

Toogo and the Secret Borough

Katha Zinn



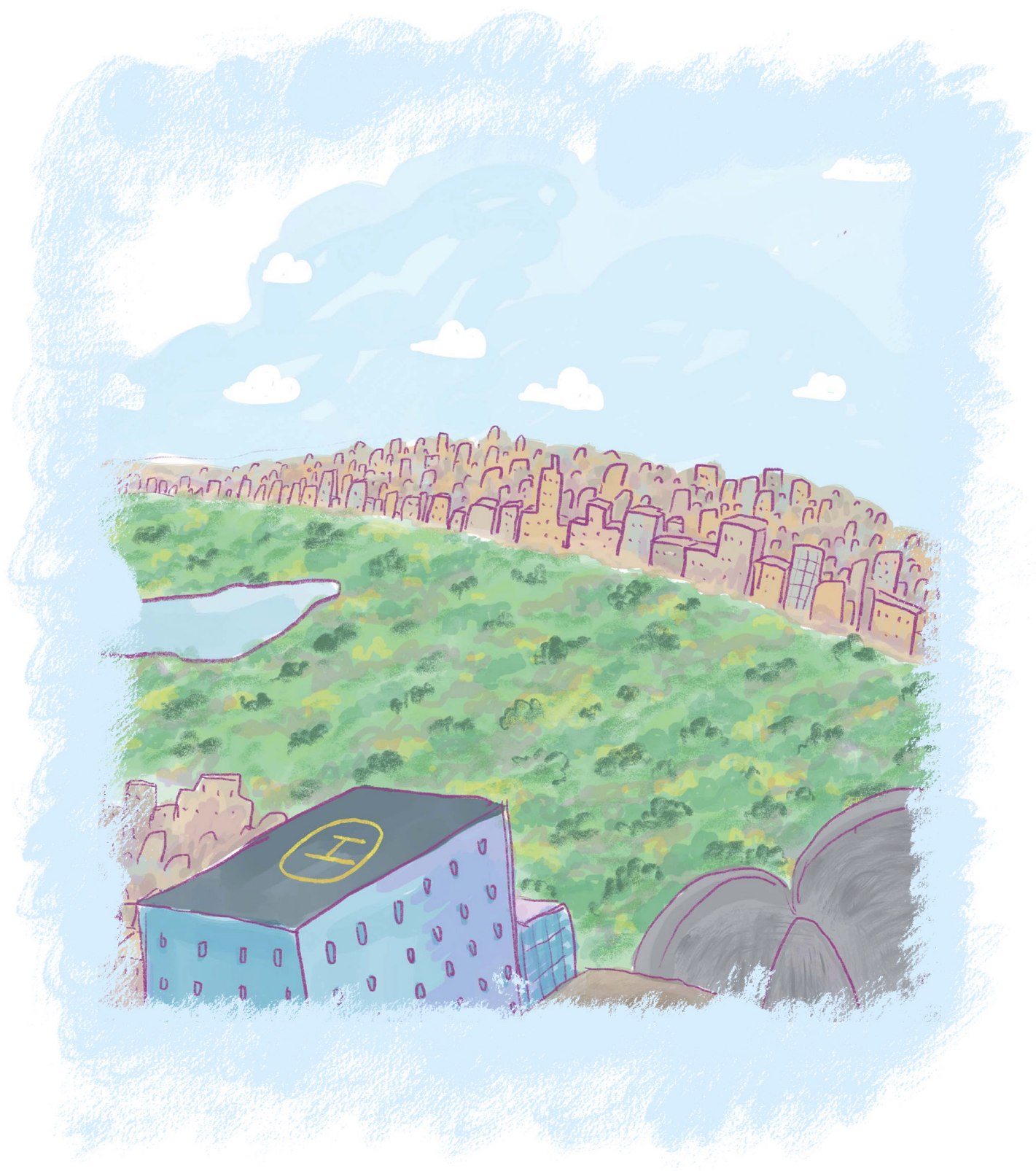


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Introduction

Now, those of us that do not live in New York City might not know about the boroughs. You see, they are like towns, or miniature cities- although there's really nothing miniature about them at all- and they're all squashed into one bigger city, known as New York City. There are five of them in all: Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island. And whatever is known about the Secret Borough... what's that? You say there *is* no Secret Borough? Well! I suppose that's true... *now*. Anyway, it wouldn't have been much of a secret! But haven't you heard the stories, the tale of the Secret Borough? Why, it was at the very, very bottom of Manhattan, wouldn't you know- and it stretched all the way to Ellis Island, connecting the two like a dainty land bridge. And it was there that all of the artists in the city painted, and danced, and wrote, and made music. But, artists are strange people- they need space, and freedom, and above all, *time*. And so, one day, all of the artists got together and held a meeting to discuss their predicament. *Where had all the time gone?* How could an artist paint, or a musician practice, if they had no time? Well, after that, no one knows what happened: they disappeared, never to be seen or heard from again. Some say they went to a place of infinite time, where they could explore, and feel, and consider, and create the most exquisite music, and art, and dance. Now, what do you make of *that*?

Once upon a time, there was a boy named Toogo.

But- hang on, that's not quite right. Because, you see, Toogo was neither a boy, nor was he entirely... human. No: Toogo was from a very distant land, in a galaxy far, far away.

