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In 1900, at the age of eighteen, Alain Michel Hamilton, fluent in three languages and determined to be a writer, like his mother, was sent to Vienna to become a doctor. 'Vienna' under Franz Josef was synonymous with 'medicine'. His father's plans included a glorious return to that most celebrated of physician thoroughfares: Harley Street, London.

'Edinburgh for the penniless professor, but Harley Street is where the money is.'

Alain was tall and slim, and at eighteen, with his slight stoop, he seemed nearly ascetic. It gave him a vulnerable lost look. His earliest consciousness of himself had been that he was different. First there was his name. *Why don't you spell it 'Alan'?* he had heard from other children for as long as he could remember. His mother, hating kilts and Scottish cardigans, had dressed him as a French boy. His schoolmates mocked and laughed. In time, however, Alain became comfortable with being different, and began to see it as a badge of courage. It was only the boys who gave him trouble, but he refused to fight them. Girls found him interesting, however, and often asked him to play.

Crossing the portals of the Vienna School of Medicine that first August of the century, Alain tripped and stumbled slightly forward, to the delight of a group of nearby girls. He stuttered something in German, his first words

in that language outside of an Edinburgh classroom, and then passed on. They noticed his accent, his long dark face and the bright blue eyes behind his embarrassed smile. It was only a few days later that they were having coffee and cakes with him on the Kärntner Strasse. That first year was filled with girlfriends and parties, a great boon to his spoken German but a strain on scholarship. He managed, by some small miracle, to pass in all his subjects.

Then, to the disappointment of many female hearts, Alain returned from summer holidays in Scotland – *married!* In 1901 he wedded Margaret, a pretty Edinburgh girl whom he had known from childhood. *Why?* he later asked himself with some regret. Perhaps because she reminded him of Annelies. Untamed and indefinable. She was a painter and Marie-Yvette loved her. But when Alain brought Margaret to Vienna he found to his dismay that she hated Austrians. ‘Narrow and pretentious,’ she announced the first night she was there, and the sentiment never changed thereafter. She spent her time painting street scenes of Vienna. The subjects in her pictures did not flatter the Austrians.

‘They stop to look at my canvas and snort, and then pass on still fuming and snorting.’

None of her paintings sold.

Wanting to make herself more useful, Margaret decided to have children. Robert arrived first, and then Alice. Alain adored them but he felt that every year in Vienna drove a greater distance between Margaret and himself. She loved him, of that he was sure, or else she would not have stayed.

In early 1907 Dr Alain Hamilton returned from Vienna, trained as a general surgeon. On 22 February he was appointed to the staff of St Bartholomew’s Hospital, London.

It was during his second week there that he met Claire.

*K.S.*