

MONEY

By Victoria Benedictsson

Translated by Verne Moberg

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I

THE VILLAGE had but a single street, if it could even be called that, as it was simply a little road, without any paving whatsoever and in inexcusably poor repair. On one side was a row of five or six poor-quality houses, and on the other were some farmsteads set far enough apart for a good-sized garden to fit in between. These farms could be respectable enough, with their wide fields and regular rectangles, but to the person ambling down the road, they appeared pretty unfriendly, for all turned their backs (i.e., they were situated with outlying buildings facing out). Only in one place, where they had left the door open, could one see into the courtyard, where no living creature was visible except for a family of chickens that went about scratching in the hay.

It had been a cold and rainy summer, and now it was ended.

With her hands stuck down into the pockets of her outgrown overcoat, a young girl came walking down the street. She looked jolly and dapper; her walk had not the mincing grace of a city lady but rather the swinging style of a half-grown boy. With an unworried look, she checked the heaven's gray clouds to see if there was going to be rain again. Then she opened the door to one of the low houses and stepped into the hall, which was just big enough so that the doors could pass by each other freely. She opened the next door as well, to the frenzied racket of a ringing bell.

This was the only general store in the village, the only place to buy tobacco, coffee, and sugar. A real hovel, actually -- low, dark, and smoke-laden -- and with this indescribable odor of pressing paper, soap, and whatever else!

A young man stood behind the counter with his elbows on it and his head leaning over a book. His appearance was just as bright and amiable as the shop's was dark and disagreeable.

At the young girl's entrance, he straightened up and bowed. He looked quite nice. His blond hair was wavy, lustrous as silk and all brushed back. His skin was fair as a woman's, and there could never be a pair of eyes bluer than his. There was a certain intelligence shining behind his glasses, but there was something oppressed in his whole facial expression, and around the mouth one observed a quality of weakness which, when reinforced by a single modulation, would turn to dejection. There was nothing gallant,

nothing manly about whose leaves, him; he resembled one of these seedlings whose leaves, from lack of light, turn white instead of green.

It did not readily occur to anyone to say an unfriendly word to Axel Möller. There was this unexplainable quality in his gaze and bearing that always seemed to ask forgiveness. One felt an involuntary compassion -- and yet he was neither sick, nor old, nor poor.

Even Selma Berg's boyish ways grew somewhat subdued when she spoke with him.

"I didn't come to buy anything," she said, walking up to the counter. "I came to ask you for something."

"Me?" he repeated cheerily, and a faint flush ran up his cheeks.

She felt abashed. True, they had met a few times in the parsonage of course, but it did seem dreadfully forward this way. His shyness registered itself with her, and her fingers toyed nervously with the loose threads of the coil of packing twine.

"Richard has said that your grandfather on your mother's side has a lot of drawings and sketches by your mother's brother."

There was a gleam behind the glasses, a kind of silent affirmation.

"I would like. . . oh, I would be so grateful if you would ask your grandfather . . . I would be so terribly glad if I got to see them."

The young man kept silent and seemed to hesitate.

Selma flushed so the tears came to her eyes. She had been awfully pushy, after all. "Or you don't think that your grandfather. . . ?"

"Grandfather, yes. There's nothing he loves more than to show all those things." He thought it over a moment. "I'll go in and tell Mother," he said rapidly.

He went in to the family room and returned after a few moments.

"Please step inside," he said holding the door open.

Selma accepted the invitation and stepped into a large living room with small windows on both sides. At one of them were sitting Mother Möller and her daughter, occupied with handiwork.

Selma had only seen the old woman in church, but once this sharp-nosed physiognomy had been glimpsed, it was not forgotten.

The son made the introductions, and the young girl uttered some words of apology for her audacity. Their reception was a bit sour, but Selma paid no mind. She knew of Mother Möller the way people know each other in a little village like this, and she knew that the old woman was not in the habit of being amiable. Besides, what was the old hag to her! And so she stuck her hands in her coat pockets and took on the look of a true street urchin. That was her usual solution when someone proved to be unfriendly.

Her curious glance flew about the room and then paused at a little picture hanging over a bureau. It was best to get a look around now; one didn't come here so often.

"Did your uncle paint it?" she asked, turning to the young man.

But before he could answer, his mother interjected: "No, Axel did that. When he was a child, he dabbled at that sort of thing."

"Do you intend to become a painter?"