Then what, you may ask, was an alien doing in the middle of New York City? Well, I might tell you he was wondering a very similar thing!

"Get out of the way!" Screamed a cab driver, his arm and head hanging out of the window as he hit the gas pedal.

"Ahh!" Yelped Toogo, jumping back just in time as the cab flew by, a bright yellow blur.

"Hey, move it, buddy!" A biker screeched, swerving closely around him as Toogo turned round and round in the middle of the street.

The honking, the yammering of braking tires, the whistles, the shouts, the noise, noise, **noise!**

Toogo fled to the sidewalk, doubled-over and panting. On Toogaria Prime there were no such things as cars, or buses, or screaming-cab-drivers! Catching his breath finally, he straightened, and narrowed his eyes. For you see, Toogo was on a mission: to visit *Carnegie Hall*. So he plucked up some courage- though it seemed harder and harder to find in this wild city- and approached a man, sitting on a bench reading a newspaper.

The newspaper was upside-down, and this might have been a clue as to the man's personality, but Toogo, determined as he was, did not notice it.

"Excuse me Sir, but can you tell me how to get to Carnegie Hall?"

The man froze for a moment, and flicked his gaze up over the edge of the newspaper. On seeing a long, orange alien, he frowned, carefully folded his paper, and slid his drooping glasses back up his long, slippery nose. "Why, practice, practice, practice. Didn't you know that?" His voice, Toogo noted, was very similar to that of a coyote with bronchitis. The man eyed Toogo for a moment longer, and coughed.

Then he stood up, and walked away with his hands in his pockets, leaving the newspaper fluttering on the bench.

Toogo stood, stunned and a little bit puzzled, in the middle of the sidewalk.

“You’re a musician?” Asked a voice by Toogo’s elbow.

Toogo let out a little *eep!* of surprise, and glanced down. A sandy-haired boy was looking up at him, his face the very picture of intense curiosity.

“Oh,” said Toogo, “Yes- yes, I happen to be a pianist.”

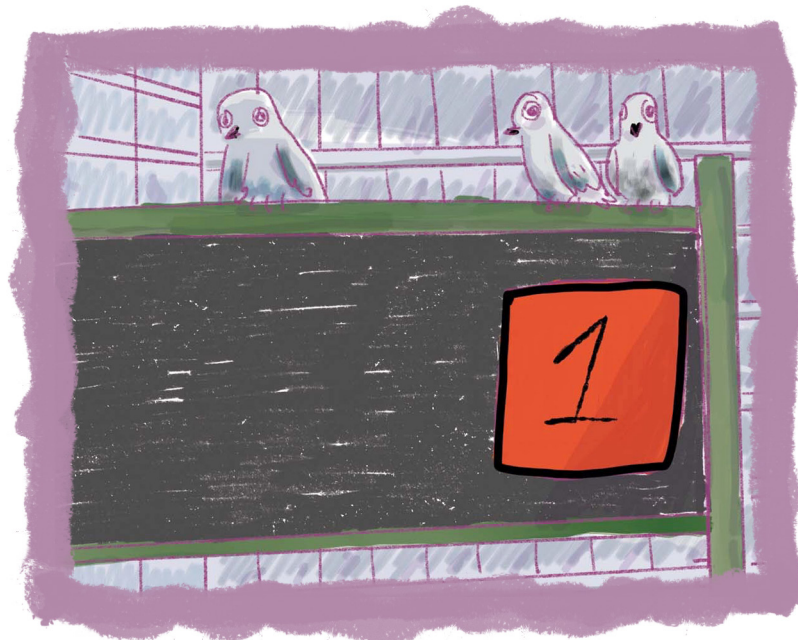
“I’m a violinist,” said the boy, indicating the black violin case bouncing against his knee.

Suddenly seized by inspiration, Toogo asked, “Do you know how to get to Carnegie Hall?” since this boy seemed to be a musician and therefore *must* know the way.

The boy twisted his lips consideringly. “Come on. We’re going to go somewhere more interesting.”

“Sorry- what? I only meant- what train can you take, or- ”

“We’re going to take the 1 to South Ferry.” The boy said impatiently, taking off at a brisk pace. “Hurry up! See, it’s right there!” And he pointed across the bustling street, to where a set of stairs led down into the subway. A bright red circle with a white number 1 was enclosed within it, perched high on a sign-board. *66th St.*, it read, *Lincoln Center*.



And so Toogo and the boy dashed across the street, quick as a dart, skipped down the steps, and fumbled for a MetroCard. One hasty swipe later and the train trundled in, and on they hopped. The doors closed, and they pushed past the huddled people with their large cases- a violin here, a French horn there, and- was that a bass, that one over there? Because, you see, Lincoln Center is home to not one, not two, but three orchestras, and also one of the most famous music schools in the world! So it was really no wonder that the people clutched at their instruments, on their backs or between their knees as they sat.

They slid their way past the people, and found two seats towards the end of the car. The boy clutched his violin case to his chest, and picked nervously at the sleeve of his red jacket. “How many stops till South Ferry? And where are we going, anyway?” Asked Toogo curiously, twisting his head to see the map of the subway.

The boy shrugged. “It’s a secret. I have a hunch... but, anyway, I can’t tell you more now. It’s an awful lot of stops, so you might as well get comfortable.” he said. Then, squinting up at him, he asked, “Why are you orange?”

