

Epiphany

By E.S. Strout MD

Mozart died at one hour past midnight on December fifth, 1791. He was 35 years old.

R. W. Gutman. *Mozart. A cultural biography.*

1.

Classified Surgical Research Section, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland. Monday 12 May, 2014. 1030 hours.

A sedated patient occupied the only bed in a small, well-equipped intensive care unit. 38 year-old Dr. William Rinehart, nephrologist and surgeon, checked the man's vital signs and EKG monitor readouts. He jotted notes on a memo pad. "Yes. Excellent progress. Vital signs normal except for slight tachycardia." Rinehart drank some black coffee, took a bite of an apple danish. He tapped on a keyboard to adjust IV nutrient, electrolyte and sedative flow. "Okay. No adverse reactions."

Dr. Rinehart walked to the adjoining DNA lab to check the flowmeters for the human kidney clone floating in an electrolyte bath. Supplements of essential proteins and complex renal enzymes dripped into IV tubing feeding the organ through its renal artery. He smiled. "Amazing."

"Gotta hand it to the President. Lifting the ban on embryonic stem cell research was courageous," his partner and wife Dr. Elizabeth Adams said.

"Oh yes. Helped us grab a nice Government grant."

She nodded. "How's the Johns Hopkins acceleration process coming?"

"96 hours to full maturity. Anatomically correct in all respects."

She placed a cool hand on his forehead. "This is going to work, love. Dennis and Jake will be here around noon to check on their tachyon recovery doohickey."

Rinehart drank more coffee. "How's our guest's lab work?"

"His uric acid and urea nitrogen are almost back to normal, thanks to six days with two-hour renal dialysis sessions." She handed her husband a printout. "I repeated his antistreptolysin-O titer. No mistake. It's the highest I've ever seen."

He nodded. "Proof that he had acute rheumatic fever. Third world countries are like his was. No antibiotics."

Beth shook her head. "Bad luck. He gets the worst possible complications. Nephropathy with massive protein loss and electrolyte imbalance. A sure death sentence in the 18th century."

"Maybe we can turn things around for him."

2.

"How do you know Dennis Haynes, Bill?"

He grinned. "College drinking buddy from Florida U. The Gators."

She punched his arm. "I was a Vandy Commodore."

Rinehart rubbed the sore spot. "I know, Beth. No need to remind . . ."

"Florida kicked our butts every year. Football and basketball both. Is Dennis as smart as you?"

"Smarter. He accomplished the first historical artifact recovery from the past at the NASA complex at Cape Canaveral a couple of years ago. Wife's a lawyer."

"Wow," she said, a taunting eyebrow raised. "Science fiction and liability litigation."

"C'mon, Beth. Give Denny a break."

She smiled. "I'm impressed. Just glad he didn't have to build another tachyon furnace here. He said his original one blew up."

"It's true, Beth. He's refined the capture procedure more than a little since then. Much less dangerous."

"Like I'd understand any of that faster than light sorcery."

1225 hours:

Dennis Haynes and Bill Rinehart exchanged Gator fraternity handshakes.

“Bill, your security is much better than mine,” Dennis said in a pronounced Southern drawl.

“Better be. Otherwise I’d have to have Security make you disappear.”

Haynes chuckled. “Got any coffee?”

Dr. Adams handed him a cupful, with a danish and paper napkin. “Nice to see you again, Dennis.”

He took a swallow of coffee. “How’s our ancient guest, Beth?”

She pulled back a curtain from the observation window. “Have a look.”

Haynes viewed a sandy-haired young man, partly hidden by IV tubing and monitoring equipment. “Looks kinda skinny. And pale.”

Beth glared. “He’s thirty-five, Dennis. You would look the same under similar circumstances as his.”

“You saw him when he arrived, Dennis,” Bill said. “Kidney failure and edema.”

“Looked like the Goodyear Blimp.”

Beth giggled. “Or that Michelin Tire guy.”

“What if he wakes up?” Dennis asked.

“He’s under continuous sedation. Beth’s Mozart CDs help relax him.”

“Are the time parameters stable, Dennis?” Dr. Adams asked.

“The computer models look good. Jake has everything stabilized.”

Elizabeth smiled. “I like working with Jake. He’s shown me past 18th century events with that unearthly retroprojection gizmo of yours. Does he still smoke those noxious cigars?”

“Only outdoors,” Dennis said. “He’s a wizard with tachyon tracking. Your patient had moved to a different First District, Vienna location. Jake found him just in time.”

She nodded. “He was comatose, in extremis. His wife Constanze had sent for a priest from St. Michael’s to give last rites.”

4.

Bill eyed the complex array of electronic equipment and video screens one floor above.

“Any problems, Dennis?”

“None so far. We have the spatial and temporal limits stabilized. How long do we have, Jake?”

Jake Herman wore Levi’s and a black MIT sweatshirt. He chewed on the butt of an unlit stogie. “Two weeks max, guys. Six days are gone already.”

