

Notes of Amadeus

By Caroline Elliott

"Yo Fritter!"

I turned around.

"Yeah?"

"Mrs. Kiko wants you in the library. She said some book was back, and you were next on the list."

"Thanks, Jack."

"No prob. Hey, are you gonna do the green team again this year?"

"Nah. Too busy."

"Oh, man! I liked the green team!"

"Sorry. Thanks, man."

"See ya."

I should probably explain.

My name is Peter Franks, but everyone calls me Fritter because I love to cook. I used to run the green team, which was a gardening team, but I quit doing it because of my schedule. I'm a freshman, at Franz High School, in Farmington, Connecticut.

I hurried over to the library before 5th period, and Mrs. Kiko was waiting for me.

"*The Life of Mozart* is in, Peter. You got lucky. A couple of kids said they'd changed their mind about the project they were doing." she said.

"Thanks, Mrs. Kiko. Really."

She smiled.

"Anytime, Peter."

I scanned the biography section, but couldn't find anything.

"Um, Mrs. Kiko, it's not here."

"Oh, yes, somebody put it in the fiction section. Here it is."

I picked it up, checked it up, and hurried off to fifth period.

When I managed to make my way home, after a long day (figures, it was a Monday), I knew I had to start my biography of a famous person of the 18th century. But that could wait until I'd had some leftover ice cream from last night...

After I'd eaten my sort-of-kind-of fair share, I picked up the book, realizing I'd never looked at it before. I gazed at the slim, golden lettering opened it, preparing myself for the tongue of fire to whip out at me, making me slam it shut.

"Mozart's life was a life of pleasure, prodigy, and a small lie upon another upon another which wound up an 18th century scandal..."

For the first time, I continued to read.

"Being the youngest of the family, he craved attention. His young mind was surprisingly conscious, and he was prone to envy. Maria Anna, his talented cello-playing older sister was quite a star, and Mozart longed for the feeling of appreciation. His father, a composer, music teacher, and violinist, loved his daughter, loved seeing the awe on his friends' faces, loved the feeling of pride Maria gave him, loved her. He loved his son, but couldn't resist his daughter's enticing pride..."

I read and read until Mom came home, and I realized, at the sound of her "Peter? Is your homework done yet?" that I still had homework that was due tomorrow, not three and a half weeks from now.

"Uh, yeah, Mom, it's in the progress!" I called. Dang it, now I'd have to work harder than a worker did on the chain gang.

I quickly pulled out my binder and worked harder and harder at my calculus papers. To be honest, I didn't even care about it much, but I still wanted to pass, as it would be good for my upcoming career.

When dinner came, I was three-quarters done, and if I didn't finish by tonight (procrastinator that I am, I had waited until the last minute), I would be dead meat, floating in the water and waiting for the alligator to snap.

All during dinner I was so stressed about Calculus that I had no time to remember the book. When I had at last finished all but one problem, it was 11:30; I had listened to the Rocket-Bombs, my favorite band, at least five times, and had very nearly fallen asleep.

My eyes flickered open. The small, neon green numbers upon my clock read 3:27 am. The small, dark green book lay on my stomach, catching rays of lights from the street lamps around the street. I figured there was no way I was going to fall asleep again, so I opened it.

When the morning came, I was still reading, and Mom's voice had already called up, "Peter! Breakfast! Now!" I closed the book and sighed. It was going to be another long day.

"Dude, what the crap!"

"Watch it, man..."

Time to get shoved around as a freshman. Oh, joy.

"Fritter!"

I turned around, having fought my way to the freshman end of the school.

Dave Harris, my not-the-biggest-trunk-in-the-attic best friend, was running up to me, while Mr. Thomas, the custodian yelled at him for running in the hallway.

"Did you get the book?"

"Yeah..." I didn't want to mention it was probably the only book that actually really appealed to me.

"So it's settled? 'Cause we need a seriously the-bomb presentation, because if we don't pull it off..."

He didn't have to go on.

"I know... it's really good... I'm almost done."

Dave's jaw dropped.

"Are you serious? You've never read a book in less than a month, you couldn't even pull off *Call of the Wild*, and that was only 95 pages!"

"Thanks for the encouragement."

"Sorry." He really did look apologetic, and because Dave has issues with sarcasm, I didn't hold on to it for that long.