This time it was Toogo’s turn to shrug. “I was just born that way!” He replied. The boy seemed to think that answer was good enough, because he nodded to himself thoughtfully, and didn’t ask any more questions.

The train lumbered on, and on, and on.

50th St. 34th St. 18th St. Christopher St. Chambers St. Rector St. And at last... South Ferry.

Last stop, blared a voice. Last stop on this train! Everyone off! Connect here to Staten Island Ferry!

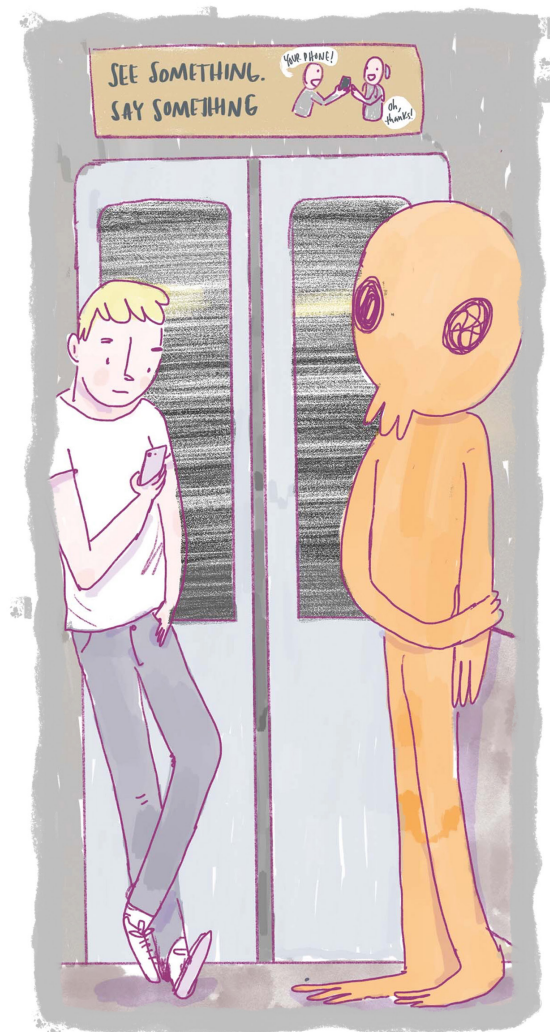
And suddenly the people sprang into motion, pushing and shoving their way off the train with much muttering and poking of elbows. “Oof,” said Toogo as someone’s tennis racquet slapped against his stomach. Out they popped and stood for a moment, catching their breath on the cold and just-a-little-smelly platform.

“Now what?” The people had all tramped up the stairs and out of the station at this point, leaving them alone on the long platform. Not a soul was in sight and, after the boy shot a furtive glance in either direction, he beckoned to Toogo silently,

trotting off in the opposite direction. Toogo paused a moment, staring after the boy in silence. Then he shrugged his shoulders, shoved his hands into his pockets, and followed along.

At the very far end of the platform was a door. But not the sort of door that the workers enter and exit through: no. This was a little door, a round, secret door, that was tucked away out of reach and out of sight. It blended right into the back wall, and if you hadn't known it was there, you might traipse right past it and never even have noticed it. "Come on," the boy hissed, sliding his finger into the lock and giving it a bit of a jiggle. It popped open, and they both scrambled through, clicking the door shut quickly behind them.

Inside, the darkness was so complete that Toogo couldn't even see his hand as he waved it in front of his face. "Where are we?" He whispered incredulously. "And even more importantly- what the heck are we doing? Who *are* you?"



“Who are *you*?” The boy quipped back. “Anyway, I’m taking you somewhere special. We just have to wait for a second, until our eyes adjust to the light. What’s your name?”

“Toogo. Yours?”

“Gideon.” They lapsed into a companionable silence, until the dark melted into a greyness, and a tiny prick of light appeared, seeming to hang in midair.

“Let’s go.” Said Gideon, with a smile in his voice.

The light was, apparently, a very long ways away, and as Toogo followed him, his footsteps slapping in the dark, he wondered again where they were going. The light became brighter, till it was the size of a candle flame, and then the size of a melon, and then presently enough Toogo could see they were racing down a tunnel, which ended in a very flat, very stone, wall.

“Um,” said Toogo, as they slowed their pace. “It’s a wall.” The wall was not very pretty, as far as walls go, and was lit by some sort of eerie light that came from precisely nowhere and everywhere all at once.

“I *beg* your pardon?” Boomed a deep, gravelly voice. Toogo froze, his heart leaping into his throat.

“What-!” He squeaked, looking frantically about for the source of the voice- but Gideon only smirked at him. A mouse ran over his foot, and cackled.

“Manners, boy!” Thundered the voice again “Respect for your elders is the cornerstone of civilization as we know it!”

Turning slowly, Toogo faced the wall- and skittered back several steps, tripping over his own feet and landing heavily on his bum. A face loomed up over him, scowling terribly. A wild mass of hair and gleaming eyes stared down at him, one brow raised in haughty distaste. Toogo opened his mouth to say something, and found that his voice had turned to dust.

“Come on, boy, on your feet! Don’t you know it’s rude to sit uninvited?”

“You’re- you’re- ” Toogo stammered, clutching blindly at the hand Gideon held out to him as he pulled himself upright.

