feliks' pride is wounded by the way Walden literally rapped his knuckles with the cane.

Feliks wants to destroy this family.

He thinks he can do that in the course of killing Oblomov.

But Oblomov has vanished.

Hartmann talks to the Embassy spy. Although Walden diplomatically smoothed over the Dick Turpin incident, both he and Oblomov know it was a serious assassination attempt. Consequently Oblomov left the house on the park. His luggage came to the Embassy - and went straight out again by the back door, no one knows where. But the talks are still going on.

Back at his own Embassy Hartmann hears the news that is about to convulse Europe: the Archduke Franz-Ferdinand has been assassinated at Sarajevo in Bosnia.

Oblomov must be found.

(ii) Feliks now makes a characteristically bold move: when Walden is out he knocks on the door and asks to see Lydia. He gives his name as David Ponsonby-Gore and is shown in to the morning-room. When Lydia sees him she turns white. She will not look at him or speak to him. (NB She does not connect him with the Dick Turpin incident.) He has to prevent her ringing for the butler. He did not anticipate such a hysterical reaction, and he realises that here and now he is not going to be able to coax her into revealing

Oblomov's whereabouts. But if he leaves empty-handed he may not get a second chance. Clutching at straws, he asks her for money. She says she has none. Then I'll have to ask your husband, he says. No! she cries. Her reaction confirms what Feliks had guessed: Walden has absolutely no knowledge of Lydia's pre-marital affair. This puts her somewhat in Feliks' power. He tells her to meet him in a restaurant in three days' time - with the money. Then he leaves.

(iii) Charlotte attends Belinda's coming-out ball. This is a glittering occasion, with all the girls in fabulous gowns and the young men in white-tie-and-tails. Belinda has joined the 'fast' set: she wears ankle-revealing dresses, does the Turkey Trot, smokes cigarettes in restaurants, and goes to boxing matches. Since that afternoon in Lady Walden's Folly she has learned the sexual facts of life, and tonight, during a girl-to-girl chat in the ladies' powder room, she relays them to Charlotte, who is stunned and cannot take it in.

On the way home from the ball at dawn Charlotte is horrified to see a woman sleeping on the pavement. Marya reluctantly explains that thousands of men, women and children have nowhere to sleep but the streets of London. Charlotte simply did not know that people could be that poor. She insists on stopping the carriage and speaking to the woman. It turns out to be Annie, the maid who used to deputise for Marya at Walden Hall. Annie says she was fired for getting pregnant. Charlotte says, Come home with me. Annie knows better than to accept. Charlotte makes Marya give Annie all the cash in her purse.

Charlotte is grossed out by the revelations of the night. She screams at her mother: 'Why did nobody tell me?' It seems to

her that her education has been little better than a conspiracy to deceive her. From now on, she resolves, she will find things out for herself.

(iv) Lydia has problems of her own. She has no cash. The household shopping is done by servants, of course. Lydia's dressmaker, hatter, shoemaker etc all send bills which Walden pays by cheque. If Lydia takes morning coffee at the Cafe Royal during a shopping expedition she signs for it. She has no bank account. Her personal fortune consists of stocks and property which she cannot sell without the knowledge of the family lawyer, a personal friend of Walden. So, highly embarrassed, she goes to Hatton Garden and sells some jewellery for cash. When the transaction is done she examines her emotions, and realises with a rather Russian sense of fatalism that she just longs to see Feliks again.

### Six

(i) Walden asks Lydia to wear one of the pieces of jewellery she has sold. She tells him she has sent it for repair. She feels so guilty that she cannot look her husband in the eye.

Walden is vaguely aware of her mood but pays little attention to it. He is authorised by the Foreign Secretary to make a counter-offer to the Russians: the Bosphorus to be an international waterway with freedom of passage for all nations in peacetime guaranteed jointly by England and Russia.

Walking down Bond Street Walden sees Lydia's jewellery for sale in a shop window. Thoughtlessly, he storms in and accuses them of theft. The manager takes him into the office and explains, with ill-concealed relish, that this happens not infrequently: a lady needs cash for a clandestine purpose and sells some jewellery unbeknown to her husband ... He shows Walden Lydia's signature

on a receipt. Humiliated, Walden buys back the jewellery.

