

Preface

28 June 1914

‘Zivio! Long may he live!’

Already the day is hot, yet Gavrilo Princip’s coat is buttoned tightly. There is no sound but the blinking of his eyelids. Voices, cheering and singing, sidestep him, climb over him, soundlessly pass by his ears. He clenches the revolver. In his other pocket, he fingers a smooth, glass vial.

He who is ready to die, will live forever.

The crowd grows. Gavrilo can feel it, swelling internally, spilling out into the alleys. The river alone contains them, stops them pushing further. Hundreds, maybe thousands of people smile on the sidewalk, in opened windows, on orange-tiled rooftops. He glances out over the faces. A few policemen, as expected. No soldiers that he can see.

Balconies hang oriental rugs, children cradle spring flowers, and everywhere pristine black and gold flags snap in the wind. A city wrought by the Turks, now cowering under the Habsburgs. A city of slaves, beaming their gratitude. And on this day.

‘Zivio! Long may he live!’

Gavrilo pulls down his hat against the sun. Will people wonder why he has not moved into the shade? Gavrilo hears his father’s voice. He hears easy, familiar words, and with the words comes the smell of barley straw, and the warm mountain grass of home...

He must concentrate. It is 9am. Seven minutes until the procession begins. First it will be Curcic, the mayor, in his immaculate morning suit, and Dr. Gerde, chief of police,

in badges and medals; then in the second car, beside the Colonel, will sit the Archduke himself. Gavrilo can picture him now, smiling and assured, glittering in his helmet and decorations, come to make his imperial presence felt. The shot will be clear and easy. Again and again he has planned this, in his mind, his dreams, his waking sleep. His hands are rigid in his pockets, perfectly still. He is ready.

A new sound erases all others. Twenty-four cannon salvos, the fortress salute. The Archduke is coming. Coming to explore his backwater jungle, his plunder.

Somewhere a band starts the imperial anthem. It stops, the players find their breath, and it starts again. Faces rear up, elbows jostle him, yet he holds his space. Trumpets intensify the morning heat. Humiliated men and starving children fill his thoughts – the neglected mothers, their daughters forced to work in whorehouses. The legacy of Vienna. The Archduke is coming.

Gavrilo stares up at the steady blue of the sky. Long minutes pass. As the moments lengthen, he reasons with his apprehension. He would have heard a bomb. Even over the infernal brass, he would have heard the explosion.

Who is at the first position – is it the boy? No, not the boy. The Muslim should be stationed there. Danilo refused to disclose the identities of the others, so now it is impossible to know what is going on. First the Muslim, and then Cabri? If Cabri has even come...

Gavrilo exhales slowly. The first position did not act, that much is clear. It is no cause for alarm. Six others lay in wait. 300 metres of road. His breathing calms. Two pigeons wheel above, then swing to a rooftop, surrendering the blue emptiness. Even the birds are grounded by the heat.

But *why* did the first position not act? The Muslim is dedicated, determined. They are all a brotherhood – one refusal to act will unnerve the others. Gavrilo stands tall, peers towards the Emperor Bridge.

A far-off explosion.

Yes, that is certain. Something has happened. As if conjured by his will. Something has happened. The cannons have already fired their salute. Did Cabri get him with the bomb? He said as much. Of course he has come – he is a true friend, the truest friend. Now Gavrilo's hand is shaking madly. The mad bastard! He has done it.

Smoke curls into the distant sky. Gavrilo begins to push through the shocked people. Instantly he sees the convoy. It has stopped.

With a thrill of joy, Gavrilo charges swiftly ahead, through the cries and the curses, stepping over a vagrant dog, a knocked-off fez. Slowing, advancing sideways, he moves toward the rising black clouds. He must not invite attention. No, he doesn't care, he must see. He must see the death-blow to imperialism.

A circle has formed on the sidewalk. Gavrilo grips a lamppost, pulls himself higher. Commotion reigns. A shattered car, wreathed in smoke. A crater in the road. On his knees, vomiting, a man. Not the Heir Apparent.