“What’s that?” Roared the man in the wall, his face darkening like a storm cloud. “*What am I?*”

“You’re *Beethoven!*” Toogo squeaked, because sure enough, it was none other than the famous composer himself, trembling in irritation at being awakened.

Suddenly, Beethoven’s brow cleared, and he cocked his head, looking surprised.

“I suppose I am!” He exclaimed, then narrowed his eyes in suspicion. “Who are you?”

“A friend,” said Gideon, stepping forward into the weird light.

“A friend, you say?” Replied the man. “Step forward, then!” He barked. Toogo hastily took two steps forward, so that he and Gideon stood side-by-side.

“Hm...” he muttered, looking Toogo over. “Are you an artist?”

“A- an artist? No! I mean, well- I don’t paint, if that’s what you mean but, but I play the piano- my teacher says I don’t practice enough, but- well, don’t they all? And I do miss it, you know, I haven’t been able to play at all since I came to Earth- well I did just once when I found a piano just sitting there all by itself in the middle of Washington Square Park! So I asked- ”

“Enough!” Bellowed the composer, pressing his hands to his ears as he shook his head wildly. “Good Heavens, boy! I’ve been deprived of the better part of my hearing, but I can’t stand to watch your feelers flap anymore! Tell me this: do you wish to enter?”

“Enter what?” Toogo asked cluelessly.

“*Enter what???*” The man roared.

“*Yes, you wish to enter!*” Gideon hissed under his breath.

“Yes, I wish to enter!” Repeated Toogo hastily.

“Then why didn’t you say so!” Beethoven boomed, and harrumphed, settling himself back into a more comfortable position. “Tell me, then,” he began with a sly smile, “if you’re a pianist, you must know: *how many notes are in an octave?*”

Eight.” Toogo replied without hesitation, then paused. “Well, that is, I mean, twelve, if you count all the notes- ”



“Enough, enough!” Beethoven waved his arms in an unmistakable finishing gesture, and Toogo clamped his mouth shut. “If you’re so clever...” he began again, stroking his chin, “Then you could also tell me... what is C Major’s relative minor?”

“Well,” began Toogo, tapping his fingers against his arm. “To find a *minor*, you have to pop *down* a minor 3rd- rather than up, you see, because minors look up to majors, and vice versa- so... a minor third down from C would be... A! So- a minor!

“Splendid!” Said Beethoven, rubbing his hands together excitedly, a wild spark in his eye. “Onto the last one, then.”

“Last one *what?*” Began Toogo, but he stopped as Beethoven glared at him ferociously. He furrowed his brows, and frowned.

“Aha!” He finally exclaimed. “Yes, this is a good one: What is my favorite rhythm?”

“How the heck would I know?” The words almost left his mouth, but he held them in as something in his brain clunked into place. This was Beethoven, after all! What was that piece, what was that piece? The Fifth Symphony...?

“*Well???*” Beethoven barked expectantly, leaning forward to meet Toogo’s eyes. And slowly, very slowly, Toogo raised his fist to knock against the wall:



Beethoven smiled queerly, a thin smile that sparked his eyes. “You may enter,” he said, bowing his head graciously.

“Can I ask you something?” Toogo blurted suddenly, then barreled ahead before he could lose his nerve. “How’d you get stuck in a subway wall?”

“Ok, time to go!” Gideon jumped in, slapping his hand to the wall. And before Beethoven could let loose the volley of curses clearing building up behind his bulging eyes, the wall had vanished with a pop, leaving a narrow, circular tunnel in its place. Pushing his battered case into the tunnel, Gideon clambered up after it, and stuck out a dirty palm to help Toogo do the same.

“What is this? *Where are we going?*” Puffed Toogo, his voice echoing off the walls as Gideon clambered ahead into the dark.

“*To the Secret Borough!*” Came his voice, disembodied and faint, like a whisper on a subterranean wind.



Toogo stepped out into a different world. He held his breath, unsure of what to make of it: for all around him was a serene, ever-shifting, watery blue-green. It drifted, and changed as he watched. He stared, his feelers quivering in wonder. *Can I breathe?* He wondered, and sucked in a shuddering, experimental breath. A school of fish darted over his head, eyeing him balefully; a clam shell squirted lazily past.

“What *is* this place?” He asked in amazement, waving his fingers through the water that seemed nothing more than air.

“It’s the Secret Borough, like I told you,” said Gideon. He had perched himself on a rock, crusted over with all manner of little crabs, the better to watch Toogo’s expression.

“But- are we *under water*? How can we breathe?”

The boy shrugged. “Dunno. It doesn’t really matter- you can breathe, and so can I, and everybody else.” Toogo looked around and, true to his word, there were people- *children*- speckled casually over the sandy bottom upon which he stood. Cozy little huts held together with kelp-twine seemed to sway in the strange current, and the slow, molten sway of music rang from every corner. Whichever way Toogo swiveled his head, there was music; weird polkas and lovely melodies mixed and mingled, coming together where he stood in a cacophonous, fantastic rush of sound.

“Come on,” said Gideon, hopping from his perch. “You’ve still got to meet the Boss,”

“Who’s the Boss?” Asked Toogo, as Gideon trotted nimbly before him, his case bouncing wildly along the inside of his knee. He shrugged, shooting Toogo a wicked grin over his shoulder. “You’ll see!”

