

The Debutante

1. This is the story of Charlotte Victoria Lambton, Viscountess Walden. In 1906 she is a debutante and distantly related the King, the ageing playboy Edward VII. She is pretty, protected, rather innocent, very intellectual and fiercely idealistic. She begins her first London season like any other debutante, going to endless balls and making empty-headed conversation with the dashing young men while her mother steers suitable prospective husbands in her direction.

The British Empire is at some kind of peak. The wealth, power and privilege amassed during the sixty-three years of Queen Victoria's reign is now being spent with gusto. The English ruling class employs more than a million servants. Everyone eats too much and drinks too much. Houses are spacious, clothes are gorgeous, entertainment is lavish. It is the age of hypocrisy: ^{people} everyone pays lip-service to Victorian morality and syphilis is rampant.

Charlotte is too intelligent to believe in the superficial surface of Edwardian life and too idealistic to ^{turn a blind eye} ignore the hypocrisy. She is furious that she cannot see while the children wonder her mother reminds her to marry. She begins to spend time with arty people, and meets some of the disgraceful subversives of the day: Thomas Hardy, Hilaire Belloc, Mrs. Pankhurst, etc. ^(wilde & most of the gays have gone abroad) She shocks her parents by attending a suffragette demonstration and humiliates her friends by declaring an (entirely theoretical) belief in free love. But these radicals ~~are~~ do not satisfy her for long, and soon she falls in with a much more serious class of radical.

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2. At the other end of the social scale, and the other end of London too, is an entirely contrasting society: poverty, dirt, degradation, drunkenness and fierce exploitation. Here in the East End of London the poorest of Englishmen mingle with even poorer immigrants from Europe and Ireland. European political ideas, ~~first~~ ^{first} brought in by the immigrants, take root in the Slavs. The most powerful political movement here is the Federation of Jewish Anarchist Groups which publishes Der Arbeiter Freiheit, a radical Yiddish newspaper. The movement's great triumph for years the successful 1912 strike of sweatshops workers.

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Among the Anarchists is William White, a Rasputin-like character, tall, magnetic, intelligent, fiery. He cultivates Charlotte and takes her virginity.

They learn that of a visit to England by a junior member of the Russian royal family. (NB: Thearina was King Edward's niece. The czar was Queen Alexandra's nephew. The German Kaiser was Edward's nephew. His cousins included the Kings of Portugal, Belgium and Bulgaria.)

White's anarchist band decides that the visit of the Rumanian prince must be the occasion for an anti-Czarist demonstration.

3. Germany is ~~surrounded~~^{enclosed} by hostile and - apparently - threatening nations. During the first decade of the twentieth century the politicians are forging the alliances and cabals which will eventually ~~lose~~^{prevent} but when one of them goes to war all the rest will follow.

Germany is allied with Austria-Hungary. France is allied with England, England with Russia. Italy is anti-Austrian. There is unrest in the Balkans. As always, the problem facing German military planners is the prospect of war on two fronts: against Russia in the east and France and England in the west. A political attempt to neutralize Russia failed in 1905: The Kaiser and the Czar signed the treaty of Björkö in 1905 but their officials tore it up immediately afterwards.

A quarrel between Germany and England would therefore be of enormous advantage to Germany.

The head of German Intelligence at this time was Gustav Reinbauer, ~~an~~ a former Pinkerton detective (!). Now he hears of the forthcoming visit to England of the Russian prince, and decides to have him assassinated.

Steinhilber goes to England to give the job to one of his agents there: William White.

4. Charlotte's wife is excited about the visit of the Russian prince. White persuades the Anarchists to assassinate him. Charlotte agrees to help by providing information.

5. Charlotte meets the Prince and White makes his plan. Charlotte likes the Prince & Mrs screening White.