

Moritz had been invited to bring his new wife to Berta's salon, though he suspected Frieda was the main target of the invitation. It was unusual in any case, for it was on a Monday evening, and Berta ordinarily entertained at the end of the week.

'Look at you two!' Berta took a step back and clasped her hands together as they came in the door. 'A successful marriage made in my salon!'

One salon, two wives, Moritz thought, although perhaps Daisy was too common a name, or too common a woman, to deserve a mention or memory. Instead the memory of another liaison was triggered.

She was still speaking as she escorted them to the table. 'Of course, Alma had an affair with that architect Gropius. Begun, you know, before Mahler had even died. Now she's with Kokoschka, who has painted the two of them in a very dark embrace.' Berta coughed. 'Or so I've been told.'

This evening the crowd was bigger than usual. There were not enough seats at the long table so chairs had been grouped in threes around the room.

Berta rose and addressed them all. 'My dear friends, it is the thirteenth of April 1914, and I have invited you here to celebrate my birthday with me.'

'Twenty-five!' came a shout.

'No, my darlings. I was born in 1861. Twenty-five was when I married Herr Professor Emil Zuckerkandl, who for once is sitting with us tonight rather than in his study.'

They all swivelled. Moritz could not read his expression as the man holding his glass aloft sported a spade-like beard topped by a very Hapsburg moustache. Berta brushed her hand at him and took back the attention.

‘Friends, let me read you a poem I have written.’

From the table, Berta took her pince-nez and a sheet of paper. In a slow, modulated voice she began to recite:

*Be true, my friends
Be kind too, my friends
Be fair, my friends.
Whatever life’s weather,
Keep an even temper—
Be strong, my friends!*

This last line, the climax, she nearly shouted.

Moritz understood her message, for in recent months, it seemed as if the entire city had come under the spell of the animal magnetist Franz Mesmer. The people were as if hypnotised. In cafés, in all the newspapers, around the samovar at the Bureau, even amongst his customers being fitted for suits, the talk could not be quieted. The message was unrelenting: ‘Like a dose of the salts, this country needs a dose of war!’

‘A common enemy would stop those Hungarians from grumbling.’

‘The generals need to prove themselves after being duped by Redl!’

Ah, thought Moritz, all those in the know now are aware of Redl. The poor lie is but tissue paper to the truth.

More and more Moritz thought General Hötendorf was like an aggressive drunk outside a tavern who was just looking for a fight. His personal prayer was being widely quoted: ‘God grant us a war.’

But tonight Berta was asking them to remain true to themselves. There was no need to invite the sound of marching boots on cobblestones. How, she asked them, could Austria fight a nation like France where her sister was married to the President’s brother?

After the poem and applause, large bouquets were wheeled in by

the maids. Then came a giant frosted birthday cake for Berta to slice, and a tower of champagne glasses for the toasts. Moritz realised that this was the first time he had heard a woman say she was celebrating her birthday or even give her age. But then Berta always delighted in being somewhat scandalous.

He had been away from the salon for years and so was unprepared for the changes that time brought. The darkness around Berta's eyes, he saw, was no longer attractive; instead, the frail discoloured skin seemed a sombre measure of the ageing process. She had also taken to bleaching her hair, likely to cover greying, Moritz assumed. Now in his thirties, he too was no longer the boy who had first come here and who had then – he touched his face at the memory – still been using make-up sticks.

Berta refused to allow any more talk of war and so switched to interrogating Stefan about his newest novel. His thirteenth. Herzl had been right about his capacity to work.

'My son Fritz is not yet twenty, so I know what I'm talking about,' Berta was saying, 'but that boy Edgar in your book is even younger, and he's very much a key character. Suitably naive. Impressionable and yet cunning.'

She took a sip of wine and continued.

'And he thwarts a perfectly good chance for a liaison between his mother and your Baron! Stefan, how can you, childless as you are, understand so well the mentality of a twelve-year-old?'

Moritz had also intuited a problem with the precocious protagonist but had not been so clear in his formulation.

Stefan jumped up, hands in the air, as if trying to catch Berta's words. 'Berta! Please stop. I myself was twelve not so long ago. But please, who will buy my book if you deliver my plot to all? Madame,' Stefan's rebuke was so convincing Moritz wondered if he had a future on the stage, 'you'll leave me destitute!'

Stefan had earlier confided in him about his vow of pacifism. That he was a pacifist who now worked in the archives of the Ministry of the Army was only one of the many puzzles about the man.

'Frieda, when can I see your new work?' Berta turned and asked.

'I'm still developing my new style. I'm not ready yet.' Frieda paused. 'But Moritz has promised me an exhibition in a year's time.'

With a flourish of her arms, she announced to the room: 'You're all invited to my 1915 show!'