They passed schools of fish, darting through an orchestra filled with the sounds of Saint-Saëns. An organ made of shells and coral thundered its chords lovingly over the quickening melodies. And from within one of the smaller huts, a boy with sandy hair clutched a cello and labored over Dvórák, as a girl sat with him at a lovely dark piano, following him in time.

Gideon led Toogo on, and on, until finally they stopped in front of a tall building that stood at the edge of the cloistered groups of swaying huts. It stood tall and alone, and might have been imposing had it not been for the bright corals and octopuses and fish that seemed to adorn its walls. In fact, it seemed not so much a building at all, but simply a *structure*, so intricately knit that one could barely tell that it was constructed of sinewy lengths of writhing seaweed. Toogo stopped and stared as they approached, his jaw hanging open in awe- for it seemed to pulse in time to the glorious music that emanated from within its confines like some loving, breathing thing. And it was not a violin which played, nor yet an organ, or a trumpet, or any of those fine instruments; no. It was a piano: and from its depths came the most simple, sweet tune, possessing the power to stop any man or beast in his tracks, simply to wonder at its godliness.

“What *is* that?” Toogo wondered aloud.

Gideon smiled up at him knowingly. “Goldberg,” he said simply, and pushed aside the fine woven mess that was the door. The music stopped as they walked forward, and at the far end of the hall- for it seemed suddenly to be a hall, that stretched on interminably- a man looked up from his place at the piano. His smile was slight, but kind, and his head was covered with a slightly lopsided white, curly wig. But it was his hands that drew Toogo’s eyes: they were large and fat, each finger it’s own sausage, that lay like enormous paws upon the black and white keys. Toogo looked at his own long, spindly orange fingers, and was suddenly very embarrassed.

“No need for that, m’boy,” the man boomed, rising heavily from the piano. He was not very tall, and his trousers were wrinkled, as if he constantly were rooting about in the various pockets for a pen. He whistled lowly between his teeth, and removed his wig to mop at his balding head with an ink-stained handkerchief. “It’s a bit hot in here, eh?”

“No- I mean, yes Sir- that is to say- Sir, are you, are you- ” Toogo stammered unsteadily, while Gideon stared nervously between the two, chewing at his lower lip.

“Johann Sebastian Bach, at your service!” The man exclaimed with a hearty chuckle, tucking the handkerchief into a breast pocket, where it flopped forlornly.

“And I expect you are Toogo. Thank you, Gideon, for bringing him here. Go on, now, I happen to know that Maestro Paganini will be quite put out if you miss another lesson!”

Gideon quickly ducked his head, flashed Toogo a bright smile, and darted off, quick as a whip.

“Well then!” Mr. Bach exclaimed, clapping his hands together so that the sound rang throughout the hall. “I suppose it’s time for your exam!”

“*Exam?*” Toogo squeaked. “I- Gideon didn’t- ”

“Relax, Mr. Toogo!” Boomed Bach, leading the way into a back room. “Just a little test of your counterpoint skills. I assume you’ve had proper instruction in species counterpoint?” Toogo’s jaw worked in wordless panic. The tiniest furrow appeared between Bach’s brows, but he flapped his hand at a little desk that sat nearby a port-hole. A little fish swam in, eyed them nervously, and darted out again. “Sit, sit... it’s nothing, really, just a little test...”



“But Sir I- I don’t really know what this is for- ”

“Well you’d like to stay, wouldn’t you? Not forever, mind you- just whenever you’d like. You see, Toogo, this is a... well, you might call it a *sanctuary*. Do you see what I mean? No, I see that you do not... well. Think of it this way: sometimes, Toogo, children just need a chance to breathe. To come away from everyday life and its pressures, and simply focus on the things they love. This place, this Borough- that is what this is. No adults- save for us few that are gone, up in the world above. And so this gives all of us the chance, you see, to be with, and work with, the music. There is little enough of this time up there, in the hustle, and the bustle- so why not give time its own life, its own room to breathe?” Mr. Bach spread his hands wide, smiling graciously. “Only- it would not do to let simply anyone in- we cannot accommodate everyone that stumbles in from the street! So: you must pass a few little tests, that’s all, nothing to fuss about. Some counterpoint, some playing... do they play my music, where you’re from?” He asked, grinning mischievously, then gestured for Toogo to sit down. “Never mind, only a joke! You have thirty minutes, now... begin!”

The exam was not nearly as bad as he had thought it might be, for which Toogo was very much relieved. But when the last grains of sand had dropped from the timer’s glass bowl, and the sheets of music-covered paper had been swept from beneath his nose, Mr. Bach pulled him up by his spindly shoulders, looked him over critically and said, “A pianist, I take it? To the piano then, with you!”

“Wh- what should I play?” Toogo asked, sitting gingerly upon the smooth bench.

“An original work, if you have one? You strike me as a composer, boy!”

“I’m- I’m not quite a boy, Sir,” Toogo squeaked. “I’m not even certain I belong here at all- I’m nearly full grown, where I come from- ”

“Unimportant.” Said Mr. Bach, with a wave of his hand. “What matters is that you’re not an adult human, and that you wish to be here. Now, play!”

So Toogo played.

It was late- or it might have been late, if time had any sort of relevance in the Secret Borough- when Toogo found himself finally deposited from the great kelpy building. He was completely exhausted, but was possessed with a wonderful sense of fulfillment, a tiredness that spoke of a task completed with thought, efficiency, and pride. Gideon sat waiting for him under a stand of swaying weeds, his knees pulled up to his chest and his violin case settled comfortably in the sand. He glanced up from the cat's cradle nestled in a complicated pattern between his finger. "Done?" He asked.

