

Outline - second draft

THE RUSSIAN PRINCE

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Background

In 1914 the British ruled half the world, and they did not know (except perhaps subconsciously) that for them this was the beginning of the end. The playboy king, Edward VII, had died in 1910, but this was still the Edwardian era: the wealth, power and prestige amassed during the sixty-three solemn years of Victoria's reign were being spent with gusto. People ate and drank hugely, sometimes five large meals a day. Houses were enormous, entertainment was lavish, clothes were gorgeous. Small fortunes were made by the Bond Street and Savile Row outfitters who supplied the many clothes necessary for different social occasions and even different times of day. The rules of etiquette had attained unparalleled complexity - for example, brown boots could not be worn nearer to London than Ascot. Fancy dress parties were all the rage. It was the time of Diaghelev's sensual ballet, the shock of post-Impressionism, the scandal of mixed bathing, suffragettes, ragtime and the tango.

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

The weather that year was unusually sunny and warm. Almost

no rain fell in April, May or June. The temperature in London on 1 July was ninety-four degrees. It was the last long summer of the British Empire.

Domestic politics were even hotter. In 1905 a Liberal government had been elected. At first this made little difference to anything. Then in 1908 the Prime Minister, Campbell-Bannerman, died, and a bunch of young firebrands came to power. Asquith was the first Prime Minister in British history who did not have a country estate. His Home Secretary was the bellicose young Winston Churchill, and as Chancellor of the Exchequer he picked the Welsh nonconformist hothead Lloyd George. Thus began a period in politics more bitter and angry than any this century. The Liberals introduced, or tried to introduce, a Land Tax, Home Rule for Ireland, a cheaper and more modern army and navy, old age pensions, national health insurance, and - horror of horrors - a diminution in the powers of the House of Lords. Before it was over the army would threaten mutiny, the Lords would defy the constitution, the monarchy would be dragged reluctantly into the political arena, and - a rare thing in Westminster - members of opposing parties would refuse to sit down at the same dinner table. Outside the framework of conventional politics the status quo was under threat from the militant new trade unions, the nascent women's movement, the burgeoning Labour Party, and the anarchists.

International politics was no more reassuring. Viewed from England, Europe appeared menaced by an increasingly wealthy and aggressive Germany. Germany's annual steel production, for example, had

overtaken that of Britain and was still accelerating. The Kaiser was the Ronald Reagan of his time - conservative, militaristic and stupid. In the past year Germany's war preparations had become increasingly obvious. The government had imposed a one-off special tax to raise a billion marks, the biggest levy in European history, and the money was used to step up conscription (so that it included all fit men of draft age without exemption) with corresponding increases in military hardware. On the London money market German firms were factoring credits, i.e. discounting bills for early payment, with the result that Germany had collected all her debts while still owing money to the rest of the world.

But most important was her navy. For some years British policy had been that the Royal Navy should be bigger than the combined navies of the two next biggest sea powers, to protect the island's vital trading arteries. Now Germany was catching up, and refused point-blank to negotiate an arms limitation treaty.

Needless to say the problem looked different from the other side of the fence. Germans were proud of their country's uphill struggle to greatness; and where, they asked, was it written that Britain should rule the world and Germany should always be a second-class power? Germany was in danger of being cut off from the rest of the world - notably the U.S., Africa and the Far East - because of the policy of 'encirclement' masterminded by Britain. Germany was partly surrounded by hostile nations: France, Belgium, England and Russia. Italy wavered and the Balkans were turbulent. Germany's route to America was via the North Sea, where Britain ruled the waves (so a naval limitation treaty, which Britain kept proposing as though it were the essence of sweet reason, would have simply maintained the status quo and kept Germany trapped). Her

route to Africa and the Middle East was via her ally Austria-Hungary and the Balkans, which was why Germany supported Austria's aggressive domination of that region. Her way to the Far East was via Persia, a territory which Britain and Russia had lately carved up between them (Britain incidentally securing Persia's oil, the fuel for a new generation of fast warships). Germany wanted colonies like everyone else, but each move she made in Africa was denounced as troublemaking by the Powers which were already sitting on rich possessions. Was there any way for Germany to avoid being suffocated? None, it seemed, but war.

The problem facing the German general staff was - 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 was to neutralise Russia. And for the same reason England and France wanted to extract from the Russians a firm commitment to join in on the Allied side if and when war broke out.

England and Russia were natural allies strategically, but other factors kept them apart. The regime of the Czar was brutal and reactionary. The difference of outlook between the two countries crystallised in the problem of dissidents. Britain at that time had no restrictions on immigration. Consequently London was a haven for refugee revolutionists from Eastern Europe. (Switzerland was similar.) This infuriated the Czar, but British public opinion and the conscience of the ruling Liberal party would not allow the dissidents to be sent back home for imprisonment, torture and execution. Anglo-Russian relations were therefore constituted by an informal and uneasy alignment.

