



Quiet, Please
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The big man eased the piano off his back and stood looking at Groverzb.

"You ain't gonna like it here." He mopped his face. "Boy, will I ever be glad to get off this cockeyed planet."

Groverzb pushed at his spectacles, sniffed, and said, "Quite."

The big man said, "Ain't no native here over three feet tall. And they got some crazy kind of communication. They don't talk."

Groverzb said, "Quiet."

"Uh?"

"Precisely why I am here. I," said Groverzb, sniffing again, "loathe conversation."

"Oh. Well." He left.

Alone, Groverzb surveyed his realm. The house was the shell of what had formerly been a Little People apartment building. Ceilings, floors and walls had been removed to form one large room. The tiny doors and windows had been sealed, and a single window and door had been cut into the shell for Groverzb's use. Crude, but serviceable.

Groverzb walked to the window and looked down the slope. Little People buildings dotted the landscape, and the people themselves scurried silently about. Yes, thought Groverzb, it would do nicely. He had brought an adequate food-tablet supply. He would finish, without the distraction of voices, his beautiful concerto. He would return to Earth famous and happy.

Armed with paper and pencils, he went to the piano, having decided to enlarge upon the theme in the second movement. His mind knew exactly how the passage should run, and he swiftly covered the paper with sharp, angular notes. Then he triumphantly lifted his hands and began to play what he had written.

He jerked back from the keyboard, his hair on end, his teeth, on edge, his ears screaming with the mass of sounds he had produced. He looked at his hands, peered at the score, adjusted his spectacles and tried again.

I'm tired, he thought, recoiling in horror from the racket. A food tablet and a nap will remedy the situation.

When he awoke, Groverzb walked to the window, refreshed. A violet glow had replaced the harsh yellow light of day. At the foot of the slope, the Little People dashed to and fro, but no voice broke the peaceful quiet of the evening.

With a sigh of satisfaction, Groverzb went to the piano. Gently, he struck the keys. Blatant, jumbled noise filled the room.

Breathing hard, Groverzb rose and gingerly lifted the spinet's lid. No, nothing amiss there. Good felts, free hammers, solid sounding board—must be out of tune.

Groverzb closed the lid, sat down and struck a single note. A clear tone sang out. He moved chromatically up and down the scale. Definitely not out of tune.

He shifted the score, glanced uneasily at the keys and began to play. Discord immediately pierced his eardrums.

He clapped his hands over his ears and leaped wildly from the piano bench. The trip, he decided frantically. It must have affected my hearing.

He flung himself from the house and down the slope. The Little People scattered, staring. He charged into the administration building and clutched the lapels of a uniformed official.

"A doctor!" he gasped. "Now! This minute!"

The official raised his eyebrows and removed Groverzb's hands with distaste.

"It's a little late in the day," he drawled, "but maybe the doc up on the top floor—"

Groverzb flew up the stairs and into the doctor's office. The doctor's face lit up.

"A patient!" he exclaimed. "Capital! What seems to be the trouble? Food poisoning? Shouldn't eat the food here. Garbage. Appendix? Heart attack?"

"Stop talking, you idiot, it's my ears!"

Obviously disappointed, the doctor nevertheless poked and peered at Groverzb's ears.

"No," he said finally. "A trifle big, yes. But nothing wrong with them."

"You're sure?"

"Absolutely. A pity. I'm getting a bit rusty."

With a groan, Groverzb staggered out of the building, back through town, and up the slope to his house. Seating himself firmly on the bench he began to play.

He shuddered. The noise was abominable.

Suddenly his door burst open and a crowd of Little People rushed in. They pulled him off the bench and slapped angrily at his hands. Then, with cutters, they attacked the piano.

"Here, stop that!" Groverzb screeched. "What do you think you're doing?"

The Little People pushed and dragged him out of the house, down the slope, through the town and into the launching bowl at the space-strip. The launching agent took one look and yelled, "Get the interpreter! On the double!"

The interpreter ran up and whipped something from his pocket. It looked like a miniature piano skeleton. He tripped a hammer. There was a faint tinkle. Instantly one of the Little People produced a single miniature hammer and tapped it rapidly against his skull. The interpreter tripped another hammer. A second little one responded.

Suddenly one of the Little People ran over and tripped all the interpreter's hammers simultaneously. The Little People winced.

"Oh," said the interpreter. "Well, it's their planet." He hustled Groverzb out to a freight ship that was warming up for takeoff.

"Is everyone insane?" Groverzb croaked. "I demand to know what this is all about!"

The interpreter shoved Groverzb into the ship.

"They say you talk too much!" he yelled, as he slammed the door.

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