

“To die, to sleep—To sleep, perchance to dream...”

William Shakespeare, Hamlet

I bought a journal today to record the events of my new life so people will know death is not the end. As some of the events have already occurred, I am not sure of the dates of them. Moreover, I often don't know the date, or don't want to bother finding out the date, so my journal will be more of a running account of events. Another thing I don't know about my new life here—

Is it a dream or is it reality, and does it matter which?

L.V. Beethoven

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My life, that is this life now, began some time after my death in 1827. I don't know how long I slept. The only thing I remember was that I was walking with Wolfgang Mozart in a beautiful green meadow studded with fragrant white flowers. That was where I decided my future, for better or worse.

"Wolfgang, how long do you think I have been here?"

"It's timeless here, Ludwig, how can I tell?"

"Are we to remain here forever? The peace is getting to me. What can we do?"

"You can listen to heavenly music and wander the fields and woods. Hear the music?"

"Yes, but it's extremely boring. Who wrote it? I'd like to give them some lessons. I long for the passion of composing, and composing passionate music."

Mozart shrugged his shoulders. "We can compose if we so desire, but who will hear it? I haven't been able to find any paper and quills or I would write just for something interesting to do."

"Who can compose in this void with this mind-numbing serene angelic music constantly assaulting my ears? I almost wish I were deaf again so I wouldn't have to listen to it and could hear my own compositions in my head."

Mozart picked a flower and stuck it in a buttonhole of his vest. "I know what you're thinking, Ludwig, because I've thought it myself, but things have changed on Earth, and not for the better. I've heard from new arrivals that it's more tumultuous than ever. Bigger wars, more noise, more people, more police!"

"Good! I want to go back! I want to write my tenth symphony! That atmosphere should help me compose even more wild and passionate music than before."

"Ludwig, be careful what you wish for. It may come true, but not as you think. You can't just come back here any time you want. You have to live out a life until you are called back, or else kill yourself—and that's frowned upon. They might not let you back in."

"Perfect! What do I do, just wish to be there in Earth's present time and to write my tenth symphony?"

"Don't do it is my advice. I fear you will be driven mad—even more so than before."

"I won't be deaf, will I?"

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“You would be better off deaf. I hear the noise is unbearable now, and the music a frightening cacophony. I prefer to stay here and enjoy the sounds of nature and,” he smiled, “of my darling mistress Louisa.”

“Well, Wolfgang, you stay here and enjoy your little dream. I’m going for the big reality. Something tells me I can compose my greatest symphony yet—my tenth—down there.”

Mozart laughed raucously. “That something telling you is the Devil! I will pray for you, Ludwig. You will surely need it. I must warn you, don’t tell anyone where you’re from. They won’t believe you and they might lock you up in an insane asylum.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t. I may see you again sometime. Now I am going to make my wish come true.”

“Wait! You have to take a valise with you.” As he said that, a valise appeared, the handle in my hand. It was chained to my wrist!

“Clothes for my new life?”

“More than that,” he said. “It *is* your new life. With the valise you will have the perfect life in which to write your tenth symphony. Don’t lose it.”

“How do you know that?”

“It’s what I’ve been told. You will be called when it’s time to return.”

“Called? How will I know I’m being called back?”

“You’ll know when it happens. I’ll say no more, except to warn you—you can’t sire children there.”

“I’ve lived without children before, and I can do it again. I’m going there to write my tenth symphony. That will be my child.” We shook hands and I took my leave of him. I walked on through the field, thinking of my desire and listening to my inner music over the so-called angelic music being perpetrated in that dull Elysium.

You may wonder why I am writing in English since I never mastered it in my previous life. The answer will become clear to you in a moment.

As Mozart had warned, the something telling me to return to Earth *was* the Devil. I had descended into hell—into the State of California! One minute I was ambling along in the green Elysian Field and the next minute I was in a quite different field, a football field! In the middle of a game, no less. At the time, I didn’t know it was a game. I was confused. I didn’t know what was going on. A monstrous voice akin to the description in the Holy Bible of God’s thunderous voice was booming across the field.

“Who’s that man? He just appeared out of nowhere on the field!”

Thousands of voices were screaming, surely caused by the agonies of hell. I tried to cover my ears with my hands to lessen the pain from the noise, but the valise got in the way.