Characters

Stephen Walden was born in 1864. His father, the seventh Earl of Walden, was one of the great Victorian aristocrats: a man of wide general knowledge, politically active and physically energetic, and a man who imposed his stern discipline on others as well as on himself. Young Stephen rebelled against his father but absorbed the old man's values of knowledge, rationalism and work, inheriting nothing feminine except a deep and hidden gentleness from his sweetly insane mother. He went to Eton, where he misbehaved, and to 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 and picked up Pritchard, the manservant who was to be with him for the rest of his life.

As a young man Walden pursued loose women. In 1893 he had a mildly notorious affair with a singer, Bonnie Carlos, real name Maudie Jenkes. He even gave her a present of a small house in St John's Wood, the area of London that was at that time Mistressville. However Bonnie threw him over when the Prince of Wales took a fancy to her.

Even before that Stephen had found England suffocating - there did not seem to be room enough for both him and his father - and he spent little time at home. A restless, troubled and deeply unhappy young man who lived for kicks, he went on safari once a year and travelled the world in between. Being the heir to an earldom, he was entertained by Britain's ambassadors in the world's capital cities. The diplomats, having heard of his reputation as a hell-raiser, were surprised to find that he was intelligent and knowledgeable about international politics and had a flair for languages. In fact he was laying the foundations of what would later

be a considerable expertise in foreign affairs. The diplomats' wives never failed to be charmed by his gentility. Nevertheless, he would leave those elegant rooms in his immaculate evening clothes and spend the rest of the night drinking, gambling and whoring, and might even have to be got out of jail by the Ambassador in the morning.

In 1895 he was painting St Petersburg red when he heard that his father had died. From the moment he became the Earl of Walden he changed radically and permanently. He proposed marriage to Lydia, the beautiful daughter of a Russian count. He took his bride back to England and they moved into the ancestral home of Walden Hall. Walden took his seat in the House of Lords and seemed in every way to become the man whose title he had inherited.

He found the family fortunes somewhat diminished by the late-Victorian collapse of agricultural prices. While other country landowners clamoured for tariff protection, Walden switched money into London property and railways, and soon he was richer than his father had ever been.

While the Conservative party was in power he was often consulted on foreign - especially Russian - affairs, and was occasionally used as a confidential diplomatic messenger. He knows the Czar personally and is related to him through Lydia. When in 1906 the Kaiser persuaded the weak-willed Czar to sign the Treaty of Bjorko - a treaty which would have permanently upset the Balance of Power - it was Walden who was despatched to St Petersburg to talk Nicolas II out of it. He succeeded, and now looks back on that as the triumph of his life.

In the domestic political battle Walden is firmly on the side of the Conservatives and tradition, against the Liberals and change. Since he became the eighth earl he has found deep contentment in

the life of an English aristocrat. 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 sometimes walks with a stick. His sharp intelligence is concealed by a jolly, hearty manner. He thoroughly enjoys life: he likes society parties and hunt balls, the opera and the music-hall, bitter ale and vintage port, the company of young men and mature women, and any game from chess to poker. He adores his wife, although he feels vaguely that he has never really possessed her; nevertheless she is desirable, intelligent, and always good company, and he has no serious desire to wander. He is as proud as Punch of his lovely daughter Charlotte, and can hardly wait for the moment when she makes her debut in London society and all his friends say: 'Damn fine filly, Walden!' He regrets not having more children, but it was not for the want of trying.

He represents the best of the English aristocracy. His lands are scrupulously well maintained and scientifically farmed. His tenants' cottages are in good repair, his servants are well cared-for, his home is beautiful, he is a patron of the arts. He is shrewd, knowledgeable and humane. He and his kind have ruled Britain during its period of greatest glory, and their worst fault is that they cannot see why things must now change. His servants and his employees agree with him: they see no point in the government's taking money from him in Land Tax in order to give them what they already get directly from him.

So Walden, a man who has found a happiness he thought would be permanent, feels that his whole way of life is under attack. But soon it will be threatened more seriously, this time from a foreign source.

Lydia is a woman haunted by a guilty secret. Her secret will be revealed, bit by bit, to her increasing dismay, during the summer of 1914.

Back in 1895 she was the belle of St Petersburg society. Then aged nineteen, she was 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 of this was to some extent an act, serving to conceal a passionate bohemian nature. She married Walden against her will, under severe pressure from her father, an elderly Russian count.

Nineteen years later she is still beautiful. Her public image is not much changed, except insofar as it is Anglicised, and she plays the part of an Edwardian lady with conviction. The passionate side of her nature is well under control. Her guilty secret has prevented her having a warm, candid relationship with Walden, but she has grown enormously fond of him, indeed she would say that she loves him, and she would never be unfaithful to him. She loves Charlotte and feels very protective toward her. Lydia's life task is to bring Charlotte up properly and see her safely married. Lydia is superb ~~and~~ ^{at} telling and showing her daughter how to walk, dress, talk, and behave generally, but not much good at explaining more intimate or emotional matters.