"Yes," replied Toogo, then paused. "I... think it went well,"

Gideon snorted, finished his cat's cradle with a flourish, and hopped up. "Course it went well. I always know when it will," He said with a smug smile. "Now you can come back anytime!" He seized his case, and they set off together, back through the little village. The sky- the *water* around them seemed to deepen, and darken, and the sun so very far above them faded into a queer sort of night. They walked in silence for awhile, neither saying a word to the other, simply lost in their own thoughts. But as they neared the tunnel that would bring them back to their own world, Toogo spied something from the corner of his eye. His feelers twitched, and his head swiveled quickly. Peering out at them from a window was a man- or rather, *half* a man, for all that could be seen of him was a pair of wispy, furrowed brows shadowing squinted eyes, and a rather formidable nose. Toogo stopped, and stared. The man started in surprise, and scowled for a brief moment before disappearing.

"Um." Said Toogo. "Who was that?"

Gideon glanced up at him, then over to the hut. "Oh- that was probably Mr. Wagner, he's always skulking around. He's a terrible grouch, but he is a good composer. He directs the singers, you know- puts together the operas. Come to think of it, it *does* seem like his are the only operas that ever get put on... it's been ages since I've seen the Marriage of Figaro, or Don Carlo, or anything like that!" He frowned, then shook his head. "Oh well. I guess I'm pretty happy I'm not a singer!"

They clambered into the tunnel, and bumped their way along, grazing their knees and scraping their heads along the dank walls. “I’ll see you tomorrow, right, Toogo?” Asked Gideon as they leapt out finally, leaving a frowning Beethoven to seal up the wall behind them.

“Of course!” Exclaimed Toogo with a grin. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”



“I don’t like this one either.” Said Gideon, tossing the Sonata to the growing pile in the corner of their practice room. “It’s too... *nervous*.”

“... And the last one was too *high*, and the one before that was too *old*, and the one before *that* had too many *chords*. Just choose one!” Shouted Toogo, and banged his head on the piano keys for good measure.

“But- ”

“No buts! Ok, new rule: my turn. *I’m* the pianist, I get to choose.”

Gideon made a face, scuffing the toe of his shoe along the floor. “Fine.”

“So. I choose...” Toogo flipped through the last remaining volume on the piano, pausing near the end of the volume. “Kreutzer! I choose the Kreutzer Sonata.”

“But that’s so hard!” Gideon whined.

“Excuse me,” replied Toogo, “but it seems to me that you’ve only got one line of music to play, whereas I have *two*. So really, *I* should be the one complaining, not you!”

Gideon muttered a half response, but accepted this logic with a mutinous glare. Taking the music and plopping it on the stand, the two looked at each other, nodded, and began to battle their way through the piece.

“It’s brilliant,” Gideon sighed after they had finished, “but so hard!”

“Isn’t that part of what makes it so amazing?” Toogo asked with a broad grin, “The fact that it is really difficult, but the music is incredible, and if we keep on working, we’ll eventually be able to make more sense of it? Isn’t that the real treat?”

“I suppose,” Gideon said, thoughtfully, then paused, furrowing his brow. “I like playing with you, Toogo,” he said suddenly. “Will you learn this piece with me, then?”

“Of course!” Exclaimed Toogo, jumping up from the piano. “We ought to play it for the next concert- I saw a flyer up on our way here- ”

“You boys need to *practice*.” Muttered a deep voice, vibrating like the fourth string of a cello. Toogo yelped in surprise, his skinny orange fingers digging into the piano’s wood. But Gideon turned, smacking his hand against his forehead. “Mr. Wagner- what are *you* doing here!”



Richard Wagner sidled from the shadows, pushing the door of the practice hut closed with his foot. He scowled at them both dourly, and picked at the cuff of his sleeve as he approached the piano. “When *I* was your age,” Wagner began in a voice that clearly told them what Wagner thought of *them*, “I studied dozens of scores- ”

But at that very moment, the earth beneath them trembled violently, rippling the floor beneath their feet. And then just as suddenly, the world fell still. They all three glanced at each other. No one said a word. Silence reigned for the space of a heartbeat- two- three-

The ground erupted into a series of ruthless, hard jolts, as if the very hut they stood in were threatening to tear itself apart. The keys plinked nervously in the dangerously swaying piano, and Gideon held his violin high aloft as the stand threatened to topple over. A pencil rolled over the swelling ground, like a surfer over crashing waves, and a framed photograph of Heifetz crashed to the floor, skittering broken glass over their toes.

And again- silence. They stood with crooked knees and panting breaths, their eyes round as they waited for another strike.

It didn't come.

"What was that?!" Gideon finally exclaimed, carefully lowering his violin to his case and locking it quickly away.

"That has never happened before," said Wagner softly, narrowing his eyes. Slowly, he lifted an accusing, knobbly finger, and pointed it in Toogo's face. "You," he paused for effect, shaking his finger menacingly. "No good will come of your presence here, mark my words!" He turned, furiously shoving his hands into his pockets, and stormed out.

Gideon and Toogo stared at each other. "What's he talking about?" Asked Toogo.

"I don't know..." muttered Gideon uneasily, "but maybe we ought to be done for the day."

