

# WELLS CAROLYN

PTOMAINE STREET: THE  
TALE OF WARBLE  
PETTICOAT

Carolyn Wells

**Ptomaine Street: The  
Tale of Warble Petticoat**

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**Carolyn Wells**  
**Ptomaine Street THE TALE**  
**OF WARBLE PETTICOAT**  
**FOREWORD TO A FOOLISH BOOK**

A certain Poet once opined  
That life is earnest, life is real;  
But some are of a different mind,  
And turn to hear the Cap-bells peal.  
Oft in this Vale of Smiles I've found  
Foolishness makes the world go round.

Ecclesiastes, Solomon,  
And lots of those who've passed before us,  
Denounced all foolishness and fun,  
Not so the gay and blithesome Horace;  
And Shakespeare's Jaques, somewhat hotly,  
Declared the only wear is Motley!

We mortals, fools are said to be;  
And doesn't this seem rather nice?  
I learn, on good authority,  
That Fools inhabit Paradise!  
Honored by kings they've always been;  
And—you know where Fools may rush in.

And so, with confidence unshaken,  
In Cap and Bells, I strike the trail.  
I know just how, because I've taken  
A Correspondence Course by mail.  
I find the Foolish life's less trouble  
Than Higher, Strenuous or Double.  
Dear Reader, small the boon I ask,—  
Your gentle smile, to egg my wit on;  
Lest people deem my earnest task  
Not worth the paper it is writ on.  
Well, at white paper's present worth,  
That *would* be rather high-priced mirth!

I hope you think my lines are bright,  
I hope you trow my jests are clever;  
If you approve of what I write  
Then you and I are friends forever.  
But if you say my stuff is rotten,

You are forgiven and forgotten.

Though, as the old hymn runs, I may not  
Sing like the angels, speak like Paul;  
Though on a golden lyre I play not,  
As David played before King Saul;  
Yet I consider this production  
A gem of verbalesque construction.

So, what your calling, or your bent,  
If clergy or if laity,  
Fall into line. I'll be content  
And plume me on my gayety,  
If of the human file and rank  
I can make nine-tenths smile,—and thank.

## CHAPTER I

On a Pittsburgh block, where three generations ago might have been heard Indian war-whoops—yes, and the next generation wore hoops, too—a girl child stood, in evident relief, far below the murky gray of the Pittsburgh sky.

She couldn't see an Indian, not even a cigar store one, and she wouldn't have noticed him anyway, for she was shaking with laughter.

A breeze, which had hurried across from New York for the purpose, blew her hat off, but she recked not, and only tautened her hair ribbon with an involuntary jerk just in time to prevent that going too.

A girl on a Pittsburgh block; bibulous, plastic, young; drinking the air in great gulps, as she would later drink life.

It is Warble Mildew, expelled from Public School, and carolling with laughter.

She had only attended for four weeks and they had been altogether wasted. In her class there were several better girls, many brighter, one prettier, but none fatter. The schoolgirls marveled at the fatness of her legs when, skirts well tucked up, they all waded in the brook. Every cell of her body was plump and she had dimples in her wrists.

And cheeks, like:

A satin pincushion pink,  
Before rude pins have touched it.

Her eyes were of the lagoon blue found in picture postcards of Venice and her hair was a curly yellow brush-heap. Sunning over with curls—you know, sort of ringolets.

In fact, Warble was not unlike one of those Kewpie things, only she was more dressed.

Expelled!

That's the way things were to come to Warble all her life. Fate laid on in broad strokes—in great splashes—in slathers.

Expelled! And she had scarce dared hope for such a thing.

To sound the humor of Warble.

She hated school. Books, restraint, routine, scratching slate pencils, gum under desks, smells—all the set up palette of the schoolroom was not to her a happy vehicle of self-expression.

Often, in hope of being sent home, she had let a rosy tongue-tip protrude from screwed up red lips at teacher, but it had gone unpunished.

And now—

Now, rocking in triumphant, glorious mirth, her plump shoulders hunched in very ecstasy, the child was on the peak!