Charlotte is an only child who has grown up amid adoring family and servants. She is too good-natured to be quite spoiled, but she is at least wilful (like Walden). Back in 1895 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.

All the same her upbringing has been narrowly restricted. She has always been educated at home. Her only real friend is her cousin Belinda, who is the same age (18) and has had a similarly protected childhood. Charlotte has never seen poor people's homes, indeed she has never seen the servants' quarters of Walden Hall, and she was never allowed to play with the children of servants or tenants. Her schooling has been heavily biased toward the impractical. She knows a lot about music and art, and she speaks fluent Russian and schoolgirl French, but she knows little of history or geography and nothing at all about science, mathematics, 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 meets are relatively fortunate, for her father is the archetypal paternal country squire.

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 devastating.

She recently asked her governess, Marya: 'What will I do after I get married?' Marya replied: 'Why, my child, you will do nothing.' Charlotte loves her mother and regards her as the personification of feminine perfection; but now she realises that Lydia and other Edwardian ladies, although they are always busy with social events, actually do nothing. Charlotte feels, like

any teenager, that she is faced with a decision about what kind of person she is going to be; and for the first time she is entertaining the unsettling idea that she may not want to be a replica of her mother. This is Charlotte's personal version of the perennial adolescent identity crisis. It will come to a head during the summer of 1914, and when it is over she will know who she is.

Feliks Murontsiv was born near Moscow in 1875. His father, a poor country priest, was a somewhat saintly man - dedicated, selfless and pious. Feliks inherited his selflessness but not his piety. He grew up with a deep and sincere compassion for the world's downtrodden and a bitter contempt for the church which supported and even profited by the status quo. Nevertheless the priesthood was the only way for a poor boy to get educated, and Feliks went to theological college in St Petersburg. There he discovered a system of belief more to his liking: anarchism.

Anarchists believe that all government is tyranny, all property is theft, and all organisation is coercion. As soon as people realise this they will rise up and destroy the state. However, because anarchists are in principle opposed to organisation, they cannot form a coherent political movement. The only way for them to encourage the revolution is by propaganda and by example, e.g. by assassinating politicians. So a caring political theory leads to murder. This is the central conflict of anarchism, and Feliks epitomises it with his contradictory qualities of compassion and ruthlessness.

He has been in love once, when he was a student. He was then a tall, gaunt, white-faced fanatic, mad as hell at the whole world yet tender and vulnerable as a lover, and both passionate

and lascivious in bed. But the girl married someone else. At that time he was arrested and tortured by the Ochrana, the Czar's bestial secret police. After he was released he wandered the Russian countryside, dressed as a monk, preaching the anarchist gospel. Eventually he was arrested again and sent to Siberia. He escaped from there, killing a guard (the only time he has killed, despite his beliefs). He made his way to Switzerland - a journey which tapped his latent powers of ingenuity and hardihood.

Now aged forty, hardened both physically and in his convictions, he is an impressive figure: intense, dominant, brilliant, and magnetic. He is tall, thin, hairy and none too clean, but there is in him an animal energy which a few women find completely hypnotic.

In Switzerland he is deeply discontented. Russia is in turmoil: the Czar is a halfwit, the Duma (parliament) is impotent, the oil workers are at war with the Cossacks and a million people are on strike. The country is a powder barrel waiting for a spark, and Feliks wants to be that spark. But he knows that as soon as he sets foot in Russia he will be sent to Siberia (this has already happened to Joe Stalin) and he could do nothing in Siberia. But what can he do outside Russia?

He is about to find out.

Pritchard, Walden's valet, is the cynical, intelligent son of a London shirtmaker. As a boy he ran away to sea then jumped ship in Zanzibar. He met Walden in East Africa in 1887, when he was seventeen and Walden was twenty-three. As well as being valet, Pritchard is responsible for motor cars, his personal obsession. (The Waldens run horse-drawn and motor vehicles.) Pritchard often takes a glass of port with his master in the gun-room late at night.

He is intensely loyal to Walden despite a biting, but largely theoretical, contempt for the British ruling class.

Pritchard has a running battle with Marya, Charlotte's governess, an insufferably prim woman in her late thirties. In the servants' hall Pritchard will attack the Establishment and Marya, who like many governesses is more royalist than the King, will defend it. Pritchard is always able to defeat her by descending to coarseness and embarrassing her into leaving the room. However, beneath this bickering is a weird mutual affection.

On Marya's day off Charlotte is supervised by Annie, an easygoing young housemaid who has too much sensuality and too little sense, and is disliked by Marya both for the excess and for the lack.

PlotOne

'Churchill? Winston Churchill?' said Walden. 'Here?'

'Yes, my lord,' the butler said.

'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, first calling on me in London then following me down here, he knows damn well I won't receive him -

The butler coughed.

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

'Mr Chruchill told me you'd be not at home, my lord, and said I must give you this.'

Walden realised 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 Earl of Walden was intimidated. He opened the letter.

