Minuet In G Chapter I

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Alice and Gerald had no idea what they were getting in their new house

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Alice McQuire was glad she had finally taken the initiative and called a realtor. The business of house hunting had been driving her batty, and Gerald, loving though he was, had been absolutely no help at all. She knew he wasn't happy that his boss had become so demanding, but he had been coming home so exhausted, she felt guilty dragging him around to visit houses she had found online during the day. So she laid her head back against the seat of the Mercedes, while the realtor prattled on about how this next place would be just "perfect for a young couple such as yourselves. It has a comfortable feel, and high, Victorian ceilings. And just wait till you see the chandelier in the dining room; you'll fall in love with it, I just know."

There was a lock box on the doorknob, and the realtor briskly crossed the wide curved front porch, and slid her pass card into the slot. Retrieving the key, she slid it into the lock, and opened the door.

Turning back to Alice, she said, "Well, do you want to see the inside?"

Alice closed her mouth with a snap. She had been standing at the bottom of the steps, looking up over the slate roof of the porch to the third story, and wondering what the shingles would look like painted in a contrasting color. She slowly ascended the three curved steps onto the porch, and running her hand over the porch column as she walked past it, looked at the front door. She loved the tracery of the frosted glasses in the side lights and transom, and smiled to herself. Without even setting foot inside, she knew this was it.

"I'd rather wait, and see the interior together with my husband," she replied. "That way, we will both get an impression that is fresh. Could we come back this evening?"

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The apartment door banged into her butt and closed behind her, as once again she mentally railed against the idiots who made ridiculous safety laws that required doors to be self-closing. She set the bags of groceries on the kitchen table, and placing her hands on her hips stood, legs akimbo,

surveying the dreary interior. “What a dump,” she said in her best Bette Davis voice. Then, thinking of Elizabeth Taylor in Who’s Afraid of Virginia Wolfe, she thought to herself, *Beyond the Woods. It’s from Beyond The Woods.* Thinking of Beyond The Woods reminded her of Into The Woods, and she began singing to herself, as she put the groceries away.

Into the woods

And down the dell,

The path is straight,

I know it well.

Into the woods,

And who can tell

What’s waiting on the jour-ney?

Oh, my, she suddenly thought. *We’ve been wishing for a house of our own for so long. I hope that ‘be careful what you wish for’ moral in Sondheim’s play doesn’t come back to bite us.* She quickly put the thought out of her head, as she began to prepare supper.

She had just finished setting the table when the door burst open, and Gerald announced, as he always did, “Hi, honey! I’m home!” Seeing the table already set for dinner, he thoughtfully put his briefcase on the floor, before taking her in his arms, and pressing his mouth to hers.

She melted into him, and hungrily kissed him back. Then, leaning back slightly, she looked up at him and asked, “How was your day?”

“Excellent!” he replied, brightly. “I have a surprise for you.” Releasing her, he bent down and fished in his briefcase. Standing up, he handed her a card. On it were printed the words, “Holman, Hughes, Finch and McQuire, PA”. ”Old Man Holman came to the office this afternoon, called us all into his inner sanctum, and passed out the new cards. I made partner!”

“Oh, Gerry, that’s wonderful! And I have a surprise for you, too! But it will have to wait until after dinner. I hope you’re not too tired to go for a little ride. I told Doris we’d be ready around six thirty.”

“Who’s Dor… oh, the realtor… I take it she has found something that might suit?” Gerald asked,

taking a seat at the table.

“ I think it might,” replied Alice, with a twinkle in her eye.

“I see that smile, you little minx,” Gerald said, noting the glint in her eye and hint of a smile at the corners of her mouth. “Remind me never to take you to Vegas for poker. You have a ‘tell’ that the whole casino could read.”

“God, I know,” laughed Alice. “Remember that Saturday your parents dropped in unexpectedly? Your mom shot me a look, and I just KNEW she could tell we’d playing. And then, later, when she and I were mixing drinks, she said to me, ‘ I saw you rubbing your wrists. You and Gerald should use neckties. They don’t dig in, the way rope does.’ I was just about MORTIFIED!”

Gerald laughed and said, “That’s mom; she just puts it right out there. I think that’s what attracted my step-father to her.”

“Or maybe her bedroom kinks,” quipped Alice, while munching on a piece of celery.

“Aw-w-w GEEZ!” said Gerald, “People are trying to EAT here! I don’t want to think about my mother doing it while I am eating.”