Expelled! Oh, gee!

And all because she had put a caterpillar down Pearl Jane Tuttle's back. One little, measly caterpillar.

Pearl Jane had sat right in front of her.

A loose neckband round a scrawny neck.

And when Pearl Jane wiggled, a space of neck between two thin, tight black pigtails—a consequent safe-deposit that was fairly crying out to have something dropped down it.

A caterpillar mooching along the schoolroom aisle—clearly sent by Providence.

Helpless in the grip of an irresistible subconscious complex, Warble scoops up the caterpillar and in an instant has fed him into the gaping maw at the back of that loose gingham neckband.

Gr-r-r-rh!

That, then, is why Warble stood in such evident relief on the Pittsburgh block.

Expelled! The world was hers!

It had always been hers, to be sure, but it was now getting bigger and more hers every minute.

The very first day she went to school, a little boy said to her:

“Do you like me?”

“No,” said Warble.

The little boy gave her all his candy and his red balloon.

So you see, she had a way—and got away with it.

Warble was an orphan. She had a paprika-seasoned sister, married to a chiropodist, in Oshkosh. But for all that, she planned to earn her own living.

And she had an ambition. At present beyond her grasp, yet so sure was she of its ultimate attainment, that she shaped her entire cosmic consciousness toward that end. Her ambition was not unique, perhaps not unattainable. It had been achieved by others with seemingly little effort and less skill; and though as yet, merely a radiant hope, Warble was determined that some day she would gain her goal.

Her ambition was to get married. Her sister had; her mother had; she politely assumed her grandmother had.

She would.

Often she imagined herself the heroine of delightful scenes she watched at the cinema. She loved the slow unwinding of the story on the screen, but when engaged with her imagination she hurried it on in haste to reach the final close-up.

It was at no one's advice, but because of her own inner yearnings that Warble took a job as waitress in a Bairns' Restaurant.

She reveled in the white tiles, the white gloss paint, the eternal clearing-up and the clatter of flatware. She loved the flatware—it always made her think of a wedding—sometimes of her own.

She adored the white-capped King Alfred baking his cakes in the window, but merely as a fixture, as she adored the mute stacks of clean plates and the piles of pathetic little serviettes.

In a more intimate and personal way she adored the pork and beans, the ham and eggs, the corned beef and cabbage, and—importantly—the gentle, easy-going puddings and cup custards. These things delighted her soul and dimpled her body.

She was proud of her fellow-waitresses, proud of their aspirations (the same as her own).

Having exceptional opportunity, Warble learned much of culinary art and architecture, at least she became grounded in elementary alimentary science.

She had little notebooks filled with rules for Parisian pastry, Hindu recipes for curry; foreign dishes with modern American improvements.

Joyously she learned to make custard pie. This, as the tumultuous future proved, was indicative.

Only the little smiling gods of circumstance, wickedly winking at one another, knew that when Warble whipped cream and beat eggs, she laid the corner stone of a waiting Destiny, known as yet but to the blinking stars above the murky Pittsburgh sky.

She was extravagant as to shoes and diet; and, on the whole, she felt that she was living.

She was not mistaken.

She went to dances, but though sometimes she toddled a bit, mostly she sat out or tucked in.

During her three years as a waitress several customers looked at her with interest though without much principle.

The president of a well-known bank, the proprietor of a folding-bed concern, a retired plumber, a Divinity student and a ticket-chopper.

None of these made her bat an eyelash.

For months no male came up for air. Then, the restaurant door swung back on its noiseless check and spring, and in walked Big Bill Petticoat.

## CHAPTER II

The Petticoats were one of the oldest and pride-fullest of New England families. So that settles the status of the Petticoats. A couple of them came over in the *Mayflower*, with the highboys and cradles and things, and they founded the branch of Connecticut Petticoats—than which, of course, there is nothing more so.

Of course, the Petticoats were not in the very upper circles of society, not in the Dress Circle, so to speak, but they formed a very necessary foundation, they stood for propriety and decency, and the Petticoats were stiff enough to stand alone.