He takes it home, intending to confront her with it. But on his way he gets more and more mad at her; and when he arrives he says nothing to her but confides in Pritchard. He tells Pritchard to spy on Lydia and find out whether she has a lover.

(Pritchard, now 43, is Walden's valet and personal servant, and he is also responsible for motor cars, which are his great enthusiasm. He quarrels continually with Marya, the governess, who unlike Pritchard is more conservative than her employers. But perhaps their constant sniping serves to conceal an underlying mutual attraction.)

(ii) Now that Charlotte is beginning to understand the real world, what can she do about it? As a woman, she cannot even vote! The action of Letitia de Vries, the deb in the court incident, now appears in a different light. Charlotte calls on her. The de Vries family has been ostracised as a matter of course, so they are pleased to see Viscountess Walden. Mrs Pankhurst is there. Charlotte is ripe for conversion. She promises to go on a suffragette march.

She comes home and defiantly tells her parents where she has been. They are horrified, and forbid her to leave the house unaccompanied.

(iii) Feliks and Lydia have lunch in a private room in a restaurant. She gives him the money. In a roundabout way he asks her where Oblomov is. She will not say. He spins her a yarn about wanting to get a message into Russia. Eventually he threatens to reveal all to Walden. Lydia does not imagine that Feliks wants to kill Oblomov, but she knows somebody wants to kill him, and she



cannot trust Feliks to keep the secret; so, courageously, she still refuses the information.

Pritchard observes this meeting. He follows Feliks home and notes the address. He reports to Walden that Lydia had lunch in a private room with a man of her own age and they spoke Russian together. Naturally Walden and Pritchard assume the man is a lover. Their hunting instincts are aroused: they decide to find out all about the man.

Walden is distressed by all this. Walking around, brooding, he finds himself in St John's Wood, near the house he gave to Bonnie Carlos. What is she like now? he wonders. My God, she must be fifty. A carriage draws up and a plump, well-dressed middle-aged woman gets out. It is she. Walden watches from a distance. She smiles at the coachman, a great big beaming smile that Walden remembers well. Suddenly he is filled with a longing like a pain. She looks in his direction. He turns quickly and walks away, not knowing whether she has seen him or not.

(iv) Hartmann learns that the Kaiser has (5 July) promised Austria unconditional support in any action against Serbia. War comes daily closer. Meanwhile the Russians have presented Walden with a modified demand: they want the territory which is at present European Turkey. Hartmann thinks the British may well concede this. He asks Feliks what is happening. Feliks says he has drawn a blank with Lydia and will now try Charlotte.

### Seven

Charlotte sneaks out of the house, wearing a coat and hat of her mother's, to go on a suffragette march. Feliks, waiting near the house, follows her. Pritchard, who is still shadowing

Feliks, follows too; but Pritchard thinks it is Lydia in the coat and hat.

King George V has refused to give audience to Mrs Pankhurst, so the suffragettes are marching on Buckingham Palace. The police have been ordered to repel the marchers with a minimum of arrests (because the women are more trouble in jail than out) but lacking the weapon of arrest the police resort to violence. Idle male bystanders join in. Some of the women wield Indian clubs and throw pepper, but Charlotte, naive as ever, is unarmed.

Pritchard now realises that this is Charlotte, not Lydia; but he assumes wrongly that Feliks has made the same mistake. He sees Charlotte knocked down. Forgetting Feliks, he plunges into the melee to rescue her. He is hit over the head and falls unconscious.

Charlotte tries to get up, is kicked, falls again and is trampled. Nothing remotely like this has ever happened to her. She is too shocked even to scream. Suddenly she is picked up by a pair of strong arms and carried out of danger. Her rescuer is Feliks.

He takes her back to his dingy lodgings in Stepney and seduces her on the ricketty bed. He plans to use her, but this does not interfere with his pleasure: he just loves to shaft the aristocracy. For him this is more than anything else an act of spite against Walden and Lydia.

Charlotte is mesmerised by Feliks: first by the power and confidence he displayed in the riot when she was helpless and terrified; second by the convincing simplicity of his political ideas; third by his fevered eyes, his hairy hands, his animal smell, and - not to put too fine a point on it - his cock. Feliks makes

love the way he does everything else - boldly, imaginatively and passionately. And Charlotte learns the one thing Belinda was unable to tell her about sex, namely how nice it is.