"Good idea."

So they packed up, and raced away, the sun beating heavily upon their hot, sweating backs.



Days turned to weeks, and weeks turned to months... well, that is, exactly one and a half months, to be precise. Toogo and Gideon met every day, to play, and to laugh and rehearse, and sometimes to squabble mercilessly. Because this is the truth of making music with another person: you, my dear students, will not always agree with us, the grown-up teachers, in how you are supposed to play. So why would you agree with your fellow students, in the way you think *they* should play? Hah! *This* is what makes us, people, so very special, and what in turn makes music such a wonderful thing: *we are all different*. And our differences, and our thoughts and our feelings, are all poured into this fantastic thing called music.

Ah- you see, you've sidetracked me. You want to know what happens to Toogo and Gideon next, is that it? Very well, then: on with it.

The Kreutzer Sonata- which is, by the way, such an excellent work of Beethoven's that it spawned a short story by one Leo Tolstoy- proved to be very difficult for Toogo and Gideon. As they practiced, and rehearsed, it became slowly better. They became more responsive to each other, more in tune- and most importantly of all, they began to *listen*. To each other, and to the music, and to the way their two instruments intertwined. Over weeks they developed this and yet, somehow, it still wasn't quite enough.

"No, you're not listening!" Shouted Toogo for what felt like the hundredth time. "You have to wait for me!"

Gideon sighed irritably, tapping his fingers against the strings of his violin. The instrument buzzed beneath his touch. "I am listening. You're just too slow there!"

"No I'm not, look, it says *rubato*, but that means you have to come back from slowing down- "

"I have an idea," said Gideon abruptly. "Let's take a walk, shall we? We've been stuck in here for too long." The earth quivered beneath them, in a menacing hum- but they ignored it. It had become commonplace over the last month, and what had at first been frightening had now become hardly noticeable.

"Alright," Toogo grumbled, and stood up from the piano.

The keys jangled in an almost-song as the ground shuddered underfoot. He frowned, laying a hand over the keys to smooth them. Gideon opened the door, and they both flung hands up over their eyes. “Gah!” Toogo exclaimed. “It’s so bright!”

“And hot,” Gideon muttered, closing the door behind them. He squinted up into the glittery blue-green water. “It’s like the sun is getting *closer*. Is that possible? Let’s go get lost in the kelp forest, it’ll at least be cooler there!”

Slowly they picked their way through the village, though the sun seemed to beat down on them with a murderous fervor. The music that emanated from the huts was lethargic, and every step burned their feet, so they were forced to walk quickly. And though they were seemingly surrounded by water, there was none at hand, and served only to make them thirstier.

“Water fountain,” Toogo said abruptly, pointing to a burbling spout in the shade of a slowly roasting stand of kelp. Gideon nodded silently, and they raced towards it. “Ah!” Toogo gasped, as he slurped up the cool liquid. Gideon followed suit, splashing it over his face and neck.

“Why is it so hot!” Gideon exclaimed. “It can’t be good for the instruments...”

A sudden jumble of voices leapt up from the hut behind them, several people voicing disagreement and astonishment all at once. Gideon’s face lit up immediately with curiosity. Standing up on his toes, he attempted to peek through a window- but found he was too short. Sighing in exasperation, he waved Toogo over. “You look- I can’t see.”

“Why should I look?”

“Because I want to see, but it turns out I’m vertically challenged,” Gideon explained carefully.

“I suppose that makes sense,” Toogo said after a moment’s consideration.

“Hurry up!” Gideon exclaimed, pushing him over to the window. Toogo peered very carefully over the sill, and then ducked down.

“It’s a meeting,” he explained, “boring stuff.”

“Who was there?”

“Um- Mr. Bach, and Mr. Wagner- I think your teacher, Mr. Paganini-

when do I get a teacher, anyway?”

“They’ll place you after the concert- but they never have meetings like this! It must be something serious. Look- there’s a window open round the back way, we can crawl in and have a listen. It’s cooler in there, anyway.” So the two boys snuck quietly around to the other side of the hut, their backs bent low and their footsteps guarded. Hoisting themselves quickly in through the low window, they crept across the darkened back room to where the meeting was taking place.

“Toogo is a nice boy,” a voice said, drifting through the open door. “And quite a good pianist- and composer! Why, just the other day, he showed me a marvelous piece- ”

“That’s beside the point.” Growled a low voice. “Who cares if he’s *nice* or not- even if he is a good musician! Bach- listen to me: *we’re beginning to float*. Hasn’t anyone else noticed how the ground shakes beneath us, how the sun shines blasted heat down upon us?”

“Of course we’ve noticed!” Exclaimed a gentler voice. “But how can we possibly be sure it’s Toogo’s fault?”

The low voice scoffed. “*What are they talking about?*” Hissed Toogo in alarm. Gideon shook his head silently, and pointed to the door, half ajar. Lowering themselves to their bellies, they squirmed their way quickly through the door and under a desk. They sat, huddled in the shadows, as the meeting continued around them. The room had darkened, and Mr. Wagner stood in the center of the room, pointing furiously at a series of images projected against the wall.

“Well, for one thing, these earthquakes- or whatever you want to call them- began the day after Toogo joined us. And if that’s not enough proof- Bach, will you do the honors, or shall I?”