Another fine old New England family, the Cottons.

Intermarriage linked the two, and the Cotton-Petticoats crowded all other ancient and honorable names off the map of Connecticut and nodded condescendingly to the Saltonwells and Hallistalls. Abbotts and Cabots tried to patronize them, but the plain unruffled Cotton-Petticoats held their peace and their position.

The present scion, Dr. Petticoat, was called Big Bill, not because of his name or stature, but because of the size of his bills. He presented them quarterly, and though his medicine was optional—the patient could take it or leave it—the bills had to be paid.

Wherefore Dr. Petticoat was at the head of his profession financially. Also by reputation and achievement, for he had the big idea.

He was a specialist, and, better yet, a specialist in Ptomaine Poisoning.

Rigidly did he adhere to his chosen line, never swerving to right or left. People might die on one side of him from water on the brain and on the other side from water on the palate, not a prescription could they get out of Big Bill Petticoat unless they could put up unmistakable symptoms of ptomaine poisoning.

And he was famous. People brought their ptomaines to him from the far places, his patients included the idlest rich, the bloatedest aristocrats, the most profitable of the profiteers. His Big Bill system worked well, and he was rich beyond the most Freudian dreams of avarice.

As to appearance, Petticoat was very pretty, with that fresh rosy beauty that is so attractive. His walnut hair was fine and silky, but a permanent wave made it fuzz forth in a bushy crinkle that was distractingly lovely. His tweezed eyebrows were arched to a perfect span and his finger nails showed a piano polish.

His features were cold-chiseled and his coloring was exquisite. In fact, his coloring was too good to be true, and no wonder, for it came out of a very modern and up-to-date six-cylinder makeup box.

His lips looked as if they were used to giving orders in restaurants, and he wore clothes which you could never quite forget.

Warble edged toward the stranger, and murmured nothing in particular, but somehow he drifted into the last and only vacant seat at her table.

She whisked him a 2 x 2 napkin, dumped a clatter of flatware at him, and stood, awaiting his order.

The pause becoming lengthy, she murmured with her engaging smile, “Whatcha want to eat?”

“Pleased to eat you,” he responded, looking at her as though she was an agreeable discovery.

Small wonder, for Warble was so peachy and creamy, so sweet and delectable that she was a far more appetizing sight than most viands are. She smiled again—engagingly this time, too.

Thus in the Painted Vale of Huneker, Vamp and Victim beguiled the hours. Thus, and not in treacled cadences, intrigued Mariar and Sir Thomas in the back alley.

“Do you like it here?” asked the doctor.

“Yop. But sometimes I feel wasted—”

“You don’t look wasted—”

“No—” after a hasty glance in the wall mirror.

“Don’t you get sick of the sight of food?”

“Here, oh, no! I don’t know any lovelier sight than our kitchens—yes, yes, sir, I’ll get your pied frotatoes at oneth.”

When Warble was a bit frustrated or embarrassed, she often inverted her initials and lisped. It was one of her ways.

The other clients at her table had no intention of being neglected while their Pickfordian waitress smiled engagingly on a newcomer.

It was the iceman who had hollered. He seemed to be merely a red-faced inanimate object, that worked by strange and compound levers.

Next him was a hat-check girl, a queenly person who communed with something set in the lid of her vanity case, and fed on chicken à la king.

Then there was a newsboy, whose all-observant eyes darted about everywhere, the while he absorbed baked beans and ketchup.

An old maid shopper. She merely brooded over her worn and pencil-scored memorandum, and muttered of fringe and buttons as she spilled tea on her samples of Navy blue foulard.

A blind man. Of no interest save that he had a calm and gentle demeanor and was the only one who didn’t spill things. His face wore a grieved but resigned look, as if something had died in his scrambled eggs. The iceman, who had the hard, set jaw of a prize fighter was successfully eating steak, and he welcomed the incoming fried potatoes, as one greets a new instalment of a serial.