“I don’t know if she’s doing it while you are eating or not, dear,” Alice laughed, then went on, “I didn’t make any dessert …”

“What? No dessert!! You mean I just ate all this food for nothing?” Gerald interrupted.

Alice ignored him, and went on, “… because I thought we’d swing by Paradiso for a little tiramisu after Doris finishes showing us the house. My treat. And stop quoting your kid brother,” she added, smiling.

“Great idea,” Gerald replied, “And we can split a bottle of bubbly in celebration of my new title.”

“What’s a great idea? Stop quoting, or the tiramisu?”

“Tiramisu, silly,” Gerald replied, wiping his mouth with his napkin.

“Ah, there’s the door buzzer now,” Alice said. “It’s probably Doris. Be a dear, and tell her we’ll be right down, while I freshen my lipstick.”

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The first thing that caught his eye as they pulled into the driveway, was the turret on one corner, and the curved wrap-around porch. Gerald was immediately reminded of those big old houses in Cape May, where as a child he spent Summers with his grandparents. He had always wanted a house with a curved room. But he forced himself to not say anything, thinking that if they seemed too eager, Doris might take advantage of them. The attorney in him took over, and he reminded himself that the realtor is representing the seller, not the buyer.

“Looks like fresh paint on the porch columns and railing, “Gerald said, to no one in particular.

“Oh, yes, “Doris brightly replied. “The old paint was that horrible dark green that was all in vogue in the fifties, and I suggested white columns would help brighten the entrance a bit.”

“I wonder what color they originally were?” asked Alice. “I’ll bet the whole house was painted with three or four different colors, just like in the old Renwick catalogs.”

“Well, that seems a little garish to me,” Doris replied primly. “I like a nice, clean, white house. And, of course you’ll want to remove those overgrown shrubs along the porch and out the driveway.” She swept her arm in a wide arc, taking in the mature rhododendrons and azaleas that lined the driveway and encircled the porch.

She’s an idiot , thought Alice, but said, “Well, I suppose there will be lots of little things we’d want to do.”

“I think I kind of like the rhododendrons and azaleas,” said Gerald. “They create a grand entrance, without sacrificing privacy.”

Doris took the hint, and became all business again, as she opened the front door. “You will note, she said, the door has been fitted with the latest in modern security locks, and …”

“I hope they didn’t discard to original hardware,” interrupted Alice.

Doris saw which way Alice was leaning, and quickly recovered with, “… and all the hardware was saved and boxed up, in case someone might want to restore it. Though it seems to me, given the seclusion created by the overgrown shrubbery, one would want a little extra security.”

Gerald, standing in the entry foyer, and in an attempt to defuse what he saw as a brooding argument between Alice and the realtor, said brightly, “Well, shall we have a look around?” He turned to his

right, and headed through the doorway into what was obviously intended to be a lived-in living room. *The formal parlor must be on the opposite side, with the turret*, he thought to himself. *I wonder if it has pocket doors, to accommodate a coffin?*

He passed on through the living room, noting the full concert grand piano in the corner, and thought, *If it were me, I'd put that piano in the turret portion of the parlor. I wonder if the piano goes with the house? It would make a wonderful anniversary present for Alice.*

Alice followed him into the living room, and when she saw the piano with its keys open, went over to it, and idly ran her fingers over the keys, as she turned and surveyed the room. Almost as if by accident, she pressed a key, and was greeted with a discordant tone. *Second string on that G is flat*, she thought to herself.

She winced slightly, and Doris asked, "Is something the matter?"

"Oh, don't mind her, "Gerald replied. "She has perfect pitch, so when a note is off like that, it bothers her."

"I think the seller is interested in letting that Mason and Hamlin go with the house," Doris said, hoping that might make up for her earlier gaffe about the exterior. "I believe they want 10,000 for it, and we could easily incorporate that into the overall purchase price and mortgage."

Gerald and Alice looked at each other, and Gerald gave a slight shake of his head, as if to say, "Hush. Don't say anything."

Alice turned and started to walk through into the dining room. Like the living room and the front hall, this room also had a large medallion in the center of the ceiling, supporting an ornate chandelier. She noted with some interest that it appeared to have originally been gas, but had been electrified at some point in its distant past.