"No, he doesn't intend to. We've had one painter in the family, and that's been more than enough."

"How well done it is. Mr. Möller has clearly inherited the gift from his uncle."

"Then that's all that he inherited from him, and it wasn't much to have. Lord knows how much money was spent on him, and when he died, he left nothing behind him but debt."

"But imagine -- such a name!"

"You can't live off that, let me tell you, Miss."

Mother Möller pinched her lips together in a way that irremediably severed the thread of conversation.

Selma cast a glance at the young man. He understood her.

"Grandfather's room is out here -- may I ask you to walk this way?"

With a farewell greeting for the hostess, Selma left the room, and when her escort had closed the door behind them, she drew a sigh of relief.

They walked through a drawing room -- reserved, tasteless, symmetrical. One could get a chill, just looking at it.

The next room had a completely different character.

"This is mine," said Mr. Möller.

Selma looked around her. She had this alert gaze that takes in everything, even down to the smallest details. It was a shabby room, but it looked lived in. One could sit there for hours and still not feel lonely, so much had the owner's taste left its imprint on everything.

"You read a good deal," said the guest, looking around her.

"At every free moment."

"What?" she asked and examined the spines of several volumes acquired from a country book auction.

"Ah, novels! Don't you read anything else?"

"Oh, yes, poetry; that's what I like best, and then historical works. Don't you ever read novels, Miss?"

"Yes, of course, but I also read philosophy and physics."

Her inimitable tone of voice was totally lost on him; he was much too naive to laugh. On the contrary, he felt almost admiration.

"Isn't it difficult?" he asked shyly.

"It depends how you take it," she answered lightly. She was already beginning to sense her superiority.

"Do you play violin?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Who have you studied with?"

"I taught myself. Mother never wanted to put up the money for me."

"And that little upright piano -- is that yours too?"

"Yes, but it's very poor quality. I wish I could afford to get a new one."

"Afford?" she repeated. "Why, people knew that Mother Möller was rich."

"Yes, afford," he repeated smiling.

She nodded to herself in a very knowing way, seeming to say: now I understand.

Everywhere in the room was so much that could entice, all sorts of things that would enchant a schoolboy who "collects." Mosses and rocks, big snails, flint arrowheads, and -- the best of all! -- a little aquarium of a primitive sort with "water busses" and newts in it. But it was not appropriate for them to stay there any longer, and so they went on.

Through a little passage or entry hall they came to the old man's room.

"Grandfather, Miss Berg wishes to see Uncle's drawings," said her escort as he stepped in and held the door open for her. His voice here had a completely different ring than a moment ago.

The old man sat reading in the easy chair by the writing desk. He got up and set his glasses on his forehead. It was remarkable how the grandson resembled him, but the old man looked more nimble.

"Welcome," he said heartily, reaching out his hand to her.

"I'm quite forward," she said with a candid glance into the old man's face, "but for me nothing is more fun than drawing and sketching; I'm just crazy about it. . . and now when I knew that there was so much here to see. . . The temptation got too strong." She burst out in an unwarranted little laugh. There was a fresh ring to it, and the old man liked her.

Axel stood in the middle of the floor balancing, first on one leg, then on the other, looking as if he were standing there enjoying something.

"How kind of you, how kind," said the old man, patting her confidently on the shoulder, as if they had known each other for a long time.

The grandson looked around with visible pleasure although all this must be so endlessly old to him.

"Miss," he said suddenly, "what do you think?" He pointed to a lithograph hanging opposite the window, above the bed.

The young girl stood still, just looking. It was the very idea in this picture that struck her -- she who still lived half in the make-believe world of childhood. Why, there it was in the flesh, with lovely fairy creatures, fanciful and bewitching as the summer night itself. That was something for her!

Axel Möller was about to hold his breath, he was so afraid of interrupting.

Here in Grandfather's room they had taken sprout, all the seeds that nature had put in his mind, here they had germinated without air and light -- sickly and twisted -- and

here he had entered into the old man's adoration of the deceased. To him it was as if the spirit of the artist had lingered on here, and now when she stood there in quiet admiration, it was his god she bowed down to.

His seclusion from the world, in combination with his mother's severity, had since childhood made his willpower shrivel up into a dwarf's body, while his imagination had developed enough to fill a giant's head. He was one of these characters who think they are born to suffer, just because they've acquired the capacity to surrender to a mood.

