

THE WAY BACK

Emma entered from the tiny oven of a kitchen where the gas light had flared furiously over her hurried breakfast preparations. The dining room was almost as small as the kitchen and quite as hot, despite the effort she had made to keep it cool on Rex's account. He sat at the table with his head on his hand, waiting. She set the tray down before him silently. Silently he accepted her ministrations. From the adjoining bedroom came an insistent wailing. The baby had awakened. Emma ran in and lifted the child from the crib. The little one drooped limply over her shoulder and the wall subsided to a whimper.

Rex called: "What is the matter with her?"

There was genuine concern in his voice, without much tenderness. He was about to step forward into the harness without being fully rested from yesterday's long strains.

Emma came out with the child in her arms. "She's cross with the heat. I'll bathe her and then she'll feel better. It's dreadfully close today. We ought to get her out of the city before long. The milk is so poor. I'm afraid for her."

Rex drew a long breath. "I don't see how we're going to do it, Emma. I can't pay board for you, and board for myself and keep up the rent here. Why don't you go home and stay for a couple of months? I could manage that much well enough."

"Home!" Emma cried. She thought of the hot, dull little house, of her father, and brother, always in coarse working clothes, of her poor, sternly economical and hard-working mother, of her younger sister with her giggling schoolgirl cliques. She shuddered. "Oh, I can't go there. I can't take baby there," she appealed, using her strongest argument.

"Well, then!" Rex said in a tone of finality.

Tears leaped to Emma's eyes. Turning quickly, she took the baby into the bath room and shut the door.

Ten minutes later Rex came and looked in. "You better consider my suggestion about your going home this summer," he said kindly. "I've got to go now. By honey."

Left to herself, Emma thought things over. The few small rooms grew hotter and hotter. The baby cried continually. "She is suffering," Emma thought, desperately. "And Rex will not send us into the country."

She felt resentful toward this new attitude of her husband's. Last summer she had gone before this to the country and Rex had joined her when his vacation time came. They had been happy together in a delightfully quiet spot. She had looked forward to going back to that place this summer with her baby. And now she could not go. As for going home she could not bear to think of that. Home had never meant to her what it meant to most girls. Emma had been the eldest and brightest and she had got an education that enabled her to earn many of the pretty things she had longed for and which her father could not afford to buy for her.

While at business school she had met Rex and when, after she thought he had passed out of her life forever, he suddenly appeared in the office where she was engaged as stenographer, she was so glad that her eyes had told him so before her lips had spoken. They had become engaged immediately and married a few months later. Between those two dates her happiness had been strangely mingled with satisfaction at the thought of

leaving home forever. She loved her people, but she had never felt of them. Her education had lifted her out of their way. They were plodders; she longed to soar. As Rex's wife she would have an opportunity to go as high as her wings would carry her. The first eighteen months of their married life had seemed to realize her dreams. Then the baby came, and with her a distinct change. Life took on a gravity a seriousness of aspect she had not looked for—how actually serious she had, however, never realized until now.

She had not been home since she was married. She had written occasionally, of course, and they had answered. But with the infrequent letters all intercourse between the home folks and herself had begun and ended.

As the morning wore on, with its wilting torpidity, Emma became convinced that she ought not to be in the city with the baby. Rex came home to luncheon, looking pale and spent.

"The hot wave's here, all right," he sighed. "I wish you'd go to your folks, Emma. You could get ready this afternoon and I'd see you out of the city early to-morrow morning. You'd be there by 10 o'clock if you start at 4, and the cars wouldn't be crowded as they are later in the day. We mustn't let the baby get very sick, you know."

Emma looked steadily away from him for a long moment. She thought much in that moment. But his last sentence helped her to a decision. "I'll do as you say, Rex," she answered.

After he had gone back to work she made ready to go away. It grew hotter and hotter. The baby cried and Emma cried with her. She had never been so utterly heartick in her life.

Rex brought home some ice cream for dinner and they ate little else. "I tell you," he said, as he wiped the perspiration from inside his limp collar, "if I could get a job in the country I'd take it."

"You couldn't get such a job as you've got in the country," Emma said. "Look at father, what he's worked for all his life."

"Nevertheless he's lived," Rex sighed. "Think of having a piece of grass to sit on on a night like this."