A sigh from Dr. Adams. “Darn it. I was hoping for more.”

“We haven’t fulfilled Sir Isaac Newton’s Third Law of Motion, Beth,” Haynes answered. “The temporal balance is iffy. Like I told you, every action must be accompanied by an equal and opposite reaction. Since none of us offered to replace your patient in 1791, there’s a space instability. We can maintain it for eight more days, then he will zip back to 18th century Vienna.”

Beth nibbled a fingernail. “What if he gets stuck in a wall?”

Jake chewed on his cigar and chuckled. “He exists in a static space-time bubble, Doc. When we return him it will be at the exact instant where and when we grabbed him. And with whatever changes you guys make.”

“We’ve scheduled him for renal transplant tomorrow at seven,” Dr. Rinehart said.

“How’s your security?”

“Air tight, Denny. No patient name, just a classified file number. The anesthesiologist and OR support crew have only been told this will be an authorized experimental procedure.”

“What about rejection of the transplant?” Dennis asked.

”Our cloned kidney is an exact DNA and immunological match. No steroid suppressives will be needed,” Beth explained.

“Can I watch?” Jake asked.

Rinehart smiled. “You can join us in surgery, Jake. Beth, would you please get Jake a set of our green OR scrubs and shoe covers?”

Jake pitched his cigar into a trash receptacle. His face had assumed a pale ashen appearance. “Thanks, but I’ll just take a long walk instead.”

5.

1140 hours. Tuesday, 13 May:

Their procedure took three and a half hours. The skin incision was closed with 2-octyl cyanoacrylate to promote rapid healing. Vital signs remained stable throughout. The patient was returned right away to the restricted ICU unit. Doctors Rinehart and Adams hovered over his bed, clad in their OR scrubs.

He blinked several times and muttered in a soft voice. Dr. Adams leaned close and answered.

“Oh, no. What did he say, Beth?”

“I’m not sure, Bill. My German is pretty rusty. I told him everything would be okay. He gave me a beautiful smile and went back to sleep.”

“Close call. We’d better up the sedative dosage a bit. A culture clash would not be good.”

Elizabeth tweaked the sedative IV line. “I agree. Hearing something by accident, an opus by 50-Cent or Eminem might give him a stroke.”

Jake chewed on a fresh unlit cigar. “I’ve got a dumb question, Dr. Rinehart.”

Bill nodded. “We’re *in terra incognita* here, Jake. No questions are dumb. Ask away.”

“Why Mozart? His music is outdated for our time. Why not some historical heavy?”

“We did have a list of potential candidates . . .”

“It was my idea,” Beth retorted. “Mozart is a historical heavy, Jake. His life and times are studied around the world. His music is still performed to packed houses. I have CD’s of everything he ever composed.”

Jake gave her a nod of understanding. “I get it. But if we fail, he dies in 1791 as history tells us. What do you expect, Dr. Adams?”

“A 42nd symphony. Completion of his *Requiem*. An opera succeeding *The Magic Flute*.”

“Listen up. You guys have seven days to return him,” Dennis said.

6.

1445 hours, Tuesday, 20 May:

“He’s stable, with good urinary output and normal lab values,” Dr. Adams announced.

“We’ve implanted some timed-release antibiotic packets for prophylaxis. These will last for two weeks.”

Bill said, “I’ve removed the Foley and all his IV lines.”

“Are we ready then?” Dennis asked.

Beth nodded.

Jake pressed keys. The screen showed a tachyon-transmitted image of a late 18th century Viennese bedroom. “This is the exact nanosecond where everyone except the wife had left the room.”

“Do it, Jake. Constanze’s asleep.” He pressed another key. There was a slight visual flutter and the bed was empty.

Smoke and sparks arose suddenly from the complex apparatus. "He's completed the trip," Jake said. "But we have a prob."

"Damn," Haynes said as he batted away remaining wisps of smoke. "Lost connection."

Jake shook his head. "Sorry, boss. We've corrupted the space-time continuum."

"Can we get it back, Jake?" Beth asked.

"Doubtful. We've upset a very delicate and precise system."

"Rats," Beth said with a contrived grin. "He's gonna miss all his follow-up appointments."

Jake nodded sagely.

Dennis said, "Remember what I told you about the computer models. If you change history, only those intimately involved in the process will remember the change. That's Beth, me, Bill and Jake. Everyone else in the world will recall the altered history as fact."

7.

The next day. 1025 hours:

Elizabeth eased the office door shut. "He didn't make it, Bill," she said, brushing a tear from one cheek.

He handed her a cup of coffee.

She took a large swallow, then another. “I was at my music store the second it opened, looked for all Mozart compositions after 1791. Not a single note. No 42nd symphony. No new operas.”

Bill smiled. Beth sniffled, wiped her nose with a Kleenex. “What’s so damn funny, Bill?”