Roughly the figure is pulled to his feet. It is Cabri, doubled-over in his long grey coat. Over him a man stands with a sabre drawn. Cabri. Another officer forces his hands stiffly at his back. He is being arrested.

The convoy starts up again. Cars race past, vanish.

For several minutes Gavrilo stands unmoving. The bomb delay. Of course Cabri was too eager and forgot to count out the ten seconds. The Archduke would have picked up the bomb with a gloved hand before tossing it aside.

Other thoughts rise up. Should he aim for Cabri? Shoot him and turn the gun on himself, clear all traces of the plot?

He gave his word, as I gave mine.

They should die together, as Sophia always predicted. She would be proud of such a death. Her heroic brother and his great friend, the liberators of Bosnia. Once she understood, she would be proud, and speak well of them. But the crowd swallows up Cabri.

He is alone. In his pocket, Gavrilo takes his fingers from the revolver; again he safely releases the vial. Away from the motorcade route he walks, following only his thoughts. The sun pours down.

St Vitus Day and he has done nothing. He has heard the message from the Habsburgs – Bosnia will never be free – heard the message and done nothing. He never even pushed off the safety catch. Bosnia will remain imprisoned within the Dual Monarchy. *His* plan, *his* promise – it must be *his* failure. His betrayal. Perhaps he *is* too sick, too weak.

What is left to do? Search out Danilo and Trifko, trade explanations? Or return to his post, hope for the motorcade's return? No. Security will descend on the route like wasps. The brief, fated moment has come and gone.

‘Do you hear? A bomb? How horrible.’

‘Treason!’

Voices rise and fall. Gavrilo does not speak. *Treason? To rise up against a brutal captor? To protest your shackles, declare your freedom?*

He stands, silent, he does not know for how long. The sun climbs higher, strengthening over the minarets, over brown hills and scattered plum trees. Finally he escapes the embankment and the clamouring voices.

He heads toward Franz Joseph street, into the winding, narrow streets of the old town. He needs shade. There many will have ignored the Mayor's proclamation to fly the Habsburg flag. A glimpse of real Sarajevo, in opposition to the massive, geometric embankment – Appel Quay, they even call it, named for some Austrian baron. There stand the unassuming, cluttered homes of true Serbs. With each step towards the old town his breathing relaxes. Smells of the bazaar – turning fruit and charred meat – reach him. Suddenly, he is very hungry. Ravenous. The bazaar... but he cannot go back there. She is waiting there. *Promise you will meet me.* Another promise, another betrayal.

Instead, Gavrilo turns the corner into the darkened street. At Schiller's cafe he stops. Old town can wait. The sun's grip releases him. He has money, he is surprised to learn, enough for coffee.

Groups of students inhabit the room, bottles thick around them despite the early hour. He can almost feel their cynicism as he moves through the close, shadowed room. Golden-edged cups clutter the tables, definite signs of the city's intellectual degeneration. The festive clash of glasses speaks for their morals. These are men – some of them Serbs – as idle as any nobleman in Vienna. They have accepted their rulers and adopted their qualities. How can these men spend such empty hours in a café? How can they not rise up against their persecutors?

What about him? Has he improved Bosnia's situation any more than these witless drunks? He has done nothing to redress St. Vitus Day, to liberate Bosnia from Austria's grasp. Nothing but watch his best friend hauled off to prison.

Today, in the green fields of Kosovo, tents and canopies will be raised. Lambs turning over large fires and plum brandy handed to older men, an orchestra of trumpets and violins keep the *kolo* dancing, the circle of raised heads and bended knees, a living, turning, spinning chain of youth and laughter, of red faces and bright eyes. St. Vitus Day.

Gavrilo steps over the tangle of feet, reaches the counter and orders a coffee. The sweat of the morning cleaves his shirt to his ribs. No, he cannot be among such unthinking people. Not now. Waiting anxiously in the smoky corner, he grips his coffee and walks purposefully outside. An empty table in the shade. He stands upright before it, pulling his shirt from his skin, adjusting his blazer in vain for cool air.