It was a fat and pink and lovely Warble who at last trotted back with Petticoat’s order.

The great specialist had an unbridled passion for pie, and throwing restraint to the winds he had ordered three kinds. The wedges Warble brought were the very widest she could wheedle from the head pie-cutter—and Warble was some wheedler, especially when she coaxed prettily for a big pieth of cutthard.

Petticoat looked at her again as she came, pie-laden.

Her cap was a bit askew, but her eyes weren’t. In her white linen dress and apron and white cap, her little pink face looked to Petticoat’s appraising glance like a postage stamp on an expanse of white linen envelope.

Little did he think, as he took his custard pie that he was about to put his foot in it. Yet he did.

“May I see you again sometime?” he said, ignoring the hat-check girl’s ogling and the iceman’s cold stare.

Warble made a face at him. It was one of her ways.

“What’s your address?” he asked. “You can ask the Boss—if you really want to know.”

“Want to know! Say, you waitress!”

Of the love-making of Warble and Big Bill Petticoat there is nothing to be reported which may not be read in any Satevepost serial, which may not be heard at any summer resort, in any winter garden. They were zoology and history. Their speech was free silver and their silence was golden.

It was a non-stop courtship. All the plump beauty of youth and all the assured complacency of a well-to-do married man kept them up in the air.

Petticoat wasn’t a married man, but he had their technique.

They took a walk, and followed a roundabout way. Then they sat on a bank, and his arm followed a roundabout way.

She seemed more young and tender than ever, in a simple white muslin frock and blue sash. Her broad-leafed hat was decked with a few pink roses, and roll-top white socks added a good deal to the picture.

Petticoat was charmed.

“Golly, but I love you, Warble!” he cried.

She did not answer, but she touched the upper edge of the wallet in his breast pocket with an exploring gesture.

“You think I’m too darn aesthetic! Well, you’re not, and so we ought to mate. We’re complementary to one another, like air and sunshine or light and shade.”

“Or pork and beans, or pie and cheese.”

“Yes, or like stout and porter—I’ll be the porter, oh—what’s the use of talking? Let my lips talk to you!”

He kissed her cheek, imprinting thereon a Cupid’s bow, by reason of his own addiction to the lipstick.

Warble rubbed it off with the back of her hand, and said, “Oh, pleathe—pleathe.”

She wondered if she ought to have said thank you, but it was only a drifting thought and she turned the other cheek. Then she smiled her engaging smile and they were engaged.

Later in the game, she said, with pretty diffidence, “I would like to thee Butterfly Thenter.” And she blushed like the inside of those pink meat melons.

“I knew it!” and Petticoat produced a pile of Sunday Picture Supplements.

Her cheek nested in his permanent wave, Warble studied the pictures.

They were the last word in artistic architecture. Truly, Butterfly Center, where Petticoat lived, was a veritable Utopia, Arcadia, Spotless Town and Happy Valley all rolled into one. Broad streets, arching trees, sublimated houses, glorified shops—it seemed to Warble like a flitter-work Christmas card from the drug-store.

“How’d you like to scoot up there with me in a fast aeroplane?” he jollied her.

“It might be—a lark—” she dubioused.

“But here’s the picture!” and proudly he exhibited a full length view of his own home.

“Ptomaine Haul,” he exploited, proudly. “Built every inch of it from the busy little ptomaines. Coral insects nothing on that, eh? And here’s the sort of people I practice on. Old Leathersham, now—he has a corking château—French Renaissance. And Mrs. Charity Givens—she has a Georgian shack. And, oh, yes, here’s Iva Payne. She’s one of my most profitable patients—sick all the time.”

Warble studied the pictures.

“What expensive people,” she said, “dear—so dear.”

“Yes, great people. You’d love ‘em. They’re just layin’ for you. Come on, Warble, will you?”

“Yop,” she murmured, from his coat pocket, “Sweet, so sweet.”

## CHAPTER III

Among the rolling stock of a great railroad, a moving mass of steel. A soft sludge as it came noiselessly to rest beneath the glazed chintz awnings of the Butterfly Center station.