It was a torrid night. Before it was fairly done they crept out and made their way to the station. Rex was very grave at parting. She was too tired to notice much besides the fact that he made her as comfortable as he could. She kissed him, the train began to move, and he swung off the steps onto the platform. She looked back and saw him watching after her, and the hard little spot in her heart came near softening entirely.

A telegram which Rex had sent the night before brought her father to the station. He stepped forward out of the little group that awaited the train's arrival—a sober, rough figure with a homely, kindly face.

"Hello, sis!" he said, merely, and took the suitcase and the baby from her. He had, she noticed, a perfectly satisfactory way of carrying the baby. At least the little thing didn't cry. Emma tagged limply after her father, who talked all the way to the baby, instead of to her.

"I guess she knows her grampa," he said triumphantly.

When at last they turned into a certain green lane Emma was amazed at the sight of the wood-colored house which had been her former home. It was so much larger than it used to seem. There was a vine on the porch and a great maple rustled over the roof. And behind was an open field with a brook.

Her mother and Mildred were waiting to receive her. Mildred had grown into a pretty, quiet-looking girl.

"This is the baby," she said, holding out eager arms for it. "It was awfully nice in you to name her after me, Emma."

"I always liked your name," Emma replied with a smile.

Within the house was clean and there were airy bare spaces. It was easy to see that Mildred used a good many of her own ideas in making home pleasant. They led her up to the guest chamber, which had been daintily papered. After the close little flat shut in by brick walls, the wood-colored house under the maple seemed a haven of coolness and rest.

"I wish Rex were here," Emma thought. And she pitied him because he must stay in the city. After all he was wiser than she had been. He had known what was best for her.

Dinner was a revelation from the hurried, messy affairs she so well remembered. There was clean linen and the cooking was delicious. Emma found herself eating as she had not eaten in weeks and praising everything.

"Yes, Mildred does fine," her mother said admiringly. "She's had a course in domestic science, you know—sort of takes to it somehow."

"It's strange," thought Emma, "that everything here seems so different from what it used to be. Mildred is a dear girl. And mother—well, she's mother. And father and Bob are the manliest men, next to Rex I ever met. Poor Rex. I wish he was here."

Three weeks later Rex came. The baby had grown jolly and plump. Emma looked like her old self. She and Mildred had become inseparable chums. She told him all about it one night when they sat alone outside the brook talking things over. "I'm glad I came," she said. "Oh, Rex! It is as if I'd been lost a long time and had somehow found the way back."

He squeezed her hand.

"I'm going to see that you don't get lost that way again," he said.

"What do you think, dear?" Your father says there's a job I can get here. His says we can rent a cozy house with a garden right next to it and get down to living like our folks do—oh my darling, I've made you cry!"

But she was crying for joy.

Starting in Business.

