

The Russian Prince

General on the penit Domestic politics, international politics, Anglo Russian relations.
Characters: Walden, Lydia, Charlotte, Feliks, Pinkhead, Maya, Annie.

One

"Churchill? Winston Churchill?" said Walden. "Here?"

"Yes, my lord," said the butler.

"Send the blighter away," Walden said. "I'm not at home." He turned and walked to the window, thinking: Young whippersnapper I don't know where he gets the nerve, just calling on me in London then following me down here, he knows damn well I won't see him —
The butler coughed.

Walden looked at him with irritation. "Still here?"

"Mr Churchill told me you'd be 'not at home', my lord, and insisted I should give you this."

Walden noticed that the butler was carrying a letter on a tray. "Give it back to him — no, wait." He had seen the seal on the envelope, and for once the East of Walden was intimidated. He opened the letter.

Buckingham Palace

21 May 1914

My dear Walden,

You will see young Winston.

George R.

Walden recognized the handwriting. It was the King's. He hesitated a moment longer, then said: "Ask Mr Churchill to come in."

*

Churchill is now First Lord of the Admiralty, which means not that he is a lord but that he is in charge of Britain's navy. He is of course a Minister in the liberal government, so from Walden's point of view he represents the people who are hell-bent on destroying England. However, Churchill wants Walden to do a job which transcends politics. He explains that he has arranged for a young Russian admiral to come to London for secret naval talks. The admiral is Prince Alexei Andreievich Orlow, aged 30, a nephew and favourite of the Czar and a distant relation of Lydia. Churchill

wants the talks to result in an Anglo-Russian military treaty. Walden, with his expertise and his personal relationship with the Czar, is probably the only man who can bring about such a deal.

To obscure the real purpose of the visit, Osborn - a very eligible bachelor - will stay at Walden's town house for the London season and be introduced to society, while it is 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 Anna, his wife is Russian, and he has rather a lot of money invested in the Trans-Siberian Railway, but more importantly it seems to him that if Russia remains neutral, Germany will destroy England.

*

Lydia leaves the men talking politics and strolls into the garden. She walks around the vast, lovely old house and wanders aimlessly through the landscaped park. The mention of Osborn has unsettled her: she remembers him as a ten-year old boy at her wedding and she remembers her wedding day as the unhappiest day of her life. She was wedded into marrying Walden when in fact she was in love with another man. Walden knows nothing of this. Lydia, despite appearances, has kept alive the memory of that adolescent passion.

Lydia sees her daughter Charlotte, deep in conversation with her cousin Belinda. Lydia thinks: Please, Lord, let me keep my secrets.

*

Charlotte and Belinda are talking about being debutantes (both are due to be presented at court this year), marriage (which is the object of being a debutante) and sex. This last is a subject upon which they are breathtakingly ignorant. (No doubt most children learn about sex despite the notorious Victorian conspiracy of silence, but Charlotte and Belinda are unusually protected.) They realize 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.

Belinda is just naughty, but Charlotte is money-illed. There are books in a locked cupboard in the library, she says; I know where the key is. Belinda immediately gets

old feet but Charlotte insists. They get two books and sneak upstairs. Charlotte leads the way through the nursery to ~~the~~^a space under the roof which used to be her secret hiding-place when she was little. From here you can see across the several acres of roof which cover Walden Hall. There is a way up here from the stables, all across roof. Charlotte says they open the books. But they get little help from the internal diagrams in the medical textbook or from the bronze, and to them incomprehensible, pornographic novel.

*

Meanwhile Feliks' boat is docking at Dover.

The Swiss anarchists have learned, through a traitor in the Ochsana, of Oblomov's planned visit to England.

Feliks takes a view of the European political scene quite contrary to Walden's. He sees Germany and Austria as largely surrounded by hostile nations, and in danger of being cut off from trade routes and colonies as a result of the Allied policy of encirclement masterminded by Britain. But Germany is growing, and must somehow break her bonds. In Feliks' view Germany is being pushed into war. He cares not a fig for England or Germany — so long as Russia is not involved. Oblomov's dismissal, to Feliks, just means risking the unnecessary deaths of thousands of innocent young Russians. The idea of young men being sent by their own and Czar and Prime Ministers, to be killed and maimed in a cause they do not understand, is just the sort of thing that makes Feliks an anarchist. He is going to subvert the Walden-Oblomov talks by killing Walden and Oblomov.