"Look, you just draw the pictures for now, I haven't quite figured out what I'm going to do yet."

"But Fritter, we don't have that much time..."

"I'll figure it out this afternoon. See ya."

But I knew he was right. I couldn't do a half-baked job... We had to pull off the ultimate oral report.

I walked into Biology and plopped down, suddenly realizing how tired I was. I laid down my binders and books and flopped down. I was so tired, and my binder was so soft...

"Mr. Franks!"

I jerked up.

"Yes?"

Mutters broke out.

"Ohhhhhh, Fritter..."

"Smooth, Fritter."

Just when I thought a lightning bolt would come out and zap me from my desk, Mr. Tally said, "Please keep your job at the mattress company to yourself." The class laughed, and I laughed a little, too, though I was a bit embarrassed, but it was mostly out of relief that I wasn't going to be sent to the Intervention Center.

For the rest of class, my eyes slowly closed, then snapped back open. I sincerely wished I hadn't gotten as little sleep I had gotten the night before. I got some sleep during advisory, until, fortunately, the sharp, cutting bell snapped me back to my senses. I grabbed a bag of pretzels, as I didn't have much for lunch, and headed off for sixth period.

I got home, tired, but hungry for the book. I microwaved a bag of popcorn and flopped down on the sofa, curled up with the book, being careful not to get any grease on the pages. Of course, when Mom came home and discovered I had finished a book, but not started on any homework whatsoever, I figured it was probably time to begin actually working.

As it was a Friday, I pretended I was working on my homework, while instead, for the first time, I decided to read a book rather than doing homework.

"... Mozart, in his final moments upon his deathbed, dreamt of his requiem, longing to conduct in the final production of his opera, La Clementa de Tito. Tended to by his younger sister, Sophie, and the family doctor, Dr. Thomas Franz Closset, legend has it that he dictated passages to Mr. Sussmayr. Though the chances are slim, it was not impossible. When his requiem was at last finished, Mozart, settled by his completion, died in peacefulness.

Yet while Mozart's work is still intact, his life, envy, his prejudice, and his pride are lost. Though a brilliant master, only those who are fit for his knowledge can ever know the true life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart."

My fingers enclosed over the latter side of the book as I closed it. I had finished the book. And actually enjoyed it. This was a first for me. I had never liked to read, and in English class... I couldn't remember the last time I raised my hand.

When at last Mom called for me to set the table, my head was crammed with a new look at this oral report... a totally new look....

Shoving my way through rush hour, what kids called between periods, I pushed my through a wall of kids, pushing my way into class. My evil English teacher's class, to be exact. The bell rang, and various loitering kids scattered, like a rock thrown into a pool of fish. Mr. Wallis, evil as he was, walked into class. After the bell. A few kids, breathless from rushing to class, dashed into class, spewing excuses.

"Mr. Wallis, Ms. Faulkner made me finish my work-"

"Mr. Wallis, Mr. Tally had to talk to me after class-"

Opal walked in. My heart jumped, and my head grew a little bit dizzy.

"Mr. Wallis, Mrs. Pews gave me a pass."

She handed it to him. A pass meant you had a reasonable excuse.

"She had to talk to me about my science project. Sorry."

"Enough." He pointed to three kids.

"Detention, detention, detention..."

He pointed to Opal.

"Detention."

Opal's face grew upset.

"But Mr. Wallis, I have a pass! Mrs. Pews gave me one!"

She held out the pass, signed by Mrs. Pews, the science teacher. I knew it was useless.

"Mrs. Pews clearly didn't know what she was doing. Detention."

Suddenly, my anger took over my guts.

"Mr. Wallis, that's not fair. The school rules say that if you have either a pass or a teacher with you." I didn't have the courage to say anymore.

Mr. Wallis turned very slowly.

"That's not your decision. Detention, Mr. Franks, for back talking. See you this afternoon."

"Everyone has found a topic for their oral report, I assume?" Mr. Wallis crooned.

A chorus of "hmmyeaaahh"s rang around the classroom. I kept quiet.

"We start research in the library on Thursday. All of the fools who have not chosen a topic or started outlining should work extra hard these few days."

I had to literally bite my tongue in order to keep a snotty insult, probably one he wouldn't understand.