Feliks tells her (truthfully) how he was tortured by the Ochrana. There are many brave Russians languishing in those infernal cells, he says. But we must do something! cries Charlotte. All right, he says, let's kidnap Oblomov and hold him to ransom against the release of political prisoners. Wonderful! says Charlotte.

But where is Oblomov? asks Feliks

Charlotte says: At Walden Hall.

Aah, says Feliks.

### Eight

(4) (i) Walden offers the Russians Constantinople and the Bosphorus. They say they will consider it. Returning to London, he finds Pritchard having his head bandaged by Marya. Pritchard reports that Charlotte was at the suffragette march. When she gets home there is a godalmighty row. Deciding that she cannot be trusted to stay in London, Walden sends her to Surrey to keep her out of trouble.

She manages to send a note to Feliks telling him what has happened and asking him to meet her in Lady Walden's Folly.

(ii) Walden's world is falling apart. The Balance of Power is toppling irrevocably, his daughter is a subversive and his wife is an adulteress. He calls on Bonnie. Yes, she did see him that day, and she has been waiting for him ever since. She is living on her savings, a little lonely, and horny as hell. They spend a wonderful afternoon in bed together, and Walden considers how he might spend more time with her and less with his family.

(iii) Pritchard, still spying on Feliks, observes a meeting in a park between Feliks and Hartmann. When they part company Pritchard, on a hunch, follows Hartmann - all the way to the German Embassy. Pritchard gives the doorman a sovereign and learns Hartmann's name.

Walden now realises that Feliks may be more than Lydia's lover. He makes an appointment to see the Commissioner of Police the following day.

(iv) Down in Surrey, Charlotte has nothing to do but spend time with Oblomov. They ride together, dine together, play cards and explore the countryside. He is rapidly falling in love with her. She likes him a lot, and is embarrassed to find herself wondering what he looks like with his clothes off. She is beginning to have second thoughts about the kidnap plan when Feliks arrives.

They make love in the Folly, and Feliks cases the joint.

He decides the best plan would be to have Charlotte bring Oblomov to the Folly, then kill both of them here. (Charlotte must be killed because she is, as far as Feliks knows, the only one who could finger him for the murder.) He will leave a bicycle concealed in the woods near the road, at a spot about ten minutes' fast walk from the Folly. The bike will take him to the railway line where he will jump a freight train. He works all this out with care, timing each move, even checking the train schedule so he can catch the train within minutes of the murder.

With what shall he kill them? A knife is silent, but messy and tricky to use; and besides, he does not quite trust himself - when it comes to the crunch - to plunge a blade into Charlotte's beautiful body. A gun is more impersonal and requires less anatomical skill, but the noise might bring people running and interfere with his getaway. A bomb makes even more noise, but

by using a timer he could get some distance away before the explosion.

He decides to postpone the decision by bringing all three.

(v) Walden sees the police commissioner. The commissioner proposes that Hartmann (who has diplomatic immunity) should be expelled for consorting with known subversives, and Feliks should be arrested on suspicion of attempted murder (i.e. the Dick Turpin incident). Walden is much relieved, and prepares to go home to Surrey for the weekend.

(vi) Germany's gold reserves are at a record high and the British fleet is on manoeuvres at Portland. Hartmann learns that the ~~British~~ Russians have accepted the British offer of Constantinople and the Bosphorus, and the secret treaty will be signed this weekend. Now he is told the game is up, and he must pack his bags and leave for Germany tomorrow.

Which gives him time to meet Feliks at the station and warn him not to go home.

### Nine

On Thursday 23 July Austria sends an ultimatum to Serbia with a 48-hour deadline for reply.

Feliks sees his criminal friends and collects knife, gun, burglar's tools including a roll of wire, and a bomb with a timer. The bomb has a buzzer which will go off five seconds before the explosion. (NB I have not yet finished researching home-made bombs of the period.) Then he heads for Surrey.

Lydia is now back at Walden Hall, the London season being more or less over. Walking in the woods, she sees Feliks entering

Lady Walden's Folly. She knows nothing of the recent feverish activity in London, and she thinks Feliks is still in love with her. In a turmoil, she hurries back to the house. In Walden's room she finds her jewels, and realises she has been found out after all.