The effects of such a murder would be greater than may be immediately apparent. Firstly ~~it would~~ it would of course bring the talks to an abrupt halt. Secondly, once it was known that the murder had been committed by an expatriate Russian anarchist, there would probably be a diplomatic quarrel between Russia and Britain, because Britain admits refugee Russian dissidents (public opinion and the conscience of the liberal government make it impossible to refuse them) and Britain's policy is a great annoyance for the Czar. Thirdly, Feliks will announce to the world ~~that~~ ~~that~~ (as if he dies his Swiss colleagues will) that Oblomov was killed because he was scheming to drag the Russian people into a war they don't want; and that, he believes, will set off a chain-reaction of revolt and perhaps ultimately revolution against the Czar's regime.

Feliks is tense, excited, apprehensive, and happy. He may die soon, but

remember for now life has suddenly started opening doors again.

As he sets foot in English soil for the first time in his life, there is something else on his mind. The woman he loved, nineteen years ago, married an Englishman. Feliks never knew the man's name but he heard they had gone to England to live. He remembers how she used to yell "Hepp!" at the moment of climax. Now, after all this time, he will be in the same country as she. Will he see her?

Two

Feliks is at Victoria Station for the arrival of Oblomov. Oblomov is travelling in a private coach (borrowed from the King) at the back end of the train. He steps out of the coach and into Walden's carriage. Feliks gets a glimpse of a handsome, expensively-dressed young man. Porters load a mountain of luggage on to the carriage and it drives away. Feliks, on a bicycle, follows it through the crowded London streets to a large house on the edge of St James's Park, a house which, he is soon able to establish, is the main home of the Earl of Walden.

Inside the house Lydia greets Oblomov. He talks about Anna, and this piques the Grand establishment news as to be something of a radical. He speaks earnestly of the need for change in Russia: for land reform, mechanised agriculture, modern industry and parliamentary democracy. He is a rather appealing young man.

When Charlotte appears we find out why this handsome, charming, wealthy prince is still a bachelor at thirty: he is chronically shy with girls. Charlotte, beginning her first London season, is suddenly a woman, and a rather devastating one. Oblomov drops his beard, bluster, and suddenly acquires a thick Russian accent. But now Charlotte's hidden talents begin to emerge, and with her unique nerve charm she begins to put him at his ease. Absorbing her, Walden and Lydia exchange a secret smile of pride.

Outside, Feliks walks in the park and ponders what he has seen. Clearly Oblomov is wary of showing himself in public: he will not be an easy target. (Perhaps the possibility of an assassination has occurred to him, too.) Getting close to him will test Feliks' ingenuity.

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Walden and Oblonov formally begin their talks, and Oblonov drops a bombshell. The Russian navy'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 only by a narrow strait, the Bosphorus, off Constantinople, and both banks of the Bosphorus are held by Turkey. Russia has been supporting Slav nationalism in this region in the hope that when the Slavs throw out the Turks then Russia will be granted free passage through the strait. But better than Slav control of the Bosphorus would be Russian control, and Oblonov now announces that if Russia is to fight on the Allied side in the coming war, the price of her participation 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 he must consult with Churchill before the talks can go any further.

*

Feliks buys a gun. He reads in the society papers that Prince Oblonov will be present as a member of the Russian Embassy delegation, at Buckingham Palace on 4 June at the King's Court. That is when he will kill Oblonov.

Three.

The King's Court is the biggest and most gorgeous ceremony of British royalty, when the aristocratic girls of the kingdom parade before the monarch. "Court dress" is obligatory. For women this means a white dress with a low bodice and a train three to four yards long, plus a hat with three white plumes and just about all the family jewels. Men must wear velvet knee-breeches ^{with} ~~and~~ white 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 by one.

Charlotte's debut is marred by an (historically true) incident. The girl ahead of her in line drops to one knee in front of the King and says, "Your Majesty, for God's sake stop hounding women!" She is hustled away by two footmen. The royal couple pretend not to notice, but Charlotte is furious. She assumes the girl is completely mad, and for now no one will tell her different.

Dubside in The Mall ~~the~~ Anticham, who is doing footmen's duty tonight because William is unwell, waits with the Waldens' carriage (among a

hundred or so others). He goes into the park to take a leak and is hit over the head with something hard.

Feliks takes Pukhara's top hat and money, then her hand up and gags her. He puts on the clothes. When he hears the call "The Earl of Walden's carriage" he drives up to the Palace gates. The few passengers get in.

Feliks stops the carriage in the middle of the park. He pulls his scarf up over his face (so that the women, whom he does not plan to kill, will be unable to describe him afterwards). He jumps down, pulls out his gun, and then opens the carriage door.

