

## The Anarchist

### An Edwardian Thriller

#### Background: Origins of the First World War

Serbia was a small country in what is now Yugoslavia. It was dominated by its neighbour Austria, which was then large and powerful and known as the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austria wanted to absorb Serbia, so Serbia sought the protection of Russia. Nevertheless in 1908 Austria annexed a big piece of Serbia, a province called Bosnia. In 1914 some nationalist Serbian students assassinated a visiting Austrian Archduke in the town of Sarajevo, in Bosnia. Then:

1. The Austrians, who had designs on Serbia anyway, used the assassination as a pretext and declared war on Serbia. (However the Austrians did not actually attack yet.)

2. Russia, which was supposed to be Serbia's patron, reluctantly mobilised her army. At first Russia mobilised only partially, against Austria; but then the Russian generals realised that partial mobilisation left them vulnerable to an attack by Austria's ally Germany, so the Russians ordered full mobilisation.

3. Once Russia had mobilised against Austria and Germany, of course Germany had to mobilise. However Germany's problem was that Russia was allied with France, and the German generals were afraid that while they mobilised against the Russians in the east, France would attack them from the west. They decided they would solve this problem by trying to put France out of the war with a lightning knockout blow. So Germany invaded France.

4. The German plan for the invasion of France involved going through Belgium. Nobody really cared about Belgium, although there was an ancient treaty (1839) permitted Britain to defend the neutrality of Belgium. However Britain did care about Germany, which was growing fast and seemed to threaten British dominance of the seas, world trade, and the colonies. So when Germany invaded Belgium England used the 1839 treaty as an excuse to declare war on Germany.

This is how a quarrel between Austria and Serbia turned into a war between England and Germany.

It is 1914. The British Empire is at a peak. On the map, half the world is coloured pink. The aging playboy Edward VII died in 1910, but nevertheless this is still the Edwardian era: the wealth, power and privilege amassed during the sixty-three solemn years of Victoria's reign are now being spent with gusto. People eat and drink hugely. Houses are spacious, clothes are gorgeous, entertainment is lavish. The rules of etiquette have attained unparalleled complexity. Men and women have different clothes for morning, lunch, afternoon, and dinner; for town and country; indoors and outdoors... for example, brown boots may not be worn closer to London than Ascot. More than a million people (out of a working population of eighteen million) are employed as domestic servants. It is a time of hypocrisy: everyone pays lip-service to Victorian morality, and the Oscar Wilde trial has driven the homosexual intelligencia out of the country; but syphilis is endemic and the aristocracy patronise the Paris brothels.

The Earl of Walden is a rich man. To look after himself, his wife and his two teenage daughters he employs more than one hundred servants at his various houses in London, Surrey, Monte Carlo, and Scotland. This year his elder daughter Charlotte is "coming out" that is to say, she will be presented at court, put her hair up, and go to the parties and balls of the London "season" in order to be matched with a good husband.

Charlotte is pretty, protected, cultured, innocent, and idealistic. Her education has been narrow and generally impractical, although she has learned French and German. A year ago she was wearing pigtails and knee socks. She asked her governess: "What will I do when I'm a debutante?"

"Oh, go to parties and palls and picnics and just have a wonderful time until you get married."

"And what will I do after I get married?"

"Why, my child, you will do nothing."

This conversation has stayed in Charlotte's mind.

The season is a kind of marriage market for the aristocracy, and this year the big prize is Prince Aleksandr Androvitch Oblomov, a handsome, dashing, enormously wealthy Russian of 30 years. He is related to half the monarchs of Europe and is the man every debutante's mother wants for a son-in-law. Charlotte meets him and soon finds out why he has escaped marriage for so long: he is chronically shy. However she succeeds in bringing him out of his shell just a little, and he talks earnestly about the need for radical reform in Russia: for mechanised agriculture, free speech, land reform and democracy. Of course he is only a young hothead and his elders are confident that a little more maturity and experience will wean him of these

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crazy ideas.