Down the alley, toward the now deserted bridge, the sun glitters off the water. Thoughts stream through his mind, of mother and father, Mom fussing over him, Father content in his silence, of the lean cattle and the soundless mountains. He pushes them aside.

He drinks – viscous, overly sweet Turkish coffee – looking across at the bright waves, the arching bridge, feeling lighter than he has ever felt. What can he do? The

Miljacka river dances in the sun. Occasional figures wander by, unseeing, oblivious. His back finds the whitewashed wall.

Time passes, vague, indeterminate. Traces of pewter smoke on the uneven wind. What of Cabri – of Sophia? If Cabri is imprisoned but he walks free... could she ever forgive him? Or has Cabri already exposed them all, boasting to the guards, bragging of his action? Trifko had never trusted him, despite all assurances. Had he been wrong? *Could* Cabri be trusted? Could he keep his silence in the presence of soldiers and judges?

Forgotten, the small cup clinks the table. Sophia would smile to see him again, laugh at his plans to attend Belgrade University. *The Happy Prince returns*. Together they would honour Cabri's sacrifice. He could write the great work that immortalizes Cabri's attempt. A new epic poem for a new St Vitus Day, the beginning of the revolution.

Sunlight spreads into the shadows, grasping up the narrow road, dispersing the thin crowd before it. Has Cabri truly ushered in a new future?

A car roars up the street, followed quickly by another. Instinctively, Gavrilo presses closer against the wall. The first vehicle surges past, disappearing north. The other reaches the café front. Gavrilo stares. It brakes, slows, and rolls to a stop in the thin dust. Everything stiffens.

A beautiful high-sided black touring car. The black and gold pennant, hanging limp in the wind's ebb, blazoned with the double eagle. A 1911 Graf und Stift *Double Phaeton*, the white roof folded back to offer the crowd views of its majestic passengers. Before he sees him, Gavrilo knows that behind the driver sits a man in a stiff military uniform and feathered helmet. He knows who this man is, what he has done, what he will do – but more than anything, he knows who he is guarding.

A German voice emerges from within.

‘Wrong! What are you doing? We’re supposed to take the quay!’

Urgently, the car shifts into reverse. With a great heave, the engine stalls. Now Gavrilo can see clearly into the backseat. Yes. It is so.

But why is it coming up here? He cannot think of an answer. His mind is perfectly blank. He does not hear his father's voice or Sophia's or anyone else's. Only silence, the silence of sunlight on waves. He steps towards the car, towards the man in the sky-blue uniform holding up a white parasol. The revolver is in Gavrilo's hand.

He fires, twice.

He looks. Blood leaks from the neck of the Heir Apparent. The face does not turn up, does not answer for his crimes, his arrogance, his oppression and humiliation of the Serbs. Still he holds up a ridiculous white parasol.

He does not look up, not once, not ever. Jewels and pendants gleam in the sun. Immobile, he looks down, stares down at the woman before him.

'Sophie. Sophie, stay here. The children... Don't die.'

Gavrilo watches the red blossom on the white silk of her dress. She lay across him, her eyes huge and wide behind the veil of her hat. *Sophie*. The Duchess. Why is the Duchess in the car? She has taken the second bullet.

The Archduke's voice, now a whisper, lingers.

'It is nothing. My dear. It is nothing.'

Gavrilo too is struck motionless, staring. Is he dying? Has he succeeded?

Voices cry out, rush toward him. It is so much like the dream that for a moment he remains unmoving.

Fumbling, Gavrilo reaches for the vial, yet cannot command his fingers. He brings the heavy revolver to the skin of his temple, but feels instead a firm grip on his wrist. The crowd is upon him. Something hits him, hard, in the side and he staggers back. The revolver is gone.

He falls to a knee on the pavement, the crowd pulling him, striking him like plying hammers. He has not failed. An arm constricts across his throat; he twists free. The strikes are not hammer blows, they are an autumn mist. He has not failed.

He must say something, something that will echo through history, the cry of a new future. *For freedom and Fatherland!* But there is no time. His hand, now free, seizes the vial, his thumb swiping the cork. As the burning liquid touches his lips, the street rushes up to him and the world turns black.