"Oh, how enchanting!" exclaimed Selma, stretching her fingers out inside her coat pockets.

A devout silence returned.

Her listeners had no sense of the comic, and the discrepancy between her full-fledged young lady's delight and these purely adolescent ways did not occur to them.

"And what's this?" she said, gesturing with her hand toward the other pictures lining the walls. Of course, she couldn't remain standing there admiring for all eternity, either!

"They're all copies of his works. He always used to send them home to me. And this oil painting is a study of a model that he did himself," said the old man with pride.

It was a naked body and an ugly head, cleverly executed. "Ugh, how dreadful!" thought Selma, using a phrase from boarding school, but she said nothing.

"It's getting dark. Can't I light Grandfather's lamp?" asked Axel.

"How stupid of me to have come here so late!" lamented Selma, "but it's because I walked for an hour on the road, wondering if I should dare to or not."

With that they laughed, so the ice was broken; she sensed that she was their favorite.

"May I take my coat off?" she asked. And the old man helped her himself, while the grandson lit the lamp and rolled down the curtain.

It was as if the old furniture had just needed this. It no longer appeared rigid and angular. Everything went together so nicely; it was nothing but old memories and old stories. How homey it felt in this room!

The grandson pulled up the grandfather's chair and invited the guest to sit down in it. His happy expression became him; he looked more lively than usual.

"Grandfather, will you take out the portfolios?" he asked.

The old man opened the desk and started to take out his treasures. Selma jumped up and sat down in the easy chair. How free one could be with these people!

She leaned back over the chair's back support to look at the room behind her. The lamplight fell sideways over her upturned face and clearly illuminated her sprightly undeveloped figure. Beautiful she was not, rather the opposite, but there was a freshness reminiscent of a cloud-free winter day with snow and jingling sleigh bells.

This room pleased her. There was no halfness: it was completely what it was. With indescribable pleasure she let her eyes glide around walls, which were crammed full: no place was left empty. And then everything was so dark, so it really drew the lamplight to it. And think how fun it must be to poke around in all these cupboards and drawers! She gave a laugh.

"This really is nice!"

Her joy was reflected in the young man's face. He stood looking at her.

"Look here," said the old man and lay a huge pile of studies on the table. Then he drew up a chair beside her, to be able to explain everything; and the grandson stood behind to look over her shoulder.

She was so interested -- examining and asking. In doing so she looked so trustingly into the old man's face that his reticence thawed: he became openhearted and talkative. While they went through the contents of the portfolios, he talked of this son who'd been the pride of his life.

"You see, Miss, I was a house painter," he said, "but let me say that I knew my business. With me he got the first fundamentals, and -- you see, Miss -- that served him well ever afterwards."

This was the old man's inexhaustible source of joy, having given him "the first fundamentals." It was his gospel, and he had to believe in it, even if all else should shatter.

"Let me tell you, Miss, it cost something. First keeping him in school in Lund -- because, you see, he was supposed to pursue his studies, of course. For you see, if you're going to become a painter, it's not enough just to smear some paint around; you're supposed to know a thing or two. And then in Stockholm at the academy. But of course I was a clever workman and, why, there was no greater pleasure I could have than to work for my boy. Sara, she got tired -- naturally -- but you couldn't pay any mind to that.

Sara, that was Mother Möller.

Axel nudged the old man a bit with his hand. He did not find the last remark quite appropriate. After all, Miss Berg was a fine lady, and Grandfather should maintain his dignity.

Selma looked up and smiled with a glance that seemed to say: let him talk.

"The baron was pretty decent," continued the old man, "as he helped him the whole time, when things were tight."

For the old house painter, there existed no more than one baron in the world, and this was the one at whose estate he'd been employed.

And so he went on talking.

Selma had this way of listening with complete and undivided attention, making quite a pleasant impression on the one talking, and the thoughtful little expression on her face had all the impact of consummate flattery.

Everything appeared to her to be interesting beyond measure -- the room, the people, the story.

Now she had forgotten the fantastic picture over there, with the moonlight and Näcken, the water sprite.¹

And through all this the young man stood behind her chair enjoying the happy feelings she had brought. For him she was something so completely different from the usual, for to his mother's house there seldom came women other than farm wives or now and then a rich young lady from Åbo² who greeted her sister and then tried to prove she was so high and mighty that she could hardly speak or move like an ordinary person. With a mixture of uppity farmer pride and the vanity of affluence, Mother Möller detested all that the phrase "persons of rank" implied and despite all the pleas she could not bring herself to let her daughter wear a hat. A kerchief was the thing.