Doris flipped the wall switch, and the room was lighted in sparkling glow. The prisms in the chandelier cast a series of rainbows on all four walls, and the overall effect was at once both festive and sophisticated. The center of the room was taken up by a large table, set with eight places on a side, and two on each end, and the light from the chandelier sparkled off the silver service. Clearly, the current owners were people with taste.

Alice glanced at the silver and noted it was Kirk "Rose", the same as her grandmother's which she had packed away in storage. She smiled to herself, picturing her own table set with her own silver, her "Bell and Ivy" glassware, and her Booth's "Real Old Willow" china. She strolled past the table, into

the kitchen, and reached for a light switch inside the kitchen doorway.

The kitchen was very modern, in stark contrast to the entry foyer, living and dining rooms. The walls and ceiling were semi-gloss white, and the lighting was by recessed ceiling floodlights. There was a large butcher block-topped center island, complete with hooks mounted low at all four corners. A heavy cleaver hung from one, and a sharpening steel hung from another. The ample counter space was all topped with a light grey granite, except for a three-foot wide section that was white marble, clearly intended for rolling out pastry dough. A rolling pin, made from matching marble, lay in a curved wall shelf above it. A white knob protruded from the edge of the counter beneath the marble section, and Alice rightly assumed it was for cooling coils set under it. A six-burner Viking range was accompanied by a Wolf double wall oven and a large Thermidor refrigerator/freezer.

Alice thought how easy it would be to prepare complicated dishes in these surroundings. And then a sudden thought popped into her head, unbidden. *I wonder how that cold, smooth granite would feel on my bare back?* She felt a familiar stirring in her lower abdomen, and involuntarily glanced at Gerald's crotch as he walked into the kitchen. She felt her face flush, and looked up into Gerald's eyes and smiled at him.

"I can imagine some wonderful meals being prepared in here," Gerald said, smiling back at Alice. Her glance had not gone unnoticed, and Gerald envisioned himself kneeling, and dining on her most delectable parts from the edge of the butcher block counter. He leaned back against it and stood with his legs crossed, hoping that the pleats in his trousers would conceal what he was sure must be a noticeable bulge.

Alice knew exactly what he was doing, and by way of helping him disguise his obvious ardor, turned to Doris and asked, "What other rooms are on the first floor?"

"Follow me," she said. "I'll show you. There's a parlor, a guest bedroom with full bath, and walk-in coat and broom closets. The bathroom has no shower, but you could easily get one of those ring things that stands up from the faucet end of the tub, and has a curtain rod attached. I think they are in the Renovator Supply catalog."

"Oh, I've no doubt that if we decide to take this place, we'll become intimately familiar with Renovator's Supply," said Gerald.

"Oh I was hoping you'd want to take me shopping to that place outside Doylestown," Alice said. "What was it? Artefact?"

"Actually, I believe that town is Furlong," Gerald replied, "but calling it Doylestown is close enough.

We should make a run there anyway. I have a hankering for some of those wonderful breads, cheeses and olive oils at Cote.”

“Here’s the parlor,” Doris announced, unnecessarily. “It has pocket doors that can be opened, to turn it and the entry foyer into a large ballroom, and notice the front windows extend to within six inches of the floor. The seller says they open them during their Summer parties, and people can easily step over the sill out onto the porch.”

Gerald looked at the parquet flooring, and could easily imagine a warm Summer evening party in this room. He was just about sold on the place, but didn’t want Doris to know it, so he said, “I take it, then, each first floor room is only accessible by passing through another room?”

“Yes,” Doris replied, “except for a narrow servant’s hallway, along the side of the staircase. Of course, if you had no servants, you’d no doubt use that passageway yourselves, to avoid unnecessary traffic through the middle of a room.”

“Oh, of course,” Alice and Gerald replied in unison. They looked at one another. Their eyes met, and they each smiled quietly. *Clearly,* Alice thought, *Doris is just not familiar with how certain classes live.*

“I take it this is the guest bedroom,” Gerald said, poking his head through an open doorway.

“Yes,” Doris replied, “though were I a guest, I’d feel a little uncomfortable staying on the first floor, where any intruder could easily find me.”

Good Lord , Gerald thought, *the fear mongers really have their claws in her.* Aloud, he said, “Let’s have a look around upstairs, shall we?” and headed back through the entry foyer and up the stairs.

Suffice it to say, the upstairs was laid out essentially the same as the first floor, except there were just two large rooms and a large central bathroom at the rear of the house. Alice noted with some chagrin that the turret portion of the master bedroom had been walled off, to form a walk-in closet.