A faint scent of chypre from Petticoat's cigarette as he alit.

From his private train, which had slithered across the intervening spaces and slid into its moorings as butter slides from a hot plate.

It is September, cool, green and well-sprinkled.

The obviously important man was followed by a yellow-topped, rose-cheeked girl, whose eyes were all blue and a yard wide as she looked about.

About what?

About eighteen.

They were Dr. Big Bill Petticoat and his bride, Warble.

They had been married and had spent their honeymoon in riotous loving.

It had been transforming. Warble had been frightened to discover how hungry she could be even on a wedding trip.

Bill had mused to himself; what's the difference between an optimist and a pessimist? One honeymoon. And now they had reached their home town. People were not altogether new to Warble. She had seen them before. But these were her own people, to bathe and encourage and adorn—and, they didn't seem to need it.

They distressed her. They were so smart. She had always held that there is no style in America, no chic effects out of Paris.

But here on the terrace of the simple little hewn stone station were hordes of men and women who seemed to be, mentally, morally and physically, literally butterflies.

"Isn't there any way of waking them up?" she begged of Petticoat, grabbing his arm and shaking him.

"These guys? Wake 'em up? What for? They're happy."

"But they're so smug—no, that isn't what I mean. They're so stick-in-the-mud."

"Look here, Warble, you want to get over your fool idea that because a woman is slender she isn't adorable. These folks are up to date, snuff and mischief."

"I know, that's what's biting me. Life seems so hard for them."

"Oh, they don't mind it. Now you must meet the bunch. They're all down here to meet their husbands or something just as good. Now you behave yourself."

"Yop."

She had a grip on herself. She was ready to kiss and be friends with them all. But she was scared at the rackets who ballyhooed like Coney Island and surged down upon her like a Niagara Falls.

She had the impression that all the men had soft voices, large, embracing arms, gimlet eyes and bored, impersonal smiles. She knew they were taking her in. Their pleasant hoots and yells of greeting overcame her.

"Oh, pleathe—pleathe," she lisped.

In her fresh frilled dimity and soft sash of baby-blue Surah, her rolled white socks disclosing but a few tantalizing inches of seashell-pink calf, Warble stood, eyes cast down, a pretty, foolish thing,

As soft as young,  
As gay as soft,

and, to a man, the male population of Butterfly Center fell for her.  
Not so the remainder of the citizens.

One of the men was yelling at Petticoat:

“Hop into my car, Bill, Don’t see yours—I’ll tote the bride-person you’ve got there—with joy and gladness.” Warble looked at the yeller.

“Can’t quite place me, chick, can you?” he grinned at her. “Well I’m only old Goldwin Leathersham—no use for me in the world but to spend money. Want me to spend some on you? Here’s my old thing—step up here, Marigold, and be introduced. She’s really nicer than she looks, Mrs. Petticoat.”

“Indeed I’m not,” Marigold Leathersham cried gaily, “I couldn’t be—nobody could be!”

She came running—a beautiful, slim young woman, with a wealth of expensive looking gold hair, white and gold teeth that broke into a lavish smile. Her voice was rich and though she looked above, away from and through Warble, yet she saw her.

“So glad to welcome you, you pretty baby,” she chirruped. “You’re going to love us all, aren’t you?”

“Yop,” said Warble, and smiled her engaging smile.

“You bet she’ll love us,” declared Leathersham, “she’ll make the world go round! Hello, Little One,” he turned to pat the cheek of a white-haired, red-faced old lady, who hawk-eyed and hawk-nosed, stood by, listening in. “This, Mrs. Petticoat, is our Lady Bountiful, Mrs. Charity Givens—noted for her generosity. She ostentatiously heads all Donation Lists, and she’s going to start a rest cure where your husband’s unsuccessful cases may die in peace. And here’s one of the cases. Hello, Iva Payne!”

“Hello,” languidly responded a girl like a long pale lily—a Burne-Jones type, who sometimes carried around a small stained-glass window to rest her head against.