~~Olson~~ and Walden he yells: "Your death will free Russia!" ~~Walden~~. Lydia screams "help!" in Russian - just as she used to when Feliks made love to her. He freezes. Lydia! Move in that carriage! My own Lydia —

Walden, who is never frozen with shock, lurches out with his cane, hitting Feliks' wrist. Feliks drops the gun. He has forgotten the assassination and is staring at Lydia. Walden hits him again. Feliks runs away.

*

Feliks remembers the last time he saw Lydia. She came to his room in a dingy boardinghouse and snatched an hour with him before going to a reception at the British Embassy. That night Feliks was arrested. The first day they beat the soles of his feet to make him give the names of other anarchists. The torture stopped without explanation, and six weeks later - equally inexplicably - he was released. When he came out he learned that Lydia had married and, the day before, had left for England.

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Lydia has not recognized Feliks, except perhaps subconsciously. She faints away after getting "help." She has been taken home and put to bed with a dose of laudanum. She dreams about making love to Feliks.

*

Walden, Olson and Churchill sit in the library. Clearly whoever tried to kill Olson will try again. Walden suggests Olson move into the Russian Embassy for the time being.

Churchill also has a counter-offer to make to the Russians: the proposal to be an international railway with freedom of passage for all nations in perpetuity guaranteed by jointly by Russia and Britain.

As Walden leaves Olson at the Embassy, Olson says: "Your Russian is only Walden. The man did not say, 'Your death will free Russia,' he said 'Your death,' plural. He wants to kill you. Be careful."

Four

Charlotte reads in the papers that the "incident" at Buckingham Palace was a suffragette protest. She tells to Ingham about it. She explains the reference to torturing women. Suffragettes who are jailed go on hunger strike, and are force-fed by a painful and degrading process. Charlotte refuses to believe this.

That night her coming-out ball is held at the Savoy Hotel. It is a glittering occasion, with all the gals in fabulous gowns and the young men in white-tie-and-tails. Charlotte's cousin Belinda is there. She has joined the "fash" set: she wears ankle-revealing dresses, does the Turkey Trot, smokes cigarettes in restaurants, and goes to boxing matches. Over that day at Walden Hall 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.

On the way home from the ball at dawn Charlotte is horrified to see a woman sleeping on the pavement. Manya 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 housemaid who used to depurise for Manya at Walden Hall. She says she was forced for getting pregnant. Charlotte says, "Come home with me." Annie knows better than to accept. Charlotte makes Manya give Annie all the money in her purse.

Charlotte is grieved out by the revelations of the night. She screams at her parents: "Why didn't anybody well me?" It seems that her education so far has been little better than a conspiracy to deceive her. From now on, she resolves, she will find things out for herself.

May have scoured up his only chance. *

Belks, watching the house for a couple of days, realises that Almon has disappeared. This is hardly surprising but it puts him in a quandary. Almon could be anywhere, and Belks cannot set a watch on every London hotel, every Cabinet Member's country house, etc. So, in desperation, he decides to ask Lydia.

He gives his name as Constantine Dmititch Kern, and tells the butler that he must see Lady Walden immediately, it is a matter of urgency, and he is sure she will remember him from St. Petersburg. (He has chosen a name which will be vaguely familiar to her, the name of a character in Anna Karenina.)

The butler shows him in. Lydia looks at him with an automatic smile, then frowns, then turns white as a sheet.

Eventually she tells him why she named Walden. Her father had found out that she

the North Sea and the Baltic

*

He makes a bomb.

Feliks knows Momov is in the Embassy, but where in the Embassy? He writes on an envelope: Prince Momov, Russian Embassy. He gives an usher a building to deliver it in ten minutes' time. By then he is in the hall of the Embassy, saying in loud Russian that there must be a letter here for him, the idiots have lost it. I demand to see the Ambassador immediately —

The small boy comes in and hands over the letter. He is immediately surrounded by brutish Russian security men who seem to have materialized out of the walls. Walden appears and begins to question the boy.

Feliks allows himself to be persuaded to leave.

Five

Outside the Walden house, Feliks sees a girl walking towards him. "Nadia!" he says. She gives him a puzzled look and walks past him. Nadia is Feliks' sister, and after a moment's thought he realizes that he has not seen her for twenty years and she no longer looks like that, but the girl who came out of the Walden house is the image of Nadia at 20.

Then begins to dawn on him the incredible possibility that this girl is the daughter of Lydia — and of Feliks.

He follows her, his mind in a turmoil.

She joins in a suffragette march. The King has refused to give Mrs Pankhurst an audience, so the suffragettes are marching in 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. Keeping the weapon of arrest the police resort to violence, and idle make hysterical fun in. Feliks sees Charlotte go down in a scuffle. He walks in, full of paternal rage, and carries her clear.