Feliks instructs Charlotte to bring Oblomov to the Folly tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock. Then they make love.

Lydia cannot sleep. She will surely now be divorced by Walden. She should never have given Feliks up; he is the only man for whom she ever felt real passion. She decides to go to him. In her nightdress she leaves the house and goes to the Folly to give herself to him. She sees him making love to Charlotte. She leaves silently.

### Ten

On Saturday morning Oblomov asks Charlotte to marry him. She is afraid that if she says No he will leave immediately and spoil the kidnap plan. So she says Maybe - and promises him a definite answer this afternoon at three o'clock in the Folly.

Walden and Pritchard arrive home at the same time as a cable from London saying that Feliks has not been arrested as planned. They immediately realise he is probably around here somewhere. Walden suggests to Oblomov that he move away. Charlotte tries desperately to think of a way to prevent this. She suggests Oblomov could camp out in Lady Walden's Folly. Walden is not keen but Oblomov is, for he wants Charlotte's answer. So it is done - but Oblomov takes his two servants with him.

Feliks sees three of them arrive early at the Folly, realises something is amiss, and hides nearby, watching.

Walden gets another cable, this one from the Foreign

Secretary. Austria has declared war on Serbia. Now it is not just Oblomov's life but the future of Europe that is at stake. Walden organises search parties to hunt for Feliks in the surrounding countryside.

A chambermaid tells Marya that Charlotte threw up this morning. Marya sees Charlotte and notices that she is not wearing a corset. Charlotte says her breasts hurt. Marya says, Did you miss your headache this month. Yes. You are pregnant, Marya tells her. Charlotte goes rushing off to tell Feliks.

One of Oblomov's servants comes out of the Folly for a pee. Feliks hits him over the head, ties him up, and waits for the other one to come out and investigate.

Lydia has been confined to her room all morning, contemplating suicide, hearing nothing of the excitement and the search parties. Now Marya tells her that Charlotte is pregnant, whereupon Lydia goes beserk. She fetches a shotgun from the gun-room and a horse from the stable and heads for the Folly, overtaking Charlotte.

Oblomov's second servant comes out. Feliks disposes of him, goes inside, and ties Oblomov up.

Lydia arrives with the shotgun but Feliks disarms her easily and ties her up too. He arms the bomb and sets the timer. When you hear a buzz, he tells them, you will have five seconds to live.

By now the woods are full of searchers, so Feliks really needs the few minutes start the timer will give him. He decides he cannot wait for Charlotte - but as he is leaving she arrives. Hastily he ties her up. Then she tells him she is pregnant. Feliks stares at her, thunderstruck, thinking of himself, an illegitimate child, knowing that he will be killing his unborn child if he kills Charlotte. He bends to untie her -

- and the buzzer sounds.

Five seconds.

There is no time to untie her, so he picks her up.

Four.

She struggles and he drops her.

Three, two.

Now nobody can get out in time.

You fool! he screams at her.

One.

Feliks throws himself on the bomb, covering it with his body. It explodes, killing him. The others are unhurt.

Lydia starts to scream.

### Epilogue

Charlotte, Lady Walden, has been talking to Peter and Lizzie all day. At lunchtime they shared sandwiches from Peter's rucksack. In the evening, when all the tourists had gone, they moved into Walden Hall and had dinner in the great dining room. Now it is midnight, and the 85-year-old Charlotte is finishing her story.

Yes, she married Oblomov. The treaty was signed and Russia's army tipped the military balance in the first few months of the war and prevented Germany conquering Europe. Lydia confessed all to Walden, and they were reconciled. Oblomov lost his entire fortune in the Russian revolution. Walden got him a directorship of a bank and to everyone's surprise he became a successful international banker. Walden himself lost a lot of money in the Depression, and when he died he left half his estate to the illegitimate son of a singer called Bonnie Carlos. But Charlotte's grandchildren have rescued the family fortunes (yet again) by turning Walden Hall into a tourist attraction. Oh, and the motor museum is run by the grandson of Pritchard, who married -



wait for it - Marya.

'It's a fabulous story,' Peter says. 'You should write a book.'

Charlotte laughs. 'Nobody would believe it.'

'Maybe not.' Peter thinks. 'Well,' he says after a while, 'you could make it a novel.'

The end.