

GIRL FROM GRAND DETOUR

IV. Katy Learns Her First Great Lesson

By ELIA W. PEATTIE

HAGADORN HALL, Chicago, Ill.

A H, Delphine, my dearest woman, I wish you were here! I wish you were, Delphine! I felt it in my bones when I wrote you last, that I should be making mistakes. I told you I got too heady.

I'm ashamed to write you about all that has happened to me; and yet when I have told you, you will see that if I was to tell anybody, it must be you. I have no friends here to whom I would confide such a thing, and I know better, I hope, than to worry Aunt Louise into her grave.

There was one man, my dear, at that little dinner Mrs. Wilkinson gave, of whom I said nothing to you. He was a quiet, handsome, well bred man, whose politeness had something a little too—well, a little too italicized about it. Everyone paid a great deal of attention to him, and when he spoke it was a signal for the others to listen. He was witty; and he was soft and hard by turns. He said very little to me, and I forgot all about him. But the other day he sent for me. He wished to see me professionally, he said. I went to his office, and he told me he had heard from Mrs. Wilkinson that I was extending my work, and that I had taken to decorating houses.

Of course I said at once that he was looking at my efforts through the wrong end of the glass. "All I've done, Mr. Rathburn," I said, "is to settle a cozy little cottage out in the suburbs. That was the kind of thing I could do as easily as not, because no particular knowledge of decoration or furniture was required. The place is comfortable and homy. I had only to play I was fitting it up for myself; but I wouldn't think of doing anything fine or elegant."

I looked around his offices, and my dear, they were perfect. Mr. Rathburn is some sort of special lawyer,—patents or something like that. But even I, who know so little about offices, could see that everything he had was just right.

Well, he wouldn't take no for an answer. "At least," he said, "come with me to look over my place."

I DIDN'T know how to refuse. He had a way of speaking as if he was used to having people jump. When we got down in the street, there was a big red automobile standing there, and he bowed and motioned me to get in. You know, it may seem strange, but I never had a ride in an automobile, Delphine, and I was glad to go. But just as I was getting in, I caught a glimpse of the chauffeur's eye. It was a blue Irish eye, of the kind that has no end of fun in it. Just now, however, it was not funny. It was—well, really Delphine, though I think I am getting so I can express myself a little better than I used to, I really could not tell you what I saw in that man's eye. It made me stop for a moment.

Then Mr. Rathburn said, "Let me assist you," and I got in.

I was all tucked up in robes, and we flew away down the boulevard toward the south. It was only four o'clock in the afternoon; but the smoke was thick over the city, and already the lights along the boulevard were lighted. The lake was gray and calm, and the sky and air a wonderful yellowish gray, and the lights above us in the high buildings, and on the rushing automobiles, and along the sides of the drive, made the world look very strange and unreal to me. Mr. Rathburn was very kind, I thought. He asked me all sorts of questions about how I came to go into business, and how long I had known Mrs. Wilkinson, and where my people were. This seemed neighborly, you know, and I told him everything.

WHEN we got to Mr. Rathburn's place, it appeared he lived in a fine apartment building—quite the finest I have yet seen. He was on the top floor, and from it one could see the lake, and the lights on the long iron vessels, which run even at this season, and down the length of the swarming boulevard. I stood and looked out quite a time, and almost forgot where I was. Then Mr. Rathburn came back with a servant, who brought some dainty little sandwiches and cakes on a tray, with a decanter and some glasses. Mr. Rathburn poured some beautiful golden colored stuff into the little glasses, and offered it to me.



Drawings by Maud Russell Tousey

"I don't know what it is, thank you," I said; "but I don't drink it. Aunt Louise would pass away if she saw me drinking anything like that. I'll have a sandwich, and—would you mind—a little milk."

Mr. Rathburn threw back his head and laughed. "Of course you shall have milk," he said. "I might have guessed your preference. But really, Miss Crotchett, the milk isn't half—no, nor a hundredth part—so delicious as what I am drinking."

"It suits my country palate better," I said.