Buckingham Palace

24 May 1914

My dear Walden,

You will see young Winston.

George R.

Walden recognised the handwriting. It was the King's.

He hesitated only 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 trying to destroy England. However, Churchill wants Walden to do a job which transcends domestic politics. He explains that he has arranged for a young Russian admiral to come to London for secret naval talks - at least, 'naval' talks was the original proposal, but Churchill is parlaying the whole thing into a defence treaty. The admiral is Prince Alexei Andreivitch Oblomov, aged 30, a nephew and favourite of the Czar and a relation of Lydia's. It is the Czar who has insisted, in a personal telegram to his cousin King George V, that the English side be represented in the negotiations by Walden.

To obscure the real purpose of the visit, Oblomov - a very eligible bachelor - will stay at Walden's town house for the London 'season' and will 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 awed 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 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 conquer Europe.

Lydia leaves the men talking politics and strolls into the garden. She walks around the vast, lovely old house and wanders through the landscaped park. The mention of Oblomov has unnerved her: she remembers him as a ten-year old boy at her wedding, and she

remembers that as the unhappiest day of her life. She was coerced into marrying Walden although she was in love with another man. She remembers how, when she was in bed with her lover, she used to feel almost as if she were drowning in pleasure, and she used to shout 'Help!' when she came. Walden knows nothing of all that, but Lydia, despite appearances, has nourished the memory of that adolescent passion.

Lydia sees Charlotte deep in conversation with Belinda, and thinks: Please, God, let me keep my secrets.

Charlotte and Belinda are talking about being debutantes (both are to be presented at court this season), marriage (which is supposed to follow soon afterwards), and sex. This last is a subject upon which they are breathtakingly ignorant. Most children learned about sex despite the notorious Victorian conspiracy of silence, but Charlotte and Belinda are unusually protected. 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 when a woman reaches the age of about twenty-one, and for them this explains why they are pressured to marry at nineteen or twenty.

Belinda is merely curious, but Charlotte is made of sterner stuff. There are forbidden books in a locked cupboard in the library, and she knows where the key is. Belinda gets cold feet, but Charlotte overrules her. They get the books and sneak upstairs.

(Annie, who is supposed to be supervising them, is meeting her boyfriend in the woods.) Charlotte leads the way through the disused nursery to an attic under the roof which used to be her 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 to get up here from the stables, all across roofs, says Charlotte. They look at the forbidden books, but they get little help from the internal diagrams in the medical textbook and none at all from the bizarre, and to them incomprehensible, pornographic novel.

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Meanwhile Feliks' boat is docking at Dover.

The Swiss anarchists have learned, through a traitor in the Ochrana, of Oblomov's planned talks with Walden. Feliks is horrified by the prospect of a European war. The idea of young men being sent, by Kaisers and Czars and Kings, to be killed and maimed in a cause not their own is exactly the kind of thing that makes Feliks an anarchist. As far as he is concerned, Oblomov and Walden are conspiring to murder millions of Russians. So he plans to kill them both.

The effects of such a murder would be greater than might immediately be apparent. Firstly and obviously it would bring the talks to an abrupt halt. Secondly, once it became known that the perpetrator was a refugee Russian anarchist, the old quarrel between Britain and Russia about expatriate revolutionists would flare up again and prevent the talks continuing with replacement negotiators. Thirdly, Feliks (or if he is dead his Swiss friends) will announce that Walden and Oblomov were killed because they were scheming to drag the Russian people into a war they do not want; and Russian popular reaction to that news might set off a chain-reaction of revolt leading ultimately to revolution.

Feliks is tense, excited, apprehensive and happy. He may die soon, but for now life has suddenly started opening doors again.

As he sets foot on 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 that they had gone to England. Now, after all this time, he will be in the same country as she. He recalls making love to her, and how, at the moment of climax, she always used to yell: 'Help!'

Two

Feliks is at Victoria Station for the arrival of Oblomov. The prince is travelling in a private coach (borrowed from the King) at the back end of the train. He steps out of the coach and straight into Walden's carriage. Feliks gets a mere glimpse of a handsome, expensively-dressed young man. Two servants (who appear to be travelling with Oblomov) 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 town home of the Earl of Walden.

Inside the house a reluctant Lydia greets Oblomov. He is a rather appealing young man. 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, modern industry, free speech and parliamentary democracy. But Lydia is thinking: Could he possibly know about me?

When Charlotte appears we find out why this handsome, charming, incredibly wealthy young prince is still a bachelor at thirty: he is chronically shy with girls. When he sees Charlotte - who, in grown-up clothes, has suddenly become a real dish - he drops his teacup, blushes, and acquires a thick Russian accent. But now Charlotte's hidden talents begin to emerge, and with her unique naive charm she puts him at his ease. Observing this, Walden and Lydia exchange a secret smile of parental 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 he, too, has thought of the possibility of an assassination.) Getting close to him will tax Feliks' ingenuity.

Walden and Oblomov begin their talks, and Oblomov springs a surprise.