The stairway to the third floor was considerably narrower, and had a door on it. Alice started to open the door, but Doris said, “Oh that is just a stairway to the unfinished attic.”

Alice peered up the dark stairway to the dimly lit attic, and noted the musty smell, as if it had been closed for a long time, and unused.

She went back down stairs after Gerald and Doris, who were heavily engaged in conversation about the particulars of the lot.

“And there is an old carriage house out back,” Doris was saying, “that could easily be used as a garage, once you got rid of the old carriage. I have a card from a man who hauls off junk like that. If you’d like, I can give you his number when I get back to my office.”

“That would be fine,” Gerald said, and thought to himself, *I’ll bet she’s one of those people who know the price of everything, but the value of nothing.*

As they got back into the car, Gerald said, “Would you mind terribly dropping me and Alice off at Paradiso? We are going to get some dessert, and talk this over. We can call you in the morning, and give you our decision, and then we can move forward from there.”

Doris smiled to herself, knowing that no one says “move forward” when they do not intend to purchase. *Let’s see, she thought to herself. Eight percent of three hundred thousand is twenty-four hundred. Not bad for an afternoon and evening’s work.* Aloud, she said, “That would be fine.”

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The tiramisu was wonderful as always, and as he poured their second glass of the Cliquot, Gerald said, ”Since we’re paying cash, and don’t have to wait for finance approval, I think we should offer two hundred fifty thousand. After ten grand for moving expenses, that will leave us three hundred forty to put in a wine cellar, and any other renovations we want to do. Oh, wait, make that two sixty. Ten extra for the piano. That comes out of my savings. Happy anniversary, honey.”

“Oh, sweetheart, you don’t have to do that. Save your account for a rainy day. That inheritance I got from my grandmother can easily take another ten grand hit. And besides, I think she’d approve.”

“Ok,” Gerald replied, and raised his glass. “A toast,” he said,” to, I hope, our soon-to-be new acquisition.”

They clinked glasses and each took a sip.

“How do you think we should present it to Doris?” Alice asked. “We don’t really want to tip her off that we can afford this place and another like it. She’d probably hold out for full price plus the ten.”

“Well, she knows that I am an attorney, but she only knows you play piano. She doesn’t know that you have an MBA in finance. Why don’t you call her tomorrow, and play dumb.”

“Oh, goody. I get to be stereotyped again. Just ‘cause I’m blond, and petite, with big tits…..”

“Hush! You’ll embarrass the couple at the next table,” Gerald said, grinning.

Alice turned her head slightly and looked at the next table out of the corner of her eye.

They were a young couple, she guessed in their mid-twenties. He looked like a typical football or lacrosse player, and she looked like the perfect cheerleader type. She had long blond hair, and even as Alice watched, she pushed it back out of her face with a perfectly practiced “Valley Girl” motion. As she did, her left nipple was briefly visible poking out of her too-small tank top.

Alice started giggling, and briefly thought how glad she was she didn’t have a mouthful of champagne. *That would have been seriously embarrassing, she thought, and painful too, had it come out of my nose.*

She stood then, and placing her napkin on the table, said to Gerald, “I have to go to the ladies room. Why don’t you get the check and call a cab for us? I’ll meet you out front.”

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The next day, Alice was humming to herself as she dialed the realtor’s number. “lada dedadeda de,la de da, la de da” *Oh my God! It’s Professor Hill’s ‘Think System’* she chuckled to herself. *I haven’t thought of Minuet In G in years.* She remembered the bad G on the piano. *Well, first order of business is to tune that poor piano. Glad I kept my hammer and the rubber wedges when I sold that old Knabe upright of Grandmother’s.*

“Hello, you’ve reached Doris, your friendly real estate agent. I am either out showing a house, or temporarily away from my desk, but your call is important to me. Please leave your name, number, a brief message following the beep, and I will return your call as soon as possible……BEEP!”

“This is Alice McQuire. I believe you already have my number. My husband and I have decided we would like to make an offer on that Victorian house you showed us yesterday. We would like to offer two hundred fifty thousand for the house and an additional ten thousand for the Mason and Hamlin Grand Piano. Could you please draw up whatever paperwork is necessary? We can stop in any evening this week to sign it. Just give us a call when it is ready. Thank you.” Alice hit the end call button and thought to herself, *Well, that ought to set a fire under her. She’ll be tickled pink at having made a sale so easily in this market.* She went to the small apartment counter, and poured herself a second cup of coffee, and was just about to start into the living room when her cell phone went off. Setting the cup on the table, and pulling out a chair, she sat down and looked at the caller ID. DORIS REALTOR, it said. She punched the answer button. “Hello?”