It was growing late, but Selma didn't seem to notice. There was still so much to ask and find out about here. This pleased both of her hosts, and at the same time they felt a certain anxiety, as when a little bird audaciously hops into the room, and one is afraid of reminding him with a single motion that he's not in his place. It's glorious to see his assured confidence, and yet one knows he may fly away at any moment.

Sometimes, when she found a drawing that she liked better than the others, she threw herself against the back of the chair and looked up into the young man's face to see if he shared her admiration. Then always she met his gaze, smiling toward her, but with a certain quality of melancholy.

And he saw her in full illumination.

She had a wide, white forehead over which her yellow hair fell in straggling bangs, her nose was small -- of a droll model -- her skin the freshest imaginable, and her thin lips were so decidedly red that they seemed painted. But perhaps they appeared so in contrast to the whiteness of her chin. The lower part of her face was as sharp and pointed as the upper was broad and firm. It gave her a peculiar appearance of determination at the same time as it made her ugly.

"Oh, how late it is, and now it's quite dark out!" she exclaimed, jumping up so impulsively that Axel was nudged by the chair.

"What time can it be?" She turned her head in every direction to see the clock. "Half past seven! Then I'm worried about making Uncle and Aunt unhappy; I won't get to supper on time."

She went over to the bed where her coat was lying and pulled it on her with a flick of the wrist.

"A thousand thanks -- it's been such fun," she said, shaking hands with the old man while she agilely fastened her hat with her free hand. "But -- ah, if only I were home!"

"I'll accompany you, Miss," said Axel.

"Yes, that's all very well! But -- the disgrace I'm in for!"

Axel opened the door.

"Isn't it possible to leave by any other way than through your mother's room?" she asked hurriedly.

"Yes through this hallway," he answered, feeling relief at this himself.

They came out on the little village street. It was dark, and light drizzle fell on them.

"Wait a minute, and I'll run after Grandpa's umbrella."

He ran in and came right back again, whereupon they set off on their way. She walked up close to him, as he was holding the umbrella.

"We'll take the shortcut around the railway embankment, all right?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. And so they fell silent for a time.

When they came to the gate, he opened it, and they walked over to the smooth ground between the railway tracks, where it was stomped down by the steps of the linemen.

"Wouldn't it be easier to walk if you held me by the arm?" he asked.

She thought for a moment whether it might be acceptable, then took his arm.

The rain pattered against the umbrella, for a strong wind was blowing. They kept in step with each other.

"It's instructive to hear how others have blazed a trail for themselves," she said.

"For me it's discouraging."

"Why?"

"I see all those other people get ahead in the world, but not me."

"Why not you?"

"Because it's too late now."

"But then why didn't it happen earlier?"

"Money, money! Mother doesn't care about anything in the whole world except money. Before I didn't realize that; now I see it."

She held more firmly to his arm than in the beginning, and the mutual shyness had disappeared. She noticed that he would have liked to speak with her as with a sensible older person. Why, it was almost an obligation to fulfill!

"Tell me," she said hurriedly.

"What?"

"Everything. Don't you think I can keep quiet?"

"There's nothing to tell; nothing that can amuse anybody."

"Amuse!" she burst out in contempt. Precisely as if she had not long since outgrown just being amused.

"Hmmm."

There were several seconds' pause. Now she was offended.

He noticed it.

"Can that be of interest to you, Miss?" he said hesitantly and with a certain softness.

"Well, then," she said emphatically and yanked him by the arm. That was her way, when some of her friends at the boarding school had something on their mind that couldn't come out.

"Ohhh, Miss, if my sister were only the least bit like you!"

"What is she like?"

"She doesn't care about anything -- anything at all -- and I feel so frightfully lonely."

"But, of course, you have your grandfather."

"He's so old."

"And then you do have my cousin Richard."

"There's a big difference. He's at the university, and I'm between the counter and the snuff keg."

"And then of course you have me. What was it now? Tell me!" He was silent a moment: she had said a couple of words that he had to say over again to himself. His voice was changed when he answered; there was something suppressed in it.

"Miss, I'm not even able to talk. I've never had anybody to speak to."