Mr. Wallis strode around the classroom, reminding me of the vischi circling around a cafe... I could almost hear him asking "Vair are your papairs?"

All of the sudden, Mr. Wallis stopped and thrust a crooked finger at me.

"Mr. Franks, what is your topic?"

"Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, sir."

"What books have you read about him?"

I swallowed.

"The Life of Amadeus, sir."

"Have you finished it, Mr. Franks?"

"Yes."

He glared at me.

"Are you sure?"

I knew he thought I was lying, cheating around reading a book. The question was more of a statement: You are LIAR. I glared back evenly.

"Yes. I am absolutely, positively sure."

He continued. Feeling slightly victorious, but I knew, from previous wars, he would be back.

There she was. One good compliment, and that was all I needed... I could score points... big ones...

"Opal!"

She turned around.

"What?" she said angrily. I backed off a little. She sighed.

"Sorry. It's just that I've just gotten my first detention ever, and unjustly, too. I've been ticked off at him all year and he isn't helping his case. In fact, he just worsened it."

I took a deep breath.

"I don't think it was fair that he did that, either."

She smiled, and my heart beat a little faster, making me dizzy.

"Thanks."

I walked off to sixth hour quickly, pumped with brand-new, unspoiled energy, on stoppable... at least, for today.

"Fritter!"

I turned around.

"Dave, what's the matter now?"

"You blew it! Mr. Wallis is so going to fail us! He holds grudges. He's unfair. He's a big, fat, lying jerk who will fail you even if you're a graduate of Harvard!"

"Dave, we're only in high school..."

"Well, you know what I mean! We are DEAD MEAT!"

"Dave, calm down. Look, I have a great idea. This is book was really, really good. You, since you're such a great artist, can do the poster. Let me handle the writing."

"Fritter, the last time we did an oral report, we completely flunked. You better do a GOOD JOB, because I haven't seen anything and I don't want to fail!"

I had never seen Dave in anything like this. He was truly upset.

"I want to go to art school, Peter. I want good grades."

He had used my real name. He was serious. I sighed.

"Dave, you're just going to have to trust me. I've never truly enjoyed a book. Tomorrow, I promise I'll bring you evidence that yes, I have been working. Here, why don't you come over around 5 o'clock tonight, okay? I'll have the poster board and all, and we can work on it."

Dave took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

"Okay."

Oh no. Oh no oh no oh no.... it occurred to me I hadn't done anything except read the book. I hadn't started on the poster. In fact, I hadn't even gotten a poster board. No report, no poster, no preparation, nothing!

I began to spin out of control. I would fail, get sent back a year, and be shamed by everyone. Especially my mom. And Mr. Wallis would goad over me, saying, "I told you, Mr. Franks, that you need to take your education seriously."

Stop it, I told myself. Just stop it. You're fine. Everything's okay. Just relax and get started. One step at a time.

I speed walked downstairs, and wrote a note to my mom telling her that I was out getting poster board, and jumped on my bike and sped down to the grocery store.

Gazing at the art section, I picked out a box of colored pencils, a bag of construction paper, and a big, white, tripod poster board.

A bald, grayish head swept around the corner. Mr. Wallis? Not good. Walking/jogging to the cash register, I peeked around the corner. It was definitely Mr. Wallis.

I peeked around the second corner. Opal.

Time to switch to the express lane.

I burst in through the front door.

"Mom?"

Nobody answered. A note told me she was out having coffee with a friend. I laid out my materials on the table and got to work on the report. For some reason, this was really of interest.

Then it hit me.

I enjoyed this book. For once, I could feel Mozart's anger, his resistance to being second best to his sister. His talent, his secret, and his success, everything this book had taught me about Mozart's life. He loved music more than his sister ever did, yet got even less attention for it, at least until he could earn money for it. I decided to get started on the report.

The doorbell rang.

"Coming!"

I opened it up, expecting to see Dave. Instead, I saw somebody I had long wished to see.

"Hey," said Opal said. "How are you?"

"Uh, I'm good, thanks. Uh, come in."

Great- now I was stuttering.

"No, I have to go soon, I just stopped by to see how you were doing."

"Oh, uh, great. I mean, not great, that you can only stay for a little while, but, I mean-"

I stopped, realizing the more I spoke, the more I made things worse for myself.