Men in strange garments and shiny helmets were charging toward me. One of them threw something at me. It hit me on the head and I fell to the ground in a daze. I struggled

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to my feet and nearly tripped over the thing that hit me. It was an odd-shaped ball. Without thinking, I picked it up and ran the other way down the field, dodging the players left and right. I ran between a couple of posts at the end of the field. A wave of applause and cheering followed me. I kept running until I came to an open area away from the field.

You cannot imagine the terror I felt. I thought I was really in hell. *Have I been so sinful that God has banished me to this place?* I cried. I wailed, and then I looked at the rows and rows of large multicolored boxes with strange wheels. *What are those? Torture chambers of hell? Will they try to put me in one?* I was too exhausted to run but I walked as fast as I could down an open lane with arrows pointing to where I knew not.

Finally, I was out of that place. Suddenly, a terrible roaring noise and a great wind came from the sky. I looked up. A huge metal monster descended from above and landed in front of me. Two men in uniforms jumped down from it and accosted me. One of them handcuffed me. A metal box with flashing lights, some kind of coach I guessed, pulled up and two more men got out. They took me over to the coach, and made me lean against it, my back to them. One of them patted me over and took things out of my pockets. “What’s in the briefcase?”

“I don’t know. I never saw it before.”

“Likely story. How could you never see it before if it’s chained to your wrist?”

I dared not tell the truth. “I got hit on the head by a ball, and knocked to the ground. I was unconscious for a moment, and lost my memory.”

“Are you a suicide bomber?”

“What? NO!”

“What’s your name?”

“I don’t remember.”

He opened a wallet he had found in my pocket. “It says here your name is Van Bevin. Is that right?”

“If you say so.”

He’d found a key as well, and unlocked the chain on my wrist.

“This case has combination locks. What’s the combination?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

The other man said to him, “Maybe it’s a bomb. Set it down away from us. I’ll call the bomb squad.”

The first man looked at the case. “It’s got writing on it. It says, “DANGER. Quantum field and particles. DO NOT OPEN.”

The other man yelled, “Put it down NOW and get away!”

The first man said to me, “You’re under arrest. You have the right to remain silent; anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to speak to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you. Do

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you understand these rights as they have been said to you?”

“Yes, but who are you?”

“I’m Police Officer Ryan.” He shoved me into the back of the strange coach and shut the door. I tried to open it, but it was locked.

The police were arresting me, for what I didn’t know. They waited for the bomb squad. After a few minutes two large coaches screaming like banshees pulled up. They were the bomb squad. One of the officers from the bomb squad opened the door and started questioning me. “What’s in the briefcase?”

“I don’t know. I got hit by a ball and fell down and hit my head. I’ve lost my memory of just about everything.”

He got the contents to my pockets from Officer Ryan. “I have your passport here. Van Bevin, German citizen. What terrorist organization do you belong to?”

“None! I’m a musician, a composer.”

“Why are you here?”

“To study your music and write a symphony.”

“You talk like an American. Why’s that?”

“Uh . . . my English teacher was American.”

He said to the other men, “He’s not saying much. Let’s get the case x-rayed and see what’s inside.”

Officer Ryan and another officer got into the seats in front of me and started driving like demons down the road with their banshee horn blaring. I was scared out of my wits! *So this IS hell. I’m sorry, Father in Heaven. I don’t know what I did to deserve this, but please forgive me and take me back to Heaven.*

They took me to the police station, stuck my thumb on a pad, stood me up against a wall, flashed blinding lights at me, then put me in a small room with a metal table and two chairs. I tried the door, but it wouldn’t open. I sat down and pondered whether this was Earth or hell. So far, I’d been hit on the head, handcuffed, transported at breakneck speed and locked in a bare-walled room. What was that valise chained to my wrist? What were quantum fields and particles? How could a field fit in a small valise? I wished only to return to Elysium, but my wish was not granted. I was still in that room.

After a long while, Officer Ryan came in with the valise. “They x-rayed the briefcase and it was empty. There was some writing on the inside, though. It read . . . well, the first time it read, ‘This is a dream. Wolfgang Amadè Mozart.’ One of the officers wanted to x-ray it again because he couldn’t believe it was signed Mozart. The second x-ray showed, ‘This is not a dream.’ Again signed by Mozart. Do you know anything about this?”

“No. Like I said, my memory is gone.”

