

An Edwardian Funeral

1. This is the story of Charlotte Victoria Pembroke-Ley, Viscountess Walden. In 1910 she is a debutante and distantly related to the King, the aging playboy Edward VII. She is pretty, protected, rather innocent, very intellectual and fiercely idealistic. This is her first London season. Her education has been narrow and impractical.

Last year she was wearing pigtails and knee socks; and suddenly she is a lady. A year ago she asked her governess: "What will I do when I come out?"

"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," said the governess, a little shocked, "you will do nothing."

This conversation is on Charlotte's mind as she rides the London merry-go-round, making small talk while her mother schemes weddings.

The British Empire is at a peak. On the map, half the world is coloured pink. The wealth, power and privilege amassed during the 63 solemn years of Victoria's reign are now being spent with gusto under the influence of the hedonistic Edward. People eat and drink hugely. Houses are spacious, clothes are gorgeous, entertainment is lavish. Etiquette has reached some kind of peak of complexity: for example born boots may not be worn any nearer to London than Ascot. More than a million people worked as domestic servants. Maids curtsy and footmen bow. Everyone pays lip-service to Victorian morality and the homosexual intelligencia have been driven abroad by the Oscar Wilde trial; but the King goes to Paris brothels and syphilis is endemic.

Coming home at dawn from a party, Charlotte is thunderstruck to see a man 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?" She realises that the world is not how she imagined it, and it seems to her that her education so far has been little more than a conspiracy to deceive her. About this time she also learns the truth about how babies are made, and the fact that this important information has been kept from her for seventeen years continues her conspiracy theory.

Now that she knows how the world works, what can she do? Nothing. She realises that she can't even vote! She begins to seek out different companions. She meets some of the intellectual subversives of the day: Thomas Hardy, Emmeline Pankhurst, Bernard Shaw, DH Lawrence, Bertrand Russell. She goes to the first-ever Post-Imperialist exhibition. She terrifies her parents by attending a suffragette demonstration and scandalises her society friends by declaring an (entirely theoretical) belief in free love.

But academic radicalism does not satisfy her for long and soon she falls in with an altogether more serious crowd.

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2. At the other end of the social scale, and at the other end of London, life is very different.

One in three children die before the age of one. When school medical examinations are introduced it is found that one child in six is too hungry, verminous or disabled to benefit from education. In London's East End the poorest of Englishmen mingle with even poorer immigrants from Eastern Europe. (England is the only European country which does not have immigrants for political criteria.) Far-left political ideas brought by the immigrants take root in the soil of London poverty. The powerful Federation of Jewish Anarchist Groups publishes its own newspaper, *Der Arbeter Fraint*, in Yiddish.

As well as ordinary immigrants, political refugees flock here, for England has an immigration control and is really the only European country which does not imprison political extremists. Scotland Yard does have a political section, the newly-formed Special Branch; but it cannot tell the difference Bolshevik and an Anarchist and is even more confused by the fact that many of the more extreme militants are in fact agents provocateurs, planted by the Ochrana (Russian

Secret Police) to provoke outrages with the long-term aim of making England send the dangerous men home to be shot.

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 charge of her political education, and seduces her. They are not in love, either before or after the seduction. Feliks [illegible] gets a bit kick out of screwing a viscountess and Charlotte is just interested in the experiment.

Among Charlotte's circle of society friends is a very glamorous Russian prince, Prince Oblomov. Feliks seems very interested in him. Charlotte fancies Oblomov like mad, but so do all the other debutantes.

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While Charlotte is learning the facts of life, European statesmen are busy forging the alliances that will ensure that when one of them goes to war the next will follow. The Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary, are encircled by hostile nations: France, England, Belgium, Russia and the Balkans. As always, the problem facing German military planners is the danger of war on two fronts - against France and Germany in the east. The aim of German diplomacy, therefore, is to neutralise Russia. One attempt to do this has 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 Intelligence at this time is an overblown, self-serving, scheming former Pinkerton detective (really!) called Gustav Steinhauer. He has a small network of about 20 spies in England. One of these spies tells him that a young Russian noble, Prince Oblomov, is going to visit England with the blessing of his great-uncle, the King.

(Most of European monarchs are related. Edward is uncle to the Czar, the Czarina and the Kaiser, and cousin to the kings of Belgium, Portugal and Bulgaria.)

Steinhauer, who is an adventurer, figures that if the Prince is assassinated in England this will cause a quarrel between Russia and England which might keep Russia out of the coming war.

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Background: origins of the First World War

Serbia was a small country in what is now Yugoslavia, dominated by its much bigger neighbour, Austria-Hungary, which was then an empire. Austria-Hungary had designs on Serbia; Serbia sought the protection of Russia. In 1908 Austria annexed a large part of Serbia, a province called Bosnia. Then in 1914 a small band of Serbian nationalists assassinated a visiting Austrian Archduke in the town of Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. Then:

1. The Austrians used the assassination as a pretext for declaring war on Serbia.
2. Russia, which was supposed to be Serbia's patron, mobilised her army. First Russia only mobilised partially against Austria; but then the Russian generals realised that this left them defenseless against Germany, Austria's ally; so the Russians ordered general mobilisation.
3. Now that Russia who mobilised against Germany, Germany had to mobilise. However Germany's problem was that Russia was allied with France, and the German generals were afraid that when they went to war against Russia in the east, France would attack them in the west. They decided to try to put France out of the war with a lightning knockout blow. So Germany went to war against France.
4. The German plan for invading France involved attacking through Belgium, a small country which was supposed to be neutral. When Germany violated Belgium's neutrality, England used that as an excuse to declare war on Germany. (*)

This is how Austria's designs on Serbia led to a war between England and Germany.

(*) The real reason was that Germany was a growing country and seemed to threaten British domination of the seas, world wide, and the colonies.

28 June: Sarajevo

5 July: Austria + Germany consult

3 weeks later (26): [illegible]

29 July: Germans decide to mobilise