“Hello. Mrs. McQuire?”

“This is she.”

“This is Doris, from the realty company. You left a message that you and your husband are interested in making an offer?”

“Yes. We talked it over last night, and got online and looked at interest rates (this was a lie, but Alice thought it might make her sound a little less educated) and decided we can afford two hundred sixty thousand. So we thought we could offer two hundred fifty thousand on the house, and an extra ten thousand for the piano.”

“Well, the place has been on the market for over thirty days, so the seller might be willing to drop the price a little. I know they are very motivated. I will draw up the contract, contingent on financing and title insurance and…”

“Contingent?” interrupted Alice, still playing dumb.

“Oh, yes,” Doris replied. “It has to have a contingency clause, because otherwise, if you couldn’t get financing for some reason -- not that you and your husband could possibly have any credit problems,” she interjected quickly, and went on. “But Sometimes banks get a little funny with older houses. You wouldn’t want to be stuck with a contract that you couldn’t fulfill. And, of course, no bank will write a loan on a property without a title search and insurance that there is no lien or other encumbrance that would create a problem with having clear title.”

“Encumbrance. Oh. I see, “ said Alice, hoping she sounded a little overwhelmed.

“Don’t worry. I can take care of all that,” Doris went on, briskly. “That’s what we realtors are trained for, and why we have licenses.”

Alice got the distinct impression from her tone of voice, it was on the tip of Doris’ tongue to say something derogatory like “don’t worry your pretty little head”, but she bit her tongue and let the voice at the other end finish her recitation.

“Oh. Okay,” Alice said in what she hoped sounded a bright and cheery tone. “So you will call us then?”

“Oh, it is just a matter of filling in the blanks on a standard form,” Doris replied. “I will have it ready for

you this evening. How about I bring it by at about six or so?”

“If it is easier for you, we can stop by your office,” Alice said. She really didn’t want to have to entertain Doris, and thought it better to keep things on a strict business level.

“That would be fine. I’ll see you at six, then. Good bye.”

She doesn’t want me to see their apartment , Doris thought to herself. *Well, I’ll go ahead and do the paperwork, but I bet they really are in over their heads. I saw that car they drive. Who drives a fifteen-year old car and can afford a three hundred thousand dollar house? This sale is probably going to fall through. Well, I can get it settled pretty quickly if the Nesbits decide to reject the offer. I guess I can set that up by letting them know by phone.* She took a sip of her soda, and reached for her desk phone.

Alice smiled to herself as she set the phone down and took a sip of coffee. *She probably thinks I don’t want her to see the place. And that was a real stroke of luck that the Beemer is in the shop, and Gerald borrowed his brother’s car. Maybe she won’t be quite so sure she has her little commission, and will work harder to try to get it.*

“Hello. Dr. Nesbit? This is Doris, your realtor. How are you? Do you have a minute?”

“I am well. I can take a minute or two, if it is good news.”

“I have an offer on your house, they will be coming into the office this evening to sign to papers and make it official, but I thought you might want a little time to think before you reject it.”

“Oh? How much below the asking price is it?” Dr. Nesbit inquired.

“It is only two hundred fifty thousand,” Doris said. “Oh, and they added ten thousand for the piano, so that makes it just two-sixty.”

“Well, it was going to cost us five thousand to move it, so the total is forty five thousand lower. Let me talk it over with Martha, and we can have a decision by tomorrow morning. You can bring the contract by then, and we can either sign it, or reject it, or make a counter-offer.”

“Fine. Does nine AM work for you?”

“Yes, that would be fine,” Dr. Nesbit replied, and added, “Thanks for calling. It gives us a little time to mull it over.”

“Well,” Doris said, “I wouldn’t mull too hard. It IS less than you were asking.”

“Thank you. See you tomorrow morning, then,” Dr. Nesbit said, and broke the connection. “Martha!” he shouted, “We got an offer on that white elephant of your sister’s! And leaving that old piano of hers there paid off!” He stuck his cigar back in his mouth, and walked down the hallway, looking for his wife, and humming to himself.

“lada dedadeda de,la de da, la de da”

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