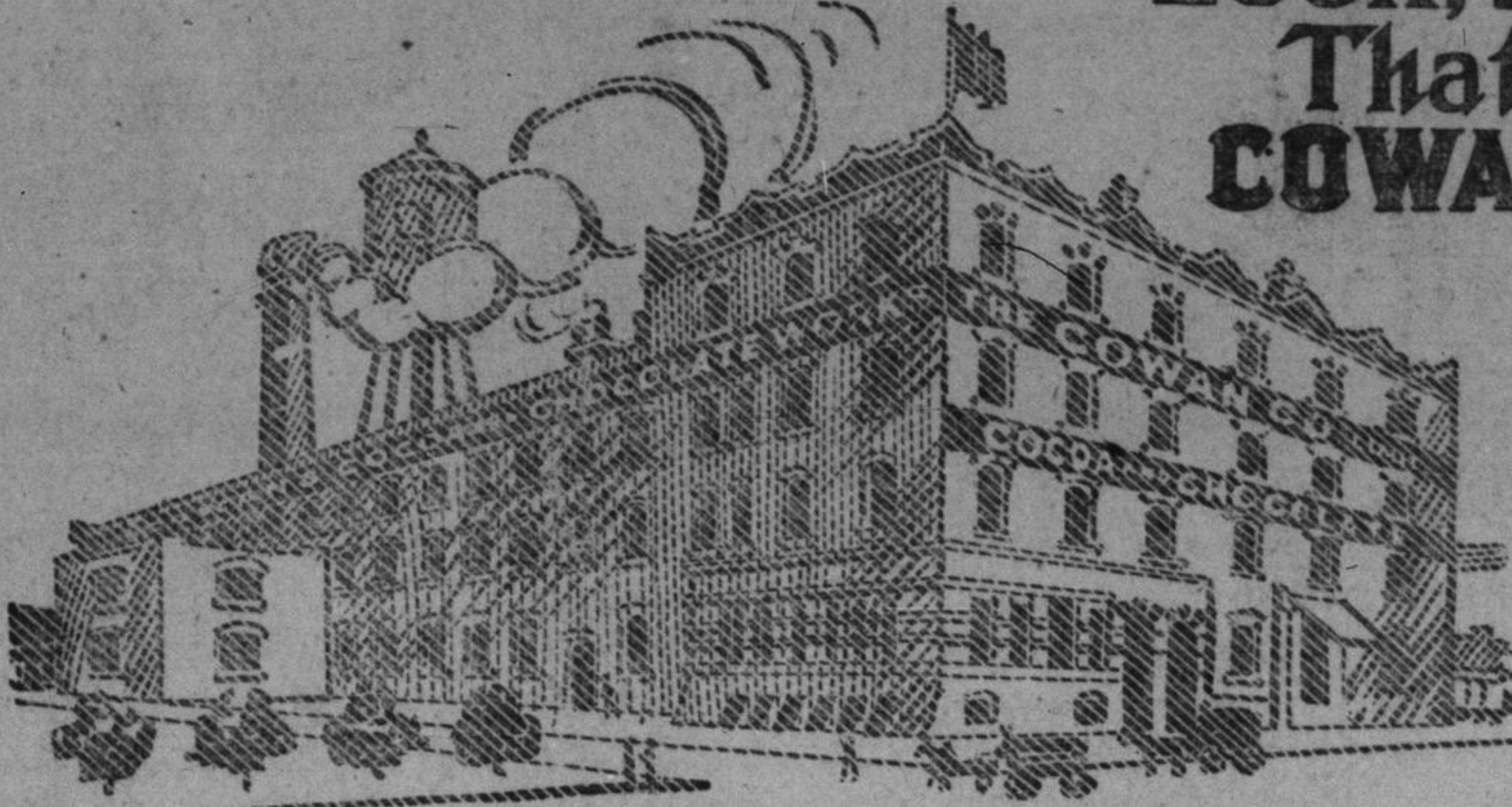
Pretty Miss—Is this the license bureau, please?

Cluck—Yes, ma'am.

Pretty Miss—Well, I've just finished my first book of poems, and I want to take out a poetic license—how much will it be?—Judge.

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ODD WAYS OF SLEEPING.

Habits Differ Greatly Among Different Peoples.

The American or the European, in order to get a good night's rest, ordinarily requires a soft pillow under his head, but the Japanese stretches himself on a rush mat on the floor, puts a hard, square block of wood under his head, and does not sleep well if he does not have it.

In China they made a great to-do with reference to their beds. These are very low, scarcely rising from the floor, but are often carved exquisitely of wood. Like the Japanese, the Chinese never makes his bed

any softer than is possible by the use of rush mats.

It is a curious fact with reference to the sleeping habits of the various peoples that, while those in northern countries do not appear to be able to sleep well unless they have lots of room in which to stretch their legs, the inhabitants of the tropics often curl themselves up like monkeys at the lower angle of a suspended hammock and sleep very soundly that way.

The robust American will cover himself with a pair of blankets and throw his window open to the air, even in the dead of winter, and sometimes he will not complain if

there is a bit of snow on the window sill in the morning. But the Russian, on the contrary, likes no sleeping place so well as the top of the big soap-stone stove in his dwelling. Crawling out of this blistering bed in the morning, he delights in taking a plunge in a cold stream, even if he breaks through the ice to do so.

In Lapland the native crawls, head and all, into a bag made of reindeer skin and sleeps warm and comfortable within it. The East Indian, at the other end of the world, also has a sleeping bag, but it is more porous than the Laplander's. Its purpose is to keep out the mosquitoes

rather than to keep its occupants warm.

The American clings to his feather pillow, but he has long since discarded the old feather bed in favor of the hair or straw or felt mattress.

Dug His Own Grave.

Haskell, Okla., Nov. 15.—Joseph Turby, seventy-five years old, assisted in digging his own grave here, although he thought it was to be the final resting place of another. Apparently in good health, Turby, with another man, dug the grave for a woman who had died, and immediately after the work was finished, Turby tumbled into the grave, dead from heart failure. Owing to the peculiar circumstances, Turby was buried in that grave.

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