The Russian navy's great long-term aim is to have a warm-water port. They have their Black Sea coast, but the Black Sea is an inland sea 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 the Balkans in the hope that when the Slavs throw the Turks out Russia will have free passage through the strait; but better than Slav control would be Russian control; and now Oblomov announces that if Russia is to fight on the Allied side in the coming war, the price of her participation will be British recognition of the Balkans as a Russian sphere of influence. Walden has not anticipated this demand. He talks around it a bit, but before he can say anything of substance he must consult with

Churchill.

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Feliks learns from the society papers that the Waldens and Oblomov will be present at the King's Court on 4 June. He buys a gun.

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 at Buckingham Palace. '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 tiara with three white plumes. Men wear a uniform if they are entitled to one, otherwise velvet knee-breeches with white silk stockings, and all their medals. Senior politicians, nobles, and diplomats attend.

Meanwhile, outside in The Mall, the Waldens' footman William waits with their carriage (among a hundred others), watched by Feliks.

In the main part of the ceremony the King and Queen sit on thrones while the debutantes pass in front of them one by one. Charlotte's debut is marred by an (historically true) incident. The girl ahead of her in 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 no one will tell her differently.

William goes into the park to take a leak. Feliks hits him over the head, takes his top hat and livery coat, and ties and gags him.

Then he goes and sits in the Walden carriage.

At the supper after the ceremony Walden tells Churchill of Oblomov's proposal and suggests a counter-offer: the Bosphorus to be an international waterway, with free passage to all nations guaranteed jointly by Britain and Russia. Churchill okays it.

Feliks hears the call: 'The Earl of Walden's carriage.' He drives up to the Palace gates. He keeps his back to the party as they get in. He drives away. He 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 not be able to describe him afterwards). He jumps down from his seat, takes his gun from his pocket, and flings open the carriage door.

Four

Lydia yells 'Help!' in Russian - just as she used to when Feliks made love to her. Feliks freezes. Lydia! Here in this carriage! My own Lydia -

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

Feliks remembers the last time he saw Lydia. She came to his dingy room and snatched an hour with him on her way to a reception at the British Embassy in St Petersburg. Later that night Feliks was arrested by the Ochrana. They beat the soles of his feet in an attempt to make him reveal the names of other anarchists. The

torture stopped without explanation, and six weeks later - equally inexplicably - he was released. On the day he came out he learned that, the day before, Lydia had left for England with her new husband.

Walden, Oblomov and Churchill sit in the library. Churchill is mad at Walden for almost letting Oblomov get killed. Walden is angry, too, at himself and at the unknown assassin who hit William over the head and scared Lydia half to death. They agree to move Oblomov to an hotel and forget about introducing him to society. Churchill tells Walden: 'I hold you personally responsible for the safety of the Prince.' Oblomov says: 'You too should be guarded, Walden. The gun was actually pointed at you.'

Lydia has not recognised Feliks (except perhaps subconsciously). She fainted when he ran away. She believes that what happened was an attempted robbery. (So does Charlotte.) Lydia has been put to bed with a dose of laudanum. She dreams about Feliks. When Walden comes to bed she makes love to him without waking up.

Five

Charlotte is reading the newspapers for the first time in her life, and she learns that the 'incident' at the King's Court was a suffragette protest. She talks to Pritchard about it. He explains the reference to torturing women: suffragettes who are jailed go on hunger strike and consequently are force-fed by a painful and degrading method. Charlotte refuses to believe this.

That night her coming-out ball is held at an hotel. It is a glittering occasion, with all the girls in fabulous gowns and the young men in white-tie-and-tails. Belinda is there. She 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 day at Walden Hall she has learned the sexual facts of life, and now 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. Marya 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 deputise for Marya at Walden Hall. She explains that she got pregnant and was fired without a 'character'. She subsequently had a miscarriage and is now destitute. Charlotte says: 'Come home with me.' Annie knows better than to accept, but she asks for money. Charlotte tells her to come to the house tomorrow afternoon.

Charlotte is grossed out by the revelations of the night. Next day she screams at her parents: 'Why didn't anybody tell me?' It seems to her that her education so far has been little better than a conspiracy to deceive her. She practically accuses her parents of murdering Annie's unborn child.

Walden and Lydia are somewhat thrown. Pregnant housemaids are always fired, it's the only way to run a respectable house. But in truth they cannot feel proud of this policy.

Walden in particular is really shook. First an assassin attacks his family in the middle of London, then his daughter tells him his moral standards are evil. What is the world coming to?

Charlotte says she wants to take Annie as her personal maid. Lydia is aghast, Walden less so; reluctantly they consent.

*

Feliks is very down. He has lost the element of surprise. Oblomov's name no longer appears in the society papers, and the two Russian servants no longer go in and out of the house by the park: the prince has obviously gone into hiding somewhere. This is hardly surprising but it puts Feliks in a quandary. Oblomov could be anywhere. Feliks cannot check every hotel, every cabinet minister's residence, every London house owned by a Russian diplomat, etc. However there is one person who might simply tell him where Oblomov is: Lydia.