“Well, it doesn’t appear dangerous, at any rate. You can have it back.” He handed me

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the valise. I wasn't sure I wanted it, but I took it anyway.

"Here's your wallet and your other stuff. You're free to go." I stuffed the items in my pockets.

"Where will I go? I'm unfamiliar with this town and I have no transportation."

"We could give you a ride. Where do you want to go?"

"I could use a cup of strong coffee."

The police dropped me off at a strange coffeehouse called Starbucks. A few people were sitting outside at tables. They were staring at me. I suppose it looked odd that I had arrived in a police car. They were dressed strangely, the men in shirts with short sleeves and baggy short pants showing their bare legs. The women were dressed in less than the bawdiest harlots of my time. One young man had strange images painted all over his bare arms and legs. It was frightening. What had this world come to?

I went inside to see what I could get to drink. The aroma of fresh-ground coffee stirred in me a great desire for some. I preferred to make my own, but I had no means at the moment to do so. I had to settle for a cup from this coffeehouse.

There were shelves of odd-looking mugs and packets of coffee and tea. I sat down at an empty table and put the ball on one chair and the valise on another. I waited for a waiter, and waited, and waited. I grew impatient and yelled, "Where's the waiter?" I banged the table with my fist. *That hurt! I must remember to take care of my hands. I want coffee!*" Everyone in the place started laughing.

A young woman behind the bar replied, "Come up to the counter and I'll take your order."

With much agitation, and forgetting that customs may be different now, I bounded angrily up to the counter. The woman looked afraid. She asked in a very meek voice, "What can I get for you?" I was taken aback by her melodious female voice. I hadn't heard the voice of a woman in many years. She was young and pretty. She was wearing too much paint on her face and too few clothes. Judging from the other women I saw, it seemed to be the custom.

"Coffee."

"What size?" she asked.

"What size?" *How many sizes could there be?*

"Yes. Tall, Grande or Venti. Also, we have a new size, Trenta."

"Just a regular cup of coffee!"

"Light, bold, or decaf?"

"I don't know what you call them. Very strong!"

"You must want espresso."

"Italian? Okay, I'll try it."

"Single or double?"

I didn't know what she meant. I was exasperated by all these choices. "Both!"

"How about a pastry?"

I had to admit, even though I was impatient to drink, I was hungry as well. I looked at the strange pastries in the glass case. I couldn't decide. "Give me the one you think is the best."

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“The brownie,” she said. She took one out and put it in a small paper bag.

“Don’t you have any plates?”

She got me a paper plate and put the bag on top of it. Then she pointed to the end of the counter. “Your coffee will be over there when it’s ready.”

I started over there when she said, “Can you pay for it now?”

Pay for it! I had forgotten about that part. I put down the plate and bag. I hoped there was some money in my clothes, but I had no idea. I started searching unfamiliar pockets. This was the first time I thought about my clothes. I didn’t know what they looked like. At least I had long pants on. I didn’t find any money in my pockets so I took out the wallet. Perhaps I would find some money in there.

Imagine my surprise when I opened it and saw a picture of myself at about thirty years of age! I looked more handsome than ever. The name under the picture was “Van Bevin,” the name the police had called me. I also noticed I was five feet eleven inches tall! (Somehow I knew what the measurements meant, even though they were foreign.) *This must be Heaven, where I have shed my short sick old body for a new and improved one!*

“Well?”

I looked in all the compartments but found no money of any kind. What was I going to do? I pulled out a strange gold card and stared at it.

“We take cards.” She held out her hand and I put the card in it. She did something with it and gave it back to me. *Is there no more money on Earth now, only cards?* “Do you want a receipt?”

“Of course,” I replied. She gave it to me and I went over to get my coffee. It was in a cup made of thick paper, like all the others I saw around me. I took it and went back to my table.

Paper cups, paper bags, paper plates, and no waiters. Customs had definitely eroded since my death. At least the coffee and the brownie were good. I felt revitalized after consuming them. I took out my wallet to get a better look at my picture. I smiled to myself. *So this is how I look now? I’m a handsome devil.* I thumped the table with my hand “NO! No mention of the Devil!” I realized I had spoken those words—loudly. I looked up. People were staring at me. They must have thought me insane to be yelling to no one in particular.

I went back to studying my picture. A moment later I heard a feminine voice. “Do you mind if I sit here?”