"Oh."

There was a pause.

Just as she turned around to leave, I blurted out, "Do you want to go out to the movies with me this Friday?"

It was terribly random, and completely uncivilized, but to my complete shock, she said "Yeah, sure." and left. I went back inside and sunk down on the couch. Half a second later, the doorbell rang. I opened it, and there stood Dave.

"Fritter, you look like a basket case."

"Really? I thought it was just me maybe I should have slowed down do you think I should have I think I was too forward I mean she doesn't really know me I really shou-"

"Fritter, shut up."

"Okay."

"Now, what is the matter?"

"I just asked out a girl."

We went inside and flopped down on the couch to plan out the poster. My hands kept shaking and I kept putting things in the wrong place, until finally, Dave said, "Fritter, why don't I work on the poster while you do the report, okay?" I calmed down a little bit after that, but was just as hyped when I went to bed at the end of the day. Things were about to change- big time.

The next day I walked into English, ready to face Mr. Wallis. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Opal, gazing over at me for just a second, then hurriedly turning to chat with her friends. I could tell she didn't want to look at me, for fear of disgracing herself with a crush on a loser like me. Unlike her, I didn't exactly have a lot of connections.

Mr. Wallis, as usual, walked in late. His stare silenced all chatter.

"Your presentations on 18th century famous people are due this Friday. Those who have not begun by now will surely get 'F's'."

Dave and I glanced nervously at each other. Mr. Wallis continued.

"Mr. Harris, the doodles I discovered on your poster board must be cleared away immediately. This is not a 'blow away in the wind' assignment. This assignment will severely affect your grade- I suggest you improve the status of your project. Caveman-like scratches as the ones I found on your poster do not count as sketches."

Dave looked like he might cry. The illustrations he had drawn were his pride and joy- he thought they were great. He had spent hours on them. It made me want to jump up and scratch his eyes out with his own pencil. My blood had boiled to the max.

"Mr. Wallis, Dave worked hard on those!"

Mr. Wallis' stony face turned to a puce color.

"Mr. Franks, you will kindly keep your tongue to yourself."

"They're perfectly fine! They're not doodles! You have no right to diss them!"

"Mr. Franks, I am your teacher! Now you will kindly keep your mouth closed and your tongue soft! You forget that right now I am in control of this class."

"Peter's right!"

Opal had stood up now.

"You need to give kids a chance to freely express themselves. He worked for hours- those are NOT doodles! They're hand-crafted, original works of art that you couldn't draw better yourself!"

"ENOUGH!"

We both backed down.

"I have been perfectly kind to this class. I have been fair and just. Now you will both join me for a week in detention. Mr. Harris, I suggest you watch yourself as well. Now everybody will now turn to page 301 in their textbooks."

"Peter, what on earth were you thinking?!?"

The bell had rung, and we were on our way to fourth hour.

"Dave, somebody had to say something. You worked for hours on those drawings. You love them. It's not like I could just sit there and ignore him."

"Peter, he will fail us..."

"So what? So what if he fails us? So we failed the last one too. But we've done well on the rest. So we get a bad grade- so what? We're not going to die just because a

terrible English teacher failed us. The best thing we can do is make a great presentation- if everybody knows we did a great job, that's better than anything else."

Dave sighed.

"I know, it's just... we're in high school now. I want to be an artist- I love drawing and painting. It's something that makes me happier than anything. I don't want my future to be ruined by my grades."

"Peter!"

Opal... I had meant to thank her, but had forgotten.

"Dave..."

He grinned.

"My little Petie's growing up... it's fine," he added. "I'll go on... see you at lunch."

"Peter!"

I found Opal in the crowd, and we managed to get through the halls.

"Opal... thanks so much-"

"Peter, listen." Opal was very serious. "Peter, we need to talk to the principal about him. He's way out of line- giving me an unfair detention was one thing, but insulting a kid this far? That's just cruel."

"Opal, nobody will listen."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Opal, we're kids. Nobody listens to us. They say they do, but they never do."

She sighed.

"Peter, you're a kind, caring, sweet guy."

She came really, really close to me. Her face came really close to mine... really really close...