Frieda was glowing, by turns tremulous and boisterous. Moritz had never seen her so animated in public. So far he had not shared in her enthusiasm for cocaine, though it was fashionable, but he did wonder if you could take too much. When he asked, she answered: 'But Herr Dr Freud himself recommends it!'

On his way to the Evidenzbureau, Moritz had seen the newspaper headline:

ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND TO INSPECT TROOPS IN BOSNIA

‘Is such a visit wise?’ he asked Major Ronge.

From behind his desk, the major shook his head and paused before replying. ‘We hear of threats. Last week, you know, a Serbian Black Hand even fired at the Bosnian governor.’

‘And?’

‘Thankfully the fool missed. And then fired his only successful shot: into his own head.’

The general staff, Moritz learned, were untroubled about the visit; they had bigger concerns. The Emperor had agreed it was way past the time to respond to Serbian threats. All that remained was to choose a date of attack. This Moritz was told while his tea was being poured.

In the office, Redl’s mantra was still being repeated: ‘Russia won’t defend the Serbs; it will all be over in six weeks.’

Moritz could not discuss what he heard with Frieda. This was not because of secrecy, for it was as if the walls of the whole city were porous and there were no longer secrets. But she had been ill for nearly all of this most wonderful summer.

Outside, the cafés were overflowing; the demand for stylish clothes had never been greater. The flâneurs who sauntered along the paths in the early evenings were just like the peacocks in the Tiergarten: they too were looking to mate. At the store, linen jackets, silk shirts and bathing suits had never been so popular.

Yet Frieda stayed in bed, increasingly thin, pale and listless. The powder she swore by seemed no longer able to boost her spirits. The door to the bedroom she used as a studio was closed. When Moritz entered he was dismayed – it revealed her once cherished brushes ruined; they'd been hardened with paint and scattered on the floor. The easel held a half-finished painting. Moritz checked the works stacked against the wall. Although they hadn't been slashed, none was new.

'Moritz, I believe the paints are making me ill. I cannot go into my studio.'

Their doctor recommended a month at a spa. Just nonsense, Moritz thought, for Vienna itself was a spa. The gardens were in bloom and the sunshine was as abundant as in any place on earth. It was a time of music, of balls. The Firemen's Ball, the Manufacturers' Ball, the Emperor's Ball, all due within a month, many of them in the gilded ballrooms of the Hofburg. The Belvedere, home of Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, was to host the Regiment Ball for the first time. It was an occasion on which Moritz had planned to parade his own wife.

What would he do if Frieda were ill? He had already purchased a gown in a smaller size than the one she usually wore and, as a further surprise, a bejewelled art nouveau necklace.

At the Bureau, Major Ronge was still angry. Redl, whom he had deified, had duped them. As a result, his own office was permanently tainted. Considering it corrupt, the generals had sent his former staff back to their regiments and so created another category of unhappy soldier. Even the undertaker-like captain, his original mentor, was redeployed.

Ronge put it to Moritz that he was now a full-time employee. The store would need to manage itself – something it had long done.

Meanwhile, the house on Berggasse was almost empty. His mother continued to live there but only as a shadow: the loss of Father after Beth had reinforced her grief. She sat in her darkened room, dust motes her only company. When Moritz asked if Anna

could come and help with Frieda, she let him repeat the words before she refused.

Instead, Anna suggested the logical: Moritz and Frieda should move back into the family home. So many rooms, a private apartment blessed with its own rear garden where Frieda could sit in the fresh air and Anna could tend to Mother as well. Moritz agreed, though he felt he was entering a hospital rather than coming home.

42

It was Sunday, the 28th of June 1914. Reclining on a canvas lounge in the park, Moritz looked up from his newspaper to marvel at an azure sky unblemished by even a wisp of cloud.

The paper had described it as the best summer in a century and, sipping his coffee in the Volksgarden on this early afternoon, Moritz was in full agreement. He was wondering what colours an artist might need to capture this sky when he became aware of a hush over the revellers in the crowded park – the same blanket of silence as when the curtain was raised at a theatre.

The distant laughter had stopped as if they'd all been listening to the same comedian and the joke was now over. Even the bandstand that had been wafting Strauss for the past hour was mute, and for the first time since he arrived, Moritz could hear the cooing pigeons scavenge for tidbits.

Moritz had been reading a discarded *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the same 'anarchist' paper his father had once burned, but now he put it aside. In the distance, he could see a newsboy approaching. He was handing out papers from his bundle, and Moritz watched as people opened them in a wave that passed from table to table. As the wave reached the closest tables, he could make out the bold headlines and a word: ASSASSINATION.