She didn't say anything. A woman's instinct told her that he needed only time.

"It's wrong, what they've done to me," he began. "I am nothing: I don't know how to do anything, and everything I try gets botched. I can't even sell herring and salt properly. . . I can't speak up for my wares. It's disgusting to me, the whole thing. I'm sick of it now."

"But then why don't you become something else?"

"Mother doesn't want me to."

"Why?"

"She says that I can take over the shop; that's enough to live on."

"Well?"

"Can I bear being in that dark hole in the wall day in and day out?"

"But why don't you go your own way?"

"Where would I get the funds to travel? And how far does a person get without knowledge, without recommendations? If I were bound hand and foot it couldn't be worse."

"But legally you're of age, of course?"

"What does that help, when a person doesn't have anything to be of age about?"

"Don't you have an inheritance from your father?"

That sounded like awfully good common sense, but he took no notice of it. That sort of thing was always lost upon him.

"No, I don't have anything. Father died when we were quite small, and there was nothing. Mother has set the shop up herself and scraped everything together."

"She's rich, isn't she?"

"Well, they say so." "But -- I know -- if she started with nothing, why can't you do it?"

He was silent a moment in the face of this question.

"Oh -- Miss -- it's not that easy."

"Hmmm -- well, at least I'm obliged to earn money, that's for sure."

"Why?"

"My papa is getting poorer and poorer, and soon he'll have nothing to give me. Everything is going backwards."

She made the last remark in such an indescribably comic fashion -- as if, with that, everything was said, as if that would be the most natural thing, for it to "go backwards." An indisputable fact and nothing more.

"What are you all going to do then?" he asked, as interested as if he'd found a gold mine.

"Well, I don't really know, but I've got to have money. You see, I want to become an artist -- an animal painter, I believe -- but naturally I don't dare talk about that for now, since it costs a lot of money. I have to get some first."

"But how is that going to work?"

"Well, you see, I have my plans. . . and then of course it could happen that a person met somebody. . ."

"What?"

"Somebody who could help you, like that baron helped your uncle."

He was silent. It passed like a sting through his heart. What if this were the case? Then she would go away -- maybe be a success -- and he would stay on behind alone.

"Imagine if you became a painter too, if we became friends!"

Her exclamation came abruptly, fresh with youth. It was a blast of wind that instantly demolished all his romantic ideas so that they started circling around in his head -- air castles and mirages -- 11 in one moment. Her as a friend! He saw her again leaning back over the chair with her face fully illuminated. . . Her as a friend, and freedom . . . freedom! He had to pause a moment. "What is it? Lord God in heaven -- yes," he said with a deep breath. And so they went on along the road. ut their thoughts had taken a new track. It was purely dreams of the future, half jest and half serious. They had at once acquired mutual interests, mutual successes, and mutual enemies. And so they thought of neither the rain nor the road but walked a good bit beyond the gate where they were to have turned off to the parsonage.

Then they had to go back.

He sighed heavily when they were standing by the gate. There were only a few more steps, and then they would part.

"All in good time," she said, "that's my motto."

"Mottoes lie," he observed in a depressed tone of voice. For a moment they walked quietly along the road.

"Imagine if we'd come upon the train, then it would have been our last walk," he said; "In this weather I hardly think we would have heard it."

He found a certain joy in saying this.

Selma did not answer; she was thinking of the roads approaching. And then they were at the garden gate.

"Good night," she said and reached out her hand to him.

It never would have occurred to him to give it a warm squeeze.

And so they parted.

When Selma had taken off her wrap, she walked into the family's living room. Her uncle was lying on the sofa reading a newspaper, and his wife was sitting beside him knitting stockings. Selma's experienced eyes immediately discovered that they had been having supper.

"Forgive me, Aunt, for coming so late," she said in a cordial voice, but one free of all submissiveness. "I went in to Mother Möller's father's place to see all the drawings he has, and I didn't keep track of the time. It was so annoying, really, I thought."

Her uncle was obviously cross, for he offered no reply and didn't look up from his paper, though it was clearly apparent he was not reading.

"How did you get home, Selma?" asked her aunt.

"I walked, naturally," replied Selma, offended by the surly looks.

"Alone?"

"No, Mr. Möller came with."

"But I should say, it's not really the accepted thing, to run around on the road with men at this time of day."

"I didn't run around with him, either."