Coming home at dawn from a party, Charlotte is thunderstruck to see a woman sleeping in the street. Her chaperone explains that thousands of Londoners sleep in the street because they have no homes. Charlotte goes home and screams at her mother: "Why didn't anyone tell me?" Her anger has another, secret source: she has just found out how babies are made. It seems to her that her education so far has been little more than a conspiracy to deceive her. Charlotte has inherited her mother's soft heart and her father's iron will. She won't take this kind of treatment.

Now that she has begun to find out what the world is like, how can she help to change it? She can't even vote! She begins to seek out a different kind of companion. She meets some of the intellectual subversives of the day: Thomas Hardy, Emmeline Pankhurst, Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, DH Lawrence. She terrifies her parents by attending a suffragette demonstration and scandalises her society friends by declaring an (entirely theoretical) belief in free love.

But hypothetical radicalisation does not satisfy her very long and soon she falls in with an altogether more serious crowd.

2 (A) At the other end of the social scale, and at the other end of London, life is very different: there is dirt, disease, awful poverty, drunkenness and fierce exploitation. In many homes people eat standing up because there are no chairs. When school medical examinations are introduced one child in six is too starving, verminous or sick to benefit from education. The infant mortality rate is 33%. Pubs are open all day until midnight and gin is the universal panacea.

In the East End the poorest of Englishmen mingle with even poorer immigrants from Eastern Europe. Far-left political ideas brought by the immigrants take root in the richly [illegible] soil of London poverty. The powerful Federation of Jewish Anarchist Groups publishes its own newspaper, *Der Arbeter Fraint*, in Yiddish, and organises a successful strike of sweatshop workers.

(B) England's policy of unrestricted immigration infuriates other European governments, who would like the English to send all the anarchists and bolsheviks home to be jailed and executed. In an ongoing attempt to make the British government toughen up, the Russian secret police (Ochrana) have planted agents provocateurs among the anarchists. The a.p.s are more militant than the genuine anarchists, and history will show that the most serious anarchist outrages were organised by Ochrana agents.

Prominent in this milieu is a Bolshevik called Feliks, a Rasputin-like character, intense, magnetic, fiery. He meets Charlotte at the Jubilee Street Anarchist Club, cultivates her, takes

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charge of her political education, and seduces her. They are not in love, either before or after the seduction. Charlotte is merely furthering her education, although she enjoys it too. Feliks gets a big kick out of screwing an aristo.

3. While Charlotte has been growing up, European statesmen have been forging the alliances which will ensure that when one of them goes to war the others will too. The Central Powers. Germany and Austria-Hungary are encircled by hostile nations: France, England, Belgium, Russia and the Balkans. As always, the problem facing Germany military planners in the danger of war on two fronts – against Russia in the east and France in the west. The aim of German diplomacy, therefore, is to neutralise Russia. One attempt to do this has already failed: in 1905 the Czar and the Kaiser signed the Treaty of Bjorko, but their officials tore it up immediately afterwards.

The head of German espionage at this time is Gustav Steinhauer, an overblown, ambitious, scheming former Pinkerton detective (really). He has a small network of spies in England – twenty-two of them, to be exact. As war looms in 1914 Steinhauer has a bright idea. If Russia and England could be made to quarrel at this moment in history, then Russia might be kept out of the coming war. Have to make them quarrel? Suppose a member of the Russian royal family were to be assassinated in England – by one of the anarchists whom England insists on sheltering despite Russian protests? It is worth a try.

Steinhauer goes to England to brief the most reliable of his spies: Feliks.

4. Feliks is a complex and driven man. At the age of eleven he discovered that the solid German bourgeois couple who brought him up were not his natural parents. In fact he is the child of a now-dead peasant girl and an unidentified young aristocrat. Feliks is obsessed with deception in general and betrayal in particular.\* He both reveres and hates the aristocracy: in a way, to be a secret agent posing as an anarchist symbolizes his inner conflict. He wants wealth and power, so he wants advancement with German Intelligence. He also longs for war.