Men and a few women were rushing towards this boy whose cap flew off as he scrambled to pick up the coins that had fallen from his hands. Moritz grabbed one of his very last papers, handing over a whole krone.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Duchess Sophie, he read, had

been assassinated in Sarajevo. The band was now playing Haydn's *Kaiserlied*.

It seemed everyone in the park was on their feet. The men were standing with their hats over their chests, their wives or companions nestling closer, as if already fearful of what the word 'war' might bring. Tears ran down their faces as they sang the national anthem:

Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser, unsern guten Kaiser Franz!

Lange lebe Franz der Kaiser, in des Glückes hellstem Glanz!

Moritz saw also that another group of young men had begun to band together. He could hear their shouts.

'Kill the Serbs!'

'To the Serbian embassy! Drag 'em out ... Burn it down!'

Someone was waving the black-and-yellow flag of the House of Hapsburg. Within minutes, it was being held at the front of this mob of men who'd run from the cafés around this usually quiet and formal garden. A group of women were waving their parasols at a Serb servant girl who fled past Moritz, howling words he could not understand. Her slapped cheek nearly matching the hue of his own.

Moritz let them run. He stayed and read. Franz Ferdinand, in Bosnia to inspect the troops, had been shot in the neck, Duchess Sophie in her belly. The Serb assassin had been captured along with six others. The Black Hand was mentioned. Moritz was in no hurry and lit a cigarillo, knowing where he soon needed to be.

Inside the Bureau, the mood was frantic. Without being asked, most of them had come in, although it was a Sunday.

Ronge reassured them it wasn't an intelligence failure. 'I can assure you the Archduke was warned but refused to listen. He was told of plotters. And still he chose to ride in an open car down the main street of Sarajevo.'

Ronge said the generals had decided it was time for a storm to clear the air over the Balkans. The war maps had long been unrolled and now the wait to use them was over.

A joint funeral was held on the 7th of July 1914. Moritz could not help but compare the two massive horse-drawn hearses to the

humbler transport at a recent Jewish funeral he'd attended for a distant aunt. As always, the higher your status in this city, the greater the parade and the fanfare.

And yet, it was also a day for retribution of a kind only royalty could deliver. The crowds lining the streets to pay their respects were shocked; instead of a military parade of medalled officers and radiant troops in their uniforms, it was elderly, retired firemen and veterans who accompanied the cortège. They formed a bedraggled group in their ill-fitting uniforms and were comically out of step, unable to keep up with the horses.

All the while, taps on shoulders relayed a message to the military men in uniform in the crowd: No salute.

An old classmate standing beside Moritz explained it: 'The Emperor never approved of Franz Ferdinand marrying Sophie. She wasn't of the right royal blood. So he didn't go to the wedding, and since then, has spent years humiliating her. Sophie wasn't allowed to sit with her husband at official functions and her children aren't heirs to the throne. The only time they could be together was when they were out of the country. So what you see today is just the punishment being continued.'

Moritz now understood the motivation behind the Bosnian visit: Sophie had been able to sit next to the Archduke as they travelled in an open car; she could inspect the troops and be beside him at the dinner they would never attend. And now they would be together for eternity, but not in the Capuchin Church imperial vaults reserved for the royals. The two were relegated to a crypt in their own distant castle.

Such pettiness was the immediate concern of the Emperor, much to the dismay of the generals. Instead of an attack, only a full investigation of the assassination followed. Within days, the mobs outside the Serbian embassy had dissipated. The cafés were again full and the Strauss waltz replaced the Haydn anthem. The Emperor even went to his summer residence at Bad Ischl to escape the heat, and calm returned to the city.

It was not until weeks later in July when people were awoken from their summer siesta. A forty-eight-hour ultimatum, they learned, had been devised and delivered to the Serbs. When their partial compliance was rejected by the generals, war was immediately declared.

In the streets, there were patriotic marches, but at home, there was mostly concern and gloom.

‘I’m afraid, Moritz.’ Though late-morning, Frieda was still in bed.

‘It’ll blow over, my dearest Frieda. I’m pleased to see you’ve eaten your breakfast and some colour has returned to your cheeks. Anna has been very helpful. Mother seems not to need any attention though I wonder at times what it is she’s thinking. Or even if she *is* thinking. She hasn’t spoken in days.’

‘Moritz,’ Frieda said, now sitting up, ‘the doctor came today. I know you don’t like his treatments and advice, but he asked whether it’s possible I am with child. Anna stayed with me as he felt my stomach through my nightdress. He believes he can feel my womb has swollen. The man is a charlatan.’

Moritz was stunned. He had not considered her recent sickness might be the one so many women suffered when they were with child. And nor, it seemed, had the doctor on his many visits. Frieda did look better, and this was a blessed outcome as he had had many a night of disturbed sleep wondering whether her consumption had returned.

War and womb.

What a day.