I looked up. She was stunning. I stood up according to the custom of my time. My first thought was, *What is SHE doing here?* I felt I knew her. She looked like my Immortal Beloved. Was she? Did she know who I was? I was compelled to stare at her. She put her coffee on the table and sat down before I could respond with, “Please do.”

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As I sat back down, she looked me right in the eye. *Bold*, I thought. She had a silver-colored metal rectangular slab she set on the table. She pushed her long dark hair away from her face.

She opened up her silver slab. "What is that strange thing you have there?"

She laughed a little and her eyes pierced my soul.

"Seriously, I don't know what it is."

"Are you from another planet?"

"Not exactly." I had to come up with something plausible, or did I. She took my question as a joke, maybe I could tell the truth and she'd be pleasantly amused.

"I'm from Bonn, Germany."

"Surely they have notebooks in Bonn."

"Oh yes, but nothing like yours."

"You don't sound German. You sound more like an American."

"I studied English with an American. Of course we have notebooks there. Is that an American notebook?"

"Well, it's sold by an American company, but I imagine most of the parts are made in China."

"Parts?" I wondered just how many parts were in a notebook. Paper, binding, cover. I didn't know what to say to that.

She noticed the ball in the other chair. She picked it up. "Do you play football?"

"I did today, although I didn't mean to. I accidentally walked onto the field while I was ruminating. I got hit in the head with it. I blacked out briefly. I think I lost parts of my memory."

She put down the ball and reached for the valise. "What's in the briefcase?"

"Nothing, according to the police, except ambiguous messages from some composer. I don't remember why I have it. The police arrested me briefly while they examined it."

"It has writing on it. Let's see, 'Danger, do not open. Quantum field and particles.' Are you a physicist?"

"No."

She went on. "I never heard of anyone carrying around a quantum field in a briefcase. In fact, I haven't heard of anyone being able to put a quantum field in a briefcase."

"All I know is, the police x-rayed it, whatever that means. They said it was empty. It was probably a joke someone played on me."

She laughed. "I thought they might have found out whether the cat was dead or alive."

"What do you mean?"

"It's just a joke, based on Bohm's theory of quantum reality."

"Bohm? The police thought there was a bomb in it."

She laughed again. "It's not the same word. Spelled differently. Bohm was a

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physicist.”

“They asked if I was a physicist.”

“Anyway,” she said, “I wouldn’t open it if I were you, in case it’s some new discovery. It could be dangerous, as the sign says. Maybe the case was lost by a physicist. He or she would be pretty upset that it’s missing.”

“Knowing I shouldn’t open it makes me want to look inside.” I picked it up and shook it a little. It made slight crackling and popping sounds.

“I don’t think you should shake it, either,” she warned. “Maybe you should put it in a safe deposit box at the bank so no one can steal it or open it.”

“Nobody seems to know what it is or that I have it, so I don’t think it matters where I put it.”

“If you really have a quantum field in there, I have no idea what it could do. It does say ‘danger.’”

I was tired of this line of conversation. I opened my wallet and showed her my picture. “I wonder if you could tell me where this address is. ”I think I live there, but I don’t remember where it is.”

“It’s a few miles away. I’ll look up the directions for you.” She opened her notebook.

“Look them up?”

“Yes.”

“In your notebook?”

“Yeah.” She laughed and shook her head. She started rattling off street after street, turn after turn.

“I’m afraid I can’t grasp all that. I would take a cab if I had any money on me, but I don’t.”

At that moment I heard a startling sound! The first motive of my Fifth Symphony! *Da Da Da Dum. There it is again! Da Da Da Dum.* “My music!”

She looked a little startled when I said that. She took a small, narrow black box out of her bag. It happened again. It was coming from the black box. She pushed on the box with her finger and held it to her ear.

“Hi, Nick.” She seemed to be listening. “Not tonight. I have to practice for a recital. I’ll talk to you tomorrow. Love you. Bye.”

Then she said to me, “You like Beethoven?”

“Like him? I *am* Beethoven!”

“That blow on the head must have done more than just daze you. It’s given you a delusion.”

I had to remember at all times that in my new life I was someone else. No one would believe I was Beethoven. “What I mean is, I’m a pianist and a composer. Like Herr Beethoven I have composed nine symphonies and I’m ready to start on my tenth.”