He waits until Walden is out; then he knocks on the door.

Six

He gives his name as Constantine Dmitrich Levin, 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. (The name he has chosen will be vaguely familiar to her as it is that of a character in Anna Karenina.)

The butler shows him into the morning-room where Lydia is writing letters. She looks up with an automatic smile, then frowns, then turns as white as a sheet.

Eventually she tells Feliks how she came to marry Walden. Her father had found out that she was having an affair with Feliks. The old count confronted her with the evidence. Defiantly, she rushed straight to Feliks' lodgings, to be told by his landlady that he had been arrested as a subversive. Her father calmly informed her that he was responsible for the arrest, and that furthermore Feliks was at that very moment being tortured by the Ochrana. She was distraught. Then the old count told her that the Earl of Walden had formally asked permission to court her. If

you promise to marry Walden, said the count, Feliks' torture will end today and he will be released as soon as you leave for England. Lydia consented.

As she tells this story, watching Feliks' face, she is consumed by a desperate need to touch him.

Feliks is much moved by the story. He goes to kiss her. No, she says; all that is half my life ago. Now that you know the truth, go away and never come back.

Feliks turns to go. Then: 'I came to ask you something ... ' He reminds himself of the importance of his mission, and forces himself to repeat his prepared speech, a yarn about wanting to petition Oblomov personally for the release of a young anarchist sailor who has been jailed. Lydia tells him that Oblomov is at the Savoy Hotel.

As Feliks leaves, Lydia thinks: Thank God, he hasn't guessed the rest of the story.

Seven

From conversations with Annie, Charlotte is learning about poverty, sex, and the role of women. But now that she is beginning to understand the real world, what can she do about it? She discovers that as a woman she cannot even vote! The protest of Letitia de Vries, the deb in the court incident, now appears in a different light. Charlotte calls on her. Since the incident, the de Vries family have been ostracised by 'good' society, so they are delighted to see the daughter of the Earl of Walden. Mrs Pankhurst is there. Charlotte is ripe for conversion. She promises to go on the next suffragette march.

Feliks buys the necessary materials and makes a bomb.

Lydia thinks over her meeting with Feliks, suppressing for the moment her still-strong physical desire for him. She knows he was and doubtless still is an anarchist. Did he tell her the truth about why he wanted to see Oblomov? Perhaps he wants to murder Oblomov. It might even have been Feliks in the park that night! The more she thinks about it the more worried she is that she might have betrayed Oblomov to an assassin.

She tells Walden: 'A man called this morning, a Russian whom I remembered vaguely from St Petersburg, asking for Oblomov . . . I told him the Savoy Hotel, I hope that was all right.'

Walden says: 'Don't worry about it.'

Walden is concealing his anger. Things are getting on top of him. Oblomov is taking an unconscionably long time to reply to the British counter-proposal. It is now mid-June, and the Germans have completed the widening of the Kiel Canal, a strategically crucial project which will enable their Dreadnoughts to pass between the North Sea and the Baltic. Every day which passes makes a deal with the Russians more urgent. The unknown assassin seems incredibly daring and ingenious. Now once again he has located Oblomov. But perhaps Walden can turn this to advantage and actually catch the man.

During a political argument in the servants' hall, Annie makes a mistake: she declares that Mrs Pankhurst is 'a real lady', she knows because Miss Charlotte said so. Marya reports to Lydia that Charlotte has met Mrs Pankhurst. Charlotte is carpeted and forbidden to leave the house alone.

Feliks writes on an envelope: 'Prince Oblomov, Savoy Hotel.' He gives an urchin a penny to deliver it in fifteen minutes. By then Feliks is in the lobby of the hotel, reading a newspaper and apparently waiting for someone. The boy comes in and hands over the letter. Feliks watches carefully: his plan is to follow the envelope all the way to Oblomov. Suddenly the urchin is surrounded by plain-clothes policemen who seem to have materialised out of the walls.

Walden is summoned from an office in the hotel. He questions the urchin. He opens the envelope and finds there is nothing in it. He begins to suspect what this is all about. He looks around.

But the lobby is empty.

Eight

Lydia finds herself longing to see Feliks again. This feeling, and its associated guilt, makes her cold toward Walden.

Walden moves Oblomov again. He tells his butler: 'If "Mr Levin" should call again, you must admit him, but I want you to tell Pritchard immediately.' He says to Pritchard: 'If "Mr Levin" calls, follow him when he leaves.'

Feliks tries following Walden around for a couple of days. The first day, Walden has lunch at his club, makes a couple of calls in the afternoon, dines at home, goes to the opera, and finishes up at a supper ball. Next day he leaves home early in his car. Feliks follows on his bicycle, but as soon as the car leaves Central London it picks up speed and Feliks is left behind.

There is nothing for it but to try Lydia again.