A deep sigh was heard. “I will.” There was a *thunk*, like the sound of a heavy book being laid open. “The Secret Borough,” Bach intoned, “is a world for children only, who are in need of a place to practice their art. No adults will be allowed- unless they have already passed from the world above. If an adult should find their way into the Secret Borough, then the Borough will no longer be Secret, and will reveal

itself.”

“There: you see!” Exclaimed Mr. Wagner, gesticulating madly as images swept in turn across the wall. “And then, you know the consequences as well as I- do *you* want boatloads of tourists swarming about our sacred place, at all hours of the day?”

“But Toogo is not even human!” Pointed out Mr. Bach.

“And neither is he completely a child! We’ve gone too far, Bach, and the Borough is telling us. I’m sorry,” he said after a moment.

Bach sighed. “At least,” he began slowly, “At least let them have their performance? I know they have been working very hard- ”

“They need more practice,” grumbled Mr. Wagner.

“And I will coach them. But they deserve this chance.” Mr. Bach said firmly.

“Now, I need to find those boys, unless you would like to be the one to break it to them?”

The conversation trailed off, the composer’s voices becoming a blur. Toogo felt he was frozen to the spot, his feelers twitching as the information whirled through his brain. *He had to leave?* Something tugged at him, and he looked down. Gideon stared at him, pulling at his elbow. “*Come on,*” he hissed “*Come on, before they see us!*”

And with that they crept off, back through the window, back into the blazing, sticky heat.



“So this is it,” said Toogo. They stood backstage, fidgeting nervously in their fancy clothes.

“Yeah, I guess,” mumbled Gideon. His thumb rolled over the strings of his violin once, twice, thrice.

“But not really, though,” insisted Toogo. “We can always play together in the real world, can’t we?”

Gideon shook his head. “Don’t you have to get back to your planet?”

“Well- ”

“They’ll miss you, Toogo. You should bring the music back to them.” He said firmly, scuffing at the floor with his shoe.

“But- ”

“Shh- listen!” The audience had quieted in their seats, and the lights had faded, leaving only the stage illuminated. “Come on, Toogo- let’s play.”

They walked onto the stage to tumultuous applause, and a whistle or two, bowed, and looked at each other. It was time to begin.

With a deep intake of breath, Gideon began, his bow catching the strings with all the weight of his arm. He pulled the sound from the depths of the instrument, and it began to sing. The phrase took shape, and lifted, then hung in the air- until Toogo seized it, and delivered his own phrase. Together they wove the tune, slowly, questioningly: and then the music seized them and, with a devilish grin, they took off. Beethoven’s music cascaded from their instruments and crashed into the audience, perking their ears with excitement.

But as they neared the end of the first movement, the ground beneath them began to shake. It was, at first, a little tremor, like the rolling of a ship beneath their feet. They faltered, slightly, but kept doggedly on, storming to the end in a fantastic rush of exhilaration and sound. The audience leapt to their feet as one, cheering madly.

“Fantastic!” “Bravo!” They shouted, even as the stage began to buck and heave, first cautiously, then wildly, so that the music stand teetered terribly, and the keys of the piano began to play all sorts of atonal chords of their own will.

The chairs began to tip, and a few shouts were heard. But still the audience kept on, thrilling at the excitement of Beethoven's music.

Toogo and Gideon stood, and bowed cautiously, unsure of what to do.

"Should we..." Gideon began, glancing at Toogo as the very walls began to vibrate, threatening to collapse.



"Boys! Everyone! It's not safe, you must leave!" Mr. Bach shouted, as he clambered suddenly onto the stage. The scrape of a hundred chairs as they pushed backward was heard, and a panicked frenzy towards the exits began. "Toogo-" Mr. Bach clapped a hand to his shoulder, looking up into his face. "Well done, my boy, very well done. And you, Gideon- together, your music is beautiful. Now, you must go! Go! Don't forget us, Toogo- never forget!"

Toogo looked at Gideon, and Gideon looked at Toogo. "I'll miss you, Gideon," he said, and sprang forward to fold him into a hug.

"I will too!" Gaspd Gideon, and squeezed him tight with one arm, the other still clutching his violin. "But- run! Or we'll all be squished!"

And so Toogo took off like a shot, jumping off the stage and dashing to the back of the hall. He looked back, once, and saw Mr. Bach smiling, one hand raised in

farewell.

The sounds of Bach's music followed him out of the hall, down the corridor, and all the way back into the real world.

It was only when he found himself back on the platform at South Ferry did he notice he still clutched the score in his hand.

"And that," said Toogo, "Is the story of the Secret Borough, and how I first learned to play the Kreutzer Sonata."

"But it's just a story," said the little girl, swinging her feet on the piano bench. "You didn't *really* meet Bach, or go to Earth, or whatever that weird planet was called,"

Toogo smiled. "You're right. Maybe not. But it doesn't make any difference, I still want to hear you play that A Major scale- both hands, please, two octaves."

When the lesson had finished, and the girl had gone off happily with a handful of jellybeans and a new Mozart Sonata to learn, Toogo sighed. He walked to his bookshelf, and stooped down, tracing his long fingers against the spines of the scores. The blue binding was frayed with age, but he tugged it out- *Beethoven Sonatas for Violin and Piano*. Toogo's face, older now and creased with age, broke into a smile as he brought the score with him to the armchair. He flipped it open, and traced the words:

Remember the Secret Borough. -Gideon.



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