

The Debutante

1. This is the story of Charlotte Victira Peachbroke Ley, Viscountess Walden. In 1906 she is a debutante and distantly related the King, the aging playboy Edward VII. She is pretty, polished, 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 [illegible] 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 pay lip-service to Victorian morality and syphilis is rampant.

Charlotte is too intelligent to believe in the surface of Edwardian life and too idealistic to turn a blind eye to the hypocrisy. She is furious that she cannot [illegible] while the chinless wonders her mother wants her to marry can. She begins to spend time with [illegible] people, and meets some of the disgraceful subversives of the day: Thomas Hardy, HG Wells, Mrs Pankhurst, etc. (Wilde and most of the gays have gone abroad.) She shocks her parents by attending a suffragette demonstration and horrifies her friends by declaring an (entirely theoretical) belief in free love. But these radicals do not satisfy her long, and soon she falls in with a much more serious clan of radical.

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, brought in by the immigrants, take root in the [illegible]. The most powerful political movement here is the Federation of Jewish Anarchist Groups which publishes *Der Arbeter Fraint*, a radical Yiddish newspaper. The movement's great triumph was the successful 1912 strike of sweatshop workers.

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Russian Bolshevik

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

They learn of a visit to England by a junior member of the Russian royal family. (NB: The Czarina 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 Russian prince must be the occasion for an anti-Czarist demonstration.

3. Germany is encircled by horrible and - apparently - threatening nations. During the

first decade of the twentieth century the politicians are forging the alliances and [illegible] which will eventually ensure that 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-Austria. 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: The Kaiser and the Czar signed the treaty of Bjorko in 1905 but their officials tore it up immediately afterwards.

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

The Lead of German Intelligence at this time was Gustav Steinhauer, a former Russian detective (!). Now he hears of the following visit to England of the Russian prince, and decides to have him assassinated.

Steinhauer goes to England to give the job to one of his agents here. William White.

4. Charlotte's circle 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 and stops seeing White.