Steinhauer's plan appeals to Feliks enormously, for he will get to kill an aristocrat in the interests of Germany: Feliks gets [illegible] it were double [illegible] from this deal.

Feliks also is able to suggest a victim – Prince Oblomov – and a way to get at him – through Charlotte.

\*He has a wife and children in Germany, and another wife and children in London. It is as if he has to betray them before he can love them.

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5. Scotland Yard has a newly-formed political section, called Special Branch. The detectives of Special Branch don't know the difference between a Bolshevik and a [illegible], and they are further confused by the agents provocateurs, some of whom act as informers.

However M. I. 5 is a little better. It was started in 1906, when it was called M. O. 5 and had a staff of just one, its founder, Captain Vernon Kell. Kell's supervisors were horrified by the first time he asked for an assistant, but now – in 1914 – he has four officers, a lawyer, two investigators and seven clerks – and some very extensive files. His officers – believe it or not – are in the basement of the Little Theater in Soho Street, off the Strand.

Kell is a curious man. His father was a soldier and his mother a Polish countess. As a boy Vernon travelled all over Europe and learned French, German, Italian and Polish. In the Army he studied Russian and Chinese and passed interpreter's exams in both. He served in China during the Boxer Rebellion. The Orient shattered his health and ended a promising Army career. He has asthma, recurrent dysentery, and back pain so bad he can barely sit upright and uses his motorcar to travel even the shortest distances. This is man with an iron will who is continually in pain. He describes his hobbies in "Who's Who," as fishing and croquet. He is morally tough and deeply pious. One of his colleagues says: "He could smell a spy like a terrier smells a rat." Superficial he is an officer of the old school form his moustache to his mirror – bright [illegible]; but in fact he is flexible, cunning and at times most ungentlemanly. He claims to be a brilliant forger but this is both a joke and a cover, for in fact he makes use of jailed criminals to counterfeit papers. He is referred to as "K", beginning the tradition that Intelligence chiefs in England are known by an initial. Kell has a good relationship with the aggressive, [illegible] young Home Secretary, Winston Churchill: Churchill is keen on cloak-and-dagger [illegible] and helps Kell cut through red tape.

Kell's first big break came when a Prussian naval officer was seen to go to a barbershop in the Caledonian Road, which is a long way from [illegible]. The barber's name was Karl Ernst, and the naval officer was Steinhauer. Kell had Ernst's mail intercepted. Ernst was the post office for Steinhauer's entire English network. Through Ernst, Kell has figured out most of the network. In another tradition-making decision Kell does not arrest the spies unless they either (a) discover something really important or (b) try to leave England. (Prologue?)

Anyway, when Steinhauer visits Feliks, Kell knows. He has Feliks followed, and is fascinated to learn that Feliks is seeing Viscountess Walden.

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6. Feliks persuades Charlette to help his assassinate Prince Oblomov. How? Some [illegible] piece of derring-do. He lies to her?

7. Charlotte persuades her mother to give a weekend party at their country house and invite Prince Oblomov. She achieves this partly by hints that Oblomov is in love with her and might propose. Oblomov also draws the conclusion that a proposal would be well received.

8. Feliks and another anarchist, Adolf, get together the materials for a bomb.

9. Kell realises that Feliks is working with the Anarchists.

10. Charlotte [illegible] Feliks as a groom at Walden Hall.

11. Charlotte stops seeing Feliks when she finds out about his wife.

12. Sarajevo.

13. The weekend. Oblomov proposes and Charlotte accepts. Austria declares war. Kell realises [note: marginalia reads told by agent prov.?] Oblomov is the target and rushes toward Surrey. Charlotte realises Feliks is German spy. Charlotte saves Oblomov. Feliks blows himself up. Charlotte marries Oblomov. Russes mobilises.