“Are you really Bill’s wife?” she asked, a little disinterestedly, of Warble.

“Yop,” said Warble, and made a face at her.

“How quaint,” said Iva.

“Whoopee, Baby! Here we are,” and Petticoat rescued his bride from the middle of a crowd and yanked her toward his car.

The car was a museum piece, and as Warble caromed into its cushions she felt that her lines had fallen in pleasant places.

That was the way Fate came to Warble. In big fat chunks, in slathers. Unexpected, sudden, inescapable—that’s Fate all over.

“I shall like Mr. Leathersham—I shall call him Goldie. They’re all nice and friendly—the men. But this town! Oh, my Heavens! This Jewel Casket—this Treasure Table! I can’t live through it! This Floating Island of a Topsy Charlotte!” Her husband nudged her. “You look like you had a pain,” he said; “Scared? I don’t expect you to fit in at first. You have to get eased into things. It’s different from Pittsburgh. But you’ll come to like it—love is so free here, and the smartest people on earth.”

She winked at him. “I love you for your misunderstanding. I’m just dog-tired. And too many chocolates. Give me a rest, dear. I’m all in from wear sheeriness.”

She laid her feet in his lap and snuggled into the corner of the pearl-colored upholstery.

She was ready for her new home, beautiful, celebrated Ptomaine Haul. Petticoat told her that his mother had been living with him, but had fled incontinently on hearing a description of Warble.

The bride chuckled and smiled engagingly as the car slithered round a corner and stopped under the *porte cochère* of a great house set in the midst of a landscape.

Neo-Colonial, of a purity unsurpassed by the Colonists themselves.

A park stretching in front; gardens at the back; steps up to a great porch, and a front door copied from the Frary house in Old Deerfield.

A great hall—at its back twin halves of a perfect staircase. To the right, a charming morning room, where Petticoat led his bride.

“You like it? It’s not inharmonious. I left it as it is—in case you care to rebuild or redecorate.”

“It’s a sweet home—” she was touched by his indifference. “So artistic.”

Petticoat winced, but he was a polite chap, and he only said, carelessly, “Yes, home is where the art is,” and let it go at that.

In the hall and the great library she was conscious of vastness and magnificent distances, but, she thought, if necessary, I can use roller skates.

As she followed Petticoat and the current shift of servants upstairs, she quavered to herself like the fat little gods of the hearth.

She took her husband into her arms, and felt that at last she had realized her one time dreams of the moving pictures, ay, even to the final close-up.

What mattered, so long as she could paw at the satin back of his shirt, and admire his rich and expensive clothing.

“Dear—so dear—” she murmured.

## CHAPTER IV

“The Leathershams are giving a ball for us to-night,” Petticoat said, casually, as he powdered his nose in the recesses of his triplicate mirror.

“A ball?”

“Oh, I don’t mean a dance—I mean—er—well, what you’d call a sociable, I suppose.”

“Oh, ain’t we got fun!”

“And, I say, Warble, I’ve got to chase a patient now; can you hike about a bit by yourself?”

“Course I can. Who’s your patient?”

“Avery Goodman—the rector of St. Judas’ church. He will eat terrapin made out of—you know what. And so, he’s all tied up in knots with ptomaine poisoning and I’ve got to straighten him out. It means a lot to us, you know.”

“I know; skittle.”

Left alone, Warble proceeded systematically to examine the interior of Ptomaine Haul. She gazed about her own bedroom and a small part of its exquisite beauty dawned upon her. It was an exact copy of Marie Antoinette’s and the delicately carved furniture and pale blue upholstery and hangings harmonized with the painted domed ceiling and paneled walls.

The dressing table bore beautiful appointments of ivory, as solid as Warble’s own dome and from the Cupid-held canopy over the bed to the embroidered satin foot-cushions, it was top hole.

The scent was of French powders, perfumes and essences and sachets, such as Warble had not smelled since before the war.