Charlotte is determined to go on the suffragette demonstration. The King has refused to give an audience to Mrs Pankhurst, so the suffragettes are marching on Buckingham Palace. Annie announces that Charlotte is in bed with a headache and is not to be disturbed. Then Charlotte sneaks out of the house.

Feliks sees his sister coming out of the Walden house. 'Nadia!' he says. She gives him a puzzled look and walks on. Feliks realises that he has not seen Nadia for twenty years, and although she looked like that when she was nineteen she doesn't any more. This is presumably Charlotte, Lydia's daughter, whom Feliks has until now seen only from a distance. She might know where Oblomov is. Feliks follows her.

The police have been ordered to repel the suffragettes with a minimum of arrests, because the women are more trouble in jail than out. Lacking the weapon of arrest the police resort to violence, and idle male bystanders join in. Feliks sees Charlotte go down in a scuffle. He wades in and rescues her.

He takes her to a cheap cafe and buys her a cup of tea. They talk. So Lydia has a daughter who looks just like my sister ... An incredible suspicion begins to dawn on Feliks. He asks Charlotte her exact date of birth. She tells him.

Then he knows: she is his daughter.

Nine

Walden is at Walden Hall, which is Oblomov's new hideout. Oblomov is in daily contact with the Czar, via the Russian Embassy, by messenger and coded cable. He now presents a modified demand: Russian control of that area of the Balkans which is at present

European Turkey. Walden dashes back to London to consult with Churchill again.

*

Charlotte is fascinated by Feliks, for he has answers to the questions which trouble her: Why is there poverty? Why are there wars? Why is sex secret?

Feliks says that he knew Lydia in Russia long ago, and that Charlotte reminds him of his sister. 'Maybe we're related,' Charlotte says idly. Feliks catches his breath, hesitates, then says: 'I doubt it.'

They arrange to meet again.

*

Walden and Churchill come up with a new counter-proposal: Russian control of the Bosphorus plus Constantinople. Walden thinks the Russians will go for that. Churchill says he must get Cabinet approval.

*

Feliks faces a dilemma. He has found a daughter he never knew he had - and she may know where Oblomov is. Should he use her?

He reads in the newspaper that the Archduke Franz-Ferdinand has been assassinated at Sarajevo.

He must use her.

They tour the National Gallery together. She talks knowledgeably about the pictures, opening a new world to Feliks. He feels so proud of her.

He tells her that the assassination at Sarajevo means war. He explains that Walden and Oblomov are trying to bring Russia into the war, and says that in order to stop them he must kill Oblomov. Charlotte does not accept this easily, but after a long discussion she says: 'You're right.'

He asks her: 'Where is Oblomov?'

She doesn't know.

But she will find out.

Ten

Charlotte asks Lydia where Oblomov is. She replies: 'Ask your father.' She asks Walden. He says: 'It's better you shouldn't know.'

*

Walden walks around London, brooding. His wife is cold as ice, his daughter is turning out wrong, and the assassin is still at large. Meanwhile the German Kaiser has promised to back Austria in any reprisals against Serbia. Walden's whole world is falling apart.

He finds himself in St John's Wood outside the house he gave to Bonnie Carlos in 1892. He wonders what she is like now. My God, she must be fifty.

A hansom cab draws up and a woman gets out. Watching from across the street, Walden recognises Bonnie. She is rather plump and a shade overdressed, but the smile she gives the driver tugs at Walden's heartstrings. She looks in his direction. He turns quickly and walks away, uncertain whether she has seen him or not.

When he gets home his house is in turmoil. Charlotte and two suffragettes have been arrested for setting fire to mailboxes. Walden has to go and get his daughter out of jail. He promises to send her out of London to keep her out of trouble.

The Cabinet approves his proposed new counter-offer, so next day he drives to Walden Hall to put it to Oblomov. He takes Charlotte with him and leaves her there.

Feliks was due to meet Charlotte again. He waits all day for her but of course she does not turn up.

Eleven

Next day, Thursday 28 July, back in London, Walden calls on Bonnie. Yes, she did see him that day, and she has been waiting ever since for him to call. She is now living on her savings, comfortable but a little lonely. They make love. Afterward she tells him that she knows (from experience) that he is infertile. He says: 'But I've got a daughter.' Bonnie says: 'When was she born, dear ... exactly?'

*

Meanwhile Feliks calls on Lydia and asks again where Oblomov is. Lydia says: 'You're trying to use me to help you murder him!' Feliks says: 'All these years I had a daughter ... do you realise what you've stolen from me?' They quarrel like lovers who have betrayed one another. At the height of the row they kiss passionately. Lydia breaks away and runs out of the room. Feliks leaves.

Pritchard follows him.

*

When Walden gets home there are three messages.

One is from Churchill. Austria has sent Serbia a war ultimatum with a 48-hour deadline.

The second is from Oblomov, accepting the new deal. Walden notifies Churchill and proposes the papers should be signed Saturday at Walden Hall.