He takes her to a cheap cafe and buys her a cup of tea. They talk. She is fascinated by him, for he has answers to questions which trouble her: why did the men attack the women? why is sex secret? why are there poor people? why are there wars?

Feliks says he knew Lydia in Russia long ago. Charlotte had reminded him of her sister. Maybe we're related? says Charlotte idly. Possibly, says Feliks.

They arrange to meet again. "I shouldn't say anything to your parents", Hugh - says Feliks "Koolman, no" hydia agrees.

*

Feliks assumes Olman has now been moved from the Human Embassy. He decides to try following Walden around. He plans him one evening to ~~the Human Embassy~~. Feliks ~~walks outside~~ all one day Walden spends a normal hender day: the city in the evening, lunch at his club, a couple of calls in the afternoon, dinner at home, the opera at night. Next day he leaves home early in his car and drives out of hender. Feliks can't follow him because the bicycle is not fast enough.

*

~~Feliks and Charlotte meet again.~~

Walden is in fact going to Walden Hall, which is Olman's new hiding-place. The talks continue. ~~Olman's talks for Olman~~ Olman presents a modified demand: human control of war that area of the Balkans which is currently Turkish. Walden is mildly puzzled, for the Archduke Franz-Ferdinand has just been shot and war is being daily closer.

his dilemma.

*

Feliks meets Charlotte again. He tells her how he was tortured by the Ottomans. There are many humans languishing in these infernal cells, he says. "But we must do something!" Charlotte cries. Feliks suggests kidnapping Olman and holding him ransom against the release of political prisoners. "Murderers!" says Charlotte. "Where is Olman?" says Feliks. Charlotte does not know.

*

Hydia is disturbed by Feliks' presence in hender. Although she has told him never to come back, she longs to see him again. In consequence she is told about Walden and imitates with Charlotte.

Walden, walking around and brooding, finds himself near the house in Hohen Wood which he gave to Banne. He wonders what she is like now. May be she must be fifty. A carriage drives up and a woman gets out. Walden, watching from some distance, recognises Banne. She is now rather plump but still all smiles. She looks in his direction. He walks away, not knowing whether she has seen him or not.

*

Charlotte and some other subtragers are caught setting fire to letterboxes. They are arrested. Walden gets Charlotte out of jail by promising to keep her under control. He buries her in Walden Hall.

*

The Kinner backs Austria.

Six.

Walden drives down to Walden Hall with Charlotte. Germany's gold reserves are at a record high. Walden offers Kinner luncheon and the boys' room.

Charlotte, seeing O'Brien there, wishes to feliks.

*

Back in London, Walden calls on Bonnie. Yes, she did see him the other day, and she has been waiting ever since for him to call. She is new living in her investments and a little lonely. They go to bed together. Afterwards the conversation has to with control. I never used any precautions with you, Bonnie tells him. At first it was because I wanted to have your baby then, later, I decided they weren't necessary: for some reason you never made me pregnant. Nothing wrong with me, Walden replies - "I've got a daughter. Not me? Yes. When was she born, dear? Born after you were married? Seven months. She's not yours, Bonnie says definitely.

*

(She will tell him where O is.)

Feliks, now desperate, goes to see hypelia again. He says "All these years I had a daughter... do you know what you've stolen from me?" She says: "You tried to use me to murder O'Brien." They quarrel like two lovers who have betrayed one another. At the height of the quarrel they kiss passionately. She runs out of the room. The husband brings feliks his coat. He leaves.

Potterhead follows.

At home there is a note from Charlotte saying O'Brien is at Walden Hall. feliks puts together his bomb materials and catches the train.

Potterhead returns to report to Walden.

Potterhead message to Walden:
Am at the dog's back today -
Wish my letter. P.

Seven.

The British fleet, about to disperse after manoeuvres, is kept together and on Monday the British delivers an ultimatum to Astoria. The Americans accept the British deal. It is to be signed at Walden Hall this weekend.

Walden and Pothorn rush toward Walden Hall. Feliks train is stopped and all the passengers arrested, but Feliks escapes the trap.

Chase.

(Walden thinks: why did Lydia not tell me about that "heroin" culting again?)

Eight.

Feliks arrives at Walden Hall before Walden & Pothorn. He catches Charlotte. She hides him in the raft.

Walden arrives. A dragnet is spread all around the surrounding district, but of course it produces nothing for Feliks or in the here.

Does Feliks screw Lydia tonight?

Nine.

Lydia catches all in Walden.

Lydia places the bomb in the raft.

Ten.

Astoria neutralized

The treaty is signed.

Charlotte reacts about the bomb. "You could kill my father!" — "He's not your father!" etc.