“Can you beat it,” she groaned. “How can I live with doodads like this?” She saw the furniture as a circle of hungry restaurant customers ready to eat her up. She kicked the dozen lace pillows off the head of the bed.

“No utility anywhere,” she cried. “Everything futile, inutile, brutal! I hate it! I hate it! Why did I ever—”

And then she remembered she was a Petticoat now, a lace, frilled Petticoat—not one of those that Oliver Herford so pathetically dubbed “the short and simple flannels of the poor.”

Yes, she was now a Petticoat—one of the aristocratic Cotton-Petticoats, washable, to be sure, but a dressy Frenchy Petticoat, and as such she must take her place on the family clothesline.

She drifted from oriel window to casement, and on to a great becurtained and becushioned bay, and looked out on the outlook.

She saw gardens like the Tuileries and Tuilerums, soft, shining pools, little skittering fountains, marble Cupids and gay-tinted flowers. This was the scene for her to look down upon and live up to.

“I mustn’t! I mustn’t! I’m nervous this afternoon! Am I sick?... Good Lord, I hope it isn’t that! Not now! I’d hate it—I’d be scared to death! Some day—but, please, kind Fate, not now! I don’t want to go down now with ptomaine poisoning! Not till after I’ve had my dinner! I’m going out for a walk.”

When Warble had plodded along for six hours, she had pretty well done up the town.

Ptomaine Street, which took its name from her husband’s own residence, was a wide, leafy avenue with a double row of fine old trees on each side. They were Lebbek trees, and the whole arrangement was patterned after the avenue which Josephine built for Napoleon, out to the Mena House.

She passed the homes of the most respectable citizens. Often they were set back from the road, and the box hedges or tall iron fences prevented her from seeing the houses. But she saw enough and sped on to the more interesting business and shopping section of Butterfly Center.

She passed Ariel Inn, the hotel being like a Swiss Chalet, perched on some convenient rocks that rose to a height above street level. A few fairly nimble chamois were leaping over these rocks and Warble heard a fairy-like chime of bells as afternoon tea was announced.

A man in an artist's smock sauntered across the street. A palette on one thumb, he scratched his chin with the other. A hearse, its long box filled with somebody, crawled down the block. A dainty Sedan with a woman's idle face at its window wafted by. From a Greek Temple came the sound of Interpretative Dancing, and the applause of perfunctory hands.

She wanted to elope. Her own ideas of utility, efficiency, and economy were being shattered—broken in pieces like a potter's vessel. Her sense of proportion, her instinct for relative values, her abhorrence of waste motion, her inborn system and method, all were swept away as a thief in the night. Could she reform this giddy whirl? Could she bring chaos out of cosmos? Was her own ego sufficient to egg her on in her chosen work?

She haed her doots.

She maundered down the street on one side—back on the other.

Dudie's Drug-store was like unto a Turkish Mosque. Minaret and pinnaret, battlement and shuttle-door, it was a perfect drug-store, nobly planned. The long flight of steps leading up to its portal was a masterpiece in the step line.

Inside, the Soda Pagoda was a joy of temple bells and soft, sweet drinks, while at the prescription counter, the line formed on the right, to get Dr. Petticoat's prescriptions filled for their ptomaines.

A Moldavian Incense Shop was the barber's; a half-timbered house sold English-built clothes; a brick affair of Georgian influences and splendid lines, housed the hardware needed by the Butterflies, and the milliner's was a replica of the pyramid of Cestus.

The bank was the Vatican, with Swiss guards in the doorway.

Perpetual waste motion! In all the town not one building that connoted to Warble the apotheosis of efficiency shown by the King Alfred tossing cakes in the window of Bairns' Restaurant. Not a dozen buildings that even suggested use in addition to their beauty.

And the street was cluttered with trees in tubs, window boxes, sudden little fountains or statues; gilded wicker birdcages on tall poles—songs issuing therefrom.

Arbors, covered with pink Dorothy Perkinses, here and there by the curbside. And, worst of all, people sitting idle in the arbors. Idle!

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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