I got home, after my detention of writing lines, still in shock. I knew I had to shake myself out of it, but I was just so.... happy. When I finally snapped out, I realized the report was due tomorrow. I got the computer and began to type. I typed and typed, faster than I ever had. It felt like all of the sudden I had things to say, something to express, something to say.

“Mozart is the most amazing person I ever wish I’d met. His life is so much different than anyone else’s. He was a genius, everyone knows. So what? That’s what I thought until I saw this one book about him...”

The more I wrote, the more I realized that Mozart was this person who I had met somehow through this book, this one book I’d ever found that I’d liked. I was actually enjoying writing. This new door had opened, and I was liking what was inside.

“Are you sure you have the report?”

Dave was looking terrified, like he was going to throw up what little he had eaten. He had asked me the same question six times. I sighed.

“Yes, I have the report.”

Dave had the poster board, and I had the folder with the report. I hadn’t actually seen the finished product, but I figured it had to be good. He was freaked out about me, so I figured he had put in more time than anything else.

The bell rang for third hour. We both walked into the classroom, Dave like a condemned man, I like a savior.

The late bell rang as we were sitting down. Opal smiled at me, and I felt my cheeks go slightly pink, and my head go light.

For once, Mr. Wallis had not been late. I knew he wouldn’t be late for this one for the world.

“Mr. Franks,” he said with a diabolical grin. “Would you care to go first?”

Now I was beginning to get nervous.

“Of course,” I replied, trying my best not to let a note of anxiety leak into my speech.

I walked up, Dave behind me. He propped up the poster. It was the most beautiful masterpiece I’d ever seen. A border of musical notes around the edge gave a look of authenticity, and the portrait (painted) of Mozart sat directly underneath the title: Notes of Amadeus. The facts around it gave the look of creativity, and it was (at the very least) perfect. Dave gave me a glance of good luck, and hurried back to his seat. I gazed out at the audience. I gazed out at Opal. She gave me a look, a look simply saying one, simple word: go.

You are Mozart, I thought to myself. You know him like a brother. You are Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

“Well,” I began. “I have never liked a book in my life. I could only barely read one when forced, let alone at will. I’m not a great reader. I’m a terrible one. But there’s one book that I would read anytime, anywhere, any situation. It made me feel like I could really be in an adventure, in another life, like I was living in somebody else’s body. In my case, the person was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart...”

It felt as if I was explaining somebody’s life. Everybody seemed unable to move their eyes away, and everybody was hanging on to every word I said. I’d never given a report like this one before- it felt great to feel like everybody enjoyed it, just like I enjoyed the book.

“...Mozart had a life that had many elements, not all of them good. He loved music so much he couldn’t even die without finishing his last composition, *La Clementa de Tito*. He lived a life like no other, and I wish I could’ve known him. And I really mean that. I wish I could’ve lived the life of Amadeus.”

The class burst into applause, cheers, and whistles. Dave smiled from ear to ear, and Opal looked so happy that I wanted to rush over and kiss her like I did yesterday.

“I guess my presentation went well,” I said to Dave.

He grinned.

“Yeah. Me too.”

I pulled the chair out for Opal, and she sat down with a dainty, “Thank you.” I sat down.

“So how are you? You look beautiful.”

“Thanks.” She grinned. She did look beautiful.

She was wearing an amber- colored dress that went just below her knees, and her hair was tied back around her neck. A small, golden chain around her neck bore a small, silver heart, and sparkling earrings hung from her ears.

“You know, Peter, you’re the first guy I’ve officially ‘dated’,” she said cheerfully.

“Oh, really? I’m either offended or honored, I’m not exactly sure.”

She laughed, as we entered the movie theater. I enjoyed the movie, but I particularly enjoyed just being next to her for an entire three hours. We rode the bus home, and when we reached the doorstep, she stopped me.

“Peter?” she asked, holding my hand.

“Yeah?”

“I love you,” she said, and with a peck on the cheek, waved to me, and went inside. I hurried out to the curb, walked to the bus stop, and rode the bus home. Life was so perfect. It made me feel good to be me - I had a girl friend, and a friend who was the most perfect friend I could ever have. I didn’t want anything.

When you’re this age, there aren’t many times that you don’t want anything. There’s always people yelling at you, telling you what to do, you never really get the time to just be happy. That’s why when the time comes, you need to just not think about anything else in the world. Just be happy.