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“Nine symphonies? Do you have copies? Can I hear them? Have they been played anywhere?”

“Yes . . . uh . . . in Germany. Small orchestras. I don’t have copies with me.”

“I’m a pianist, too, but I haven’t written anything much. I play classical and romantic music mostly. I’m getting my Master’s Degree in music at the university here.”

“I’d love to hear you play,” I said. “Do you play music of composers more modern than Beethoven?”

“Of course.”

“Then I definitely want to hear you play. My memory is a little foggy, but I might have a piano at my house. My name is Van. What’s yours?”

“Melanie.”

“A beautiful name, Melanie. I’m interested in new music. I want to hear as much of it as possible.”

“There’s a recital of new compositions by students at tomorrow night. It might interest you.”

I drummed my fingers impatiently on the table. “I can think of nothing worse than listening to students’ feeble ideas of music!”

“I think they might surprise you.”

“Like the football game?”

“No, not like the football game . . . I’m going to the recital. You can come with me if you want.”

“That’s a different story,” I said. “I’d like to go with you. You can explain the music to me.”

“Tomorrow night, meet me in front of Thompson Hall at six forty-five.”

Melanie wrote something on a napkin and handed it to me. “Here’s my phone number. Phone me if you decide not to go, because I don’t want to stand around waiting.”

“Phone?”

“Maybe you *have* lost your memory. The telephone, remember—transports sounds through wires or the air to a receiver? How are you getting home?”

“Cab, I guess. Can I get one on the street?”

“Not here. You’d have to phone for one. Do you have a cell phone?”

“I don’t think so—not with me anyway. Money. I don’t have any. Would they take my card?” I showed her my card.

“I don’t know. Maybe not. I guess I could drive you if you promise not to try to seduce me,” she said with a smile.

“I promise—not this time, anyway.” I grinned a little sheepishly. She was quite lovely, and the thought of seducing her had been on my mind from the very beginning. I was not used to these passionate thoughts and feelings of the young. I wondered if I really looked thirty years old.

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“How old do I look, Melanie?”

She looked at me thoughtfully. “I don’t know. Thirty, maybe?”

Thirty years of age and I still have all my hearing! “We should get going. I have a lot to do after I drop you off.”

I followed her out to an area where there were about twenty carriages. I had yet to see a single horse in this new world. She stopped at one of the carriages, opened a door, got in and shut it. I opened her door.

“The other side, Beethoven.”

I went around and opened the door. It was small inside, but I managed to get in and sit down. I shut the door, and a low whirring sound commenced. She fastened a belt around herself.

“Put on your seatbelt.” I fumbled with it until she took hold of it and fastened it for me.

Then the carriage backed up, then went forward, turned, turned again onto the busy street. I was scared out of my wits as she drove faster, other carriages whizzing by us in the opposite direction. I hid my face in my hands.

“Relax, Beethoven, you’re safe with me.”

I uncovered my face to look at her. “Your carriage goes so fast!”

“You’ll get used to it. We call them cars, not carriages.”

“Why are you calling me Beethoven?”

“I don’t know. You kind of look like him, and you’re from Germany, and you’re a composer. It’s a good nickname for you.”

Then we rode up an incline onto a street with even more cars going even faster. She sped up until I yelled, “Slow down, you’re going to kill us!” Shaking her head and chuckling, she slowed down a little. Soon we got off that street in hell to slower, tree-lined streets. Then we entered a narrow road thick with trees and other vegetation. It was beautiful! A few twists and turns and traveling up a hill, then she stopped the car.

“You’re home,” she said.

I looked out the window. It was a charming cottage with pale pink roses climbing the porch railing.

“Do you want to come in? See if I have a piano?”

“I don’t have time today. Got your key?”

I searched my pockets and found a ring with three keys on it. “Maybe it’s one of these.”

“If you’re having trouble with your memory, I think you should see a doctor. You might have had a serious concussion and bleeding in your brain.”

I couldn’t help laughing. “I don’t believe it’s that bad. My head doesn’t hurt. It only hurt for a minute or two.”

“If you want, I can give you a ride to the recital.”

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“That would be most appreciated.”

“I’ll pick you up at six-thirty tomorrow evening. Don’t forget.”

“I won’t.” I got out of the car and took my leave of her.

I was excited to be coming home to such a pleasant and quiet place nestled among the trees. I unlocked the door and went in.