Dr. Rinehart placed a comforting arm around his wife’s shoulder and booted up his laptop. “Take a look, dear. I googled this right after you left this morning.”

Elizabeth clasped a hand over her mouth to stifle a gasp as she read, “Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Born Tuesday, 27 January 1756. Died Wednesday, June 10, 1835 of natural causes at the Dominican Monastery in Vienna.”

“Our transplant worked, Beth. He was seventy-nine.”

“Damn,” she swore under her breath. “Something is wrong here, Bill. Why did he stop composing? And what was he doing in a monastery? Google for Mozart compositions, love. Please?”

“Already done. Nothing you didn’t already know. Symphony 41 was his last. The Magic Flute, his final opera.”

Beth jumped to her feet, “Professor Thomas Kiefer,” she shouted. “My old Prof at Catholic U. I took all of his classical music history courses in undergraduate school.”

Bill winced, then uncovered his ears. “Who?”

“Professor Kiefer is a respected Mozart scholar, Bill. He’ll know. I have his phone number in my old college notes.”

8.

Friday, May 23. 0915 hours:

“Professor Kiefer? It’s Elizabeth Adams.”

A pause. “Beth?”

“Yes, sir.”

“One of my best students. You didn’t forget me.”

“I haven’t forgotten you or Mozart, Professor.”

“How can I help you, Beth?”

She pondered for a moment. How to phrase this. “I’m trying to resolve a problem. Why did Mozart suddenly quit composing after 1791. I’ve looked everywhere for information

on his career after that year. Nothing.”

Another pause. “An epiphany, Beth.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Could you come to my office? Perhaps I can explain.”

“I’ll be there in an hour.”

9.

Thomas Kiefer’s office. 1115 hours:

Beth hugged her grey-bearded former Professor.

“I get very few calls from former students, Beth. Do you still play the piano?”

She smiled. “When I have a little time. My husband Bill likes Mozart’s piano sonatas.”

“You must think I know something nobody else does.”

She nodded. “I do. Tell me what you know about his epiphany.”

“A real mystery, Beth. Little is known after the miracle recovery. I do know this, however. His priest from St. Michael’s had given him last rites. Constanze wrote in her diary that Wolfgang awoke on the morning of December fifth. No fever, no swelling. He

demanded breakfast.”

“Unbelievable. You knew . . .?”

Kiefer gave a cautionary head shake, whispered. “This is pure conjecture, Beth, based on 18th century rumors. Mozart allegedly visited St. Michaels and the Dominican Monastery. I do know that Emperor Joseph II offered him the post of Court Composer after hearing of his wondrous recovery. Mozart refused it.”

“How very strange. Possibly why he didn’t continue composing.”

“Ah, but he did. He finished the Requiem.”

“It was all his work?”

The Professor smiled. “According to Constanze’s diary she and her husband had discussed a contingency plan with Franz Sussmayr, a family friend and musician. He was to complete the Requiem after Mozart’s impending death.”

Kiefer’s face assumed a puzzled expression. “Why would you think otherwise, Beth?”

Everyone else in the world will recall the altered history as fact.

She turned up her blouse collar to hide the creeping hot blush of her neck. “Just my confusion, Professor. Sorry.”

Kiefer placed a disc in his office CD player, selected a track from the Requiem. “Listen, Beth. This is the *Sanctus*.”

The notes were pure Mozart. Gone were Herr Sussmayr’s seriously flawed attempts Beth had heard for all those years. “Of course,” she stammered. “And he wrote nothing else?”

“More speculation and rumor, Beth. It’s said that after his experience he wrote, but only for the Vienna Dominican Monastery’s choir and string ensemble. At his specific directions none of those compositions were ever written down. ‘These are for God’s ears and yours only,’ he told them.”

“The epiphany, Professor?”

He shrugged. “Mozart told only his priest at St. Michael’s and the Dominicans’ Abbott, swore them to secrecy. The facts are lost in antiquity. An occasional rumor pops up, but it’s disregarded as being too far-fetched.”

Elizabeth rested her folded arms on Kiefer’s desk. “Tell me.”

10.

The next morning. NIH Surgical Research office.

“You’re here early, Beth.” Bill said.

She clicked the CD player on. “This is the *Agnus Dei* from Mozart’s Requiem. Notice anything different?”

He grabbed a chair, drank coffee from a china cup, listened. “Smoother than the last time I heard it. You’re the expert, Beth. What am I missing?”

“This is Mozart, Bill. The way he wrote it.”

“So he did compose. Why didn’t he continue . . . ?”

She smiled. “An epiphany, love. Professor Kiefer told me of an 18th century rumor. Allegedly, Mozart revealed a divine manifestation, or visitation, only to his Saint Michael’s priest and the Dominicans’ Abbott.”

“Which was?”

“He was attended by two angels. Both were clad in green robes and head coverings. The female spoke to him . . .”

The End