The third comes from the Red Lion pub in Stepney, from where Pritchard is watching the front door of the house where Feliks is

lodging. It says: 'I have tracked the lion to his den.'

Walden sends another message to Churchill, then puts on a coat of Pritchard's and heads for the East End.

Twelve

When Feliks reached home there was a letter from Charlotte: 'Oblomov is here at Walden Hall. Meet me any morning on the bridle path in the woods to the north of the house.' Feliks is now methodically packing his bomb kit.

Feliks leaves before the police arrive at the Red Lion pub. Walden and Pritchard follow him to the railway station. Pritchard gets behind him in the queue and buys a ticket to the same destination, a market town near Walden Hall. Pritchard gets on the train, establishes where Feliks is sitting, then comes back and gives the ticket to Walden. Walden scribbles a note for Pritchard to take to Churchill, then gets on the train. The train pulls out.

Churchill gives orders for troops to stop the train and arrest everyone on board.

Pritchard rushes back to the house. He tells Lydia what is happening. Then he takes the Rolls and heads pell-mell for the place where the train is to be stopped.

*

Walden, on the train, is wondering why Lydia did not tell him that 'Mr Levin' had called again, and whether this has any connection with what Bonnie said this afternoon. The train slows to a halt on an uphill slope. Walden looks out and sees that the train is surrounded by soldiers. Then he sees Feliks go by, heading for

the rear of the train. He gets up and follows.

Feliks gets into the guard's van, the last coach in the train. He releases the brake and dynamites the coupling. The coach begins to roll backward down the hill.

Walden leaps the gap and attacks Feliks. The fight is unequal, and Walden is thrown out of the coach.

The coach gathers speed and bursts through the cordon of soldiers.

Thirteen.

Pritchard arrives. Walden is not seriously injured. The soldiers chase after the coach.

When it comes to a stop Feliks takes off over the fields. He has a good start on the soldiers. He reaches a main road. A car comes along. He stops it, throws the driver out, and takes the car.

The soldiers set up a roadblock. Feliks smashes through it.

Walden and Pritchard give chase in the Rolls.

Feliks has a puncture. He drives the stolen car off the road. He shatters its windscreen and plants the shards of glass in the road. Then he heads across country.

Walden and Pritchard drive over the glass and get two punctures. They begin to walk, looking for somewhere to hire horses.

Feliks takes a horse from a field. He arrives in the vicinity of Walden Hall around 3 a.m. on Friday. There are a few police around, but the man who escaped from Siberia knows how to hide in the woods for a night.

Fourteen

Walden and Pritchard arrive just before dawn and organise a police dragnet in the area of Walden Hall.

Charlotte goes riding before breakfast and picks up Feliks in the woods. She gets him back to the stables then leads him up over the roofs to her attic hiding-place. She tells him that Oblomov's room is being guarded day and night, doors and windows. However they are going to sign the treaty on Saturday at 3 p.m. in a room called the Octagon.

Lydia arrives from London. After what Pritchard told her last night she has deduced that Charlotte must be helping Feliks. She must tell Walden this, and in so doing she is obliged to reveal the secret of Charlotte's parentage. Walden was somewhat prepared for this by Bonnie. He and Lydia forgive one another and resolve to start afresh.

Meanwhile Charlotte is confined to her room and the house is searched. Feliks evades the searchers by going out on to the roof.

In the night he creeps through the darkened house and plants a bomb in a flower pot in the Octagon. He sets it to go off at 3.15.

Fifteen

On Saturday Austria declares war on Serbia. This is the beginning of World War One.

At three o'clock the secret treaty is signed by Walden and Oblomov in the presence of Churchill and the Russian Ambassador. The four men drink a celebratory glass of champagne.

Charlotte is released from confinement. She goes straight to the attic and tells Feliks: 'It's too late - they've signed it.'

'It's not too late,' he says. 'They will all be blown up in ... two minutes.'

Charlotte says: 'But you can't kill my father!'

'He's not your father,' says Feliks. 'I am.' You see, Lydia and I were lovers, then - '

'It makes no difference!' says Charlotte - and runs off.

Feliks goes after her.

Charlotte runs into the Octagon at 3.14.30. She says: 'Get out, everyone - '

Feliks comes in behind her and tries to drag her out.

Walden and Oblomov jump him.

It is 3.14.50.

Feliks struggles. For an instant he gets free.

It is 3.14.59.

Feliks picks up the flower pot containing the bomb.

Clutching it to his chest, he throws himself through the window.

The bomb goes off before he hits the ground.

Charlotte runs to Walden. He puts his arms around her.

'Father,' she says.

Postscript

In the first few months of the war, the Russian threat to Germany's eastern front, by drawing troops away from the west, played a crucial role in halting the German invasion of France. In 1915 the Russians were officially given Constantinople and the Bosphorus. And in 1917 the Russian people did rise up and overthrow the Czarist regime. Of course Feliks was not alive to see the result of his life's work. But perhaps it was just as well.

The end.