"Even as milk, I'm afraid it isn't very good," he said; "whereas what I am drinking is the best of its kind."

"I should like to see the room, if you please," I said. "It is getting late."

"Why, sure enough!" he said, with an air of great surprise. "I'm afraid I have forgotten how fast the time is passing."

With that he took me through some beautiful rooms. I can't tell you, Delphine, what soft, dim, deep colors they had, or how they made my heart ache with a sense of how ignorant I was of pictures and rugs and books and statues and all the wonderful things that people have made in the ages past, and are making to-day in the cities of the Old World, which I suppose I shall never see. Then we came to two unfurnished rooms.

"These rooms," Mr. Rathburn said, "are the ones, and I want you to do here as you did when you made that little love nest for your nice suburbanite and his English love,—I want you to furnish it to suit yourself."

"It is a different matter," said I. "That other was the A B C of decoration. I understood it. You have got to the X Y Z of such matters, Mr. Rathburn. I couldn't furnish these rooms so that they would be in keeping with the rest of your home."

"What you do will suit me," he said in that way

of his that seems to make you do as he says. "This is to be a boudoir, and that a bed room for a lady. The best is just good enough for her. You shall decide what you think the best,—choose your own colors, your own style, everything. Consult whom you please, and don't be afraid of the expense. Make the result exquisite. You can do it,—I know you are precisely the one to do it. If you will allow me to say it, you have not yet begun to discover your abilities, Miss Crotchett. You may purchase any books you can find that will help you. As a matter of fact, you will find a number on this particular subject there in the other room. I insist upon only one thing, and that is that you shall be expeditious. I have quite a number of good qualities; but patience is not among them."

"I don't want to do the work," I said. "I am not equal to it. It's beyond me."

"It is precisely in your line," he said, with a curious kind of smile. "You haven't yet, my child, the faintest notion of how completely your destiny it is."

Weren't they strange words?

I HARDLY know what I said. He went down to the door with me and put me in the machine, and I was whirled back to my dear old hall bed room. Three times on the way home the Irish chauffeur turned and looked at me, and each time he made funny rabbitlike motions with his mouth as if he was going to say something. But he didn't, except, "Good night, miss," in a sort of kind way when I thanked him. You may think it odd to speak of a chauffeur's kindness; but, you see, I like kindness wherever I get it, and when servants are kind to me it makes me happy. I'm only the Grand Detour girl, Delphine, and my heart is a foolish thing. I'm as scared as a hare, half the time, for all the front I put up.

Well, I had brought home with me half a dozen of the books on decoration that Mr. Rathburn had urged upon me; and I looked them over, of course, although I still felt I could never do the work properly. But do you know, I became perfectly fascinated. I didn't so much want to do something along the lines of the work laid down there as I did to get together certain colors and shapes that would please me. A queer thing happened to me, Delphine. As I read and read and looked at the illustrations in those books, I realized I never had been in a room that suited me, and I said to myself that I would make just the kind of room I wanted,—the sort that the dreamiest, best part of me wanted. I knew some woman was coming into those rooms; though of course I hadn't an idea what sort of woman. I hoped she would be as sweet as the little English bride, who had come on, and simply loved her house, and had me out to dinner and cemented a great friendship with me, and said I had done wonders to help keep the homesickness away. As I went on with those books, my dear, my ideas, which had been drifting this way and that, began to get into some sort of form and pattern, and I felt that I wanted to try my hand at the work.

So I wrote Mr. Rathburn about it, and asked him how much I was to be permitted to spend, and what he wished to pay me for my work. I'm ashamed to tell you the price he named, it was so large. But I said to myself that I should spend only what was needed, and that he would be glad to have the rest back; and I meant to keep in payment only what it seemed to me I had earned. I decided to leave that till the work was done.

SUCH beautiful rooms as I made, Delphine! They are not fussy and pretty. I find I don't care much for rooms like that. They are rooms to sleep in, to think in, Delphine. Perhaps they are even rooms



It Doesn't Sound Reasonable, but He Even Opened the Door for Me.