"No backtalk," roared the pastor, looking up.

"God forbid, Uncle," she said, regarding him with a certain roguish expression, which she used masterfully when necessary.

"Don't use God's name in vain, I've told you that for the last time."

She gave him the disarming look of a young rascal that seemed to say: I'll shut up -- since I still can't say anything to please you, my little old man.

He turned to his paper, for he had difficulty looking stern though he wanted to. He had been so angry through the whole meal that he really was boiling inside. But now when she was standing there so flushed and white and cheerful, he couldn't grasp onto a word of all he'd wanted to say.

"But let me say this, Selma," began the aunt in a lecturing voice (she never used the familiar *du* form for "you" when she was angry).³ "I would go so far as to say that it's highly inappropriate to be out walking and having young gentlemen follow you home, when a person is as young as you are, Selma. A virtual rendez-vous, a tête à tête for two! Oh yes -- that would have been something in my younger days, thank you! No, folks then had to watch themselves, all right."

"But I assure you, Aunt, we didn't say the least thing other than what the whole world --" ("Could have heard," she'd intended to say, but she had a scrupulous love of truth and therefore checked herself.) "Well, that is to say, we spoke only about business." she added.

"Business?" repeated the wife with surprise verging on horror, "has he spoken to you about his business?"

"Yes, he has. I've spoken to him about mine, too; what's so remarkable about that?"

"What's that supposed to mean, 'your business'?" asked the uncle in a very dry voice.

She took one step closer, driven by a burning desire to act, to make a change. She was a very enterprising, undaunted woman.

"Well, that is, I think I would like to earn something."

"Really, would you?" he answered in a respectful voice, somewhat tainted by a sneer. "And how is that supposed to work, if I may be permitted to ask? Were you perhaps going to go into business with Mr. Möller?"

She was so occupied by her plans that she had not had time to think what there could possibly be beneath his words.

"Well, you know, Uncle, what I could do better than my friends at boarding school was drawing, so I thought it would be best to try my luck for something in that line."

"Ah-hah."

"Yes. And so I thought perhaps Uncle would help me get into the technical school in Stockholm. They get to learn a whole lot of practical things there that they can make money on later. I can't rely on my papa, you know."

"No-o-o. That's for certain, God help you!"

"Yes, but anyhow, Uncle, was that so stupid?"

"We'll have to see, won't we. But let me tell you, it takes a whole lot of money for that too."

"Yes, that's surely true: you don't get anyplace without money!" she burst out with a trace of worry on her brow. "But couldn't I take out life insurance on myself?"

"But child," he said emphatically, "where have you got all this nonsense from?"

She looked down and set her mouth in an expression of shame, but didn't reply. All this out-of-place business talk she had learned in associating with her father, of course. It kept coming out of her mouth and causing a nuisance.

She stuck her index finger into one of the buttonholes on her dress, where she turned and twisted it, embarrassed. She knew that she was making a fool of herself with all this, but now that things were this way. . .

"Of course, I have my inheritance from Mother," she reminded them, blushing red hot.

"Yes. Approximately how large do you think it can be?" the uncle asked with hard-won gravity.

"Seven hundred thirty-one crowns and eighty-two öre,"⁴ she answered with a low voice, about to cry. She was very sensitive to ridicule, and now she knew he would find it funny, that she kept so close account of it. But she could not lie.

"But you're not of age, you can't get at it!" He was struggling not to laugh, so it felt as if his insides were turned upside down.

"I was thinking, that if a person presented a petition --"⁵

Then it broke loose, quite uncontrollably; he roared with laughter.

The flush had risen to the roots of her hair, and she pushed out her lips even more so as not to burst into tears, but she remained standing in her place in the lamplight. She was a courageous woman.

"Well, I'll think about it; perhaps it can be arranged," said her uncle. Now he felt sorry for her.

"Then I can write to Papa about the matter?" she asked without looking up, still in her business voice.

"Yes, you can. I'll write this evening too."

"But my dear little Berg," said his wife in her ceremonious tone, so full of circumlocution, "that sort of thing, naturally, can't enter the question till later on. Why, there's no way to tell. . . that is, it's not the woman's true calling, you know, and those new opinions. . . yes, I would go so far, even up to the point of saying it's not really right. hat older unmarried women take refuge in such things, why, that's quite in order, but at Selma's age a lady certainly has a good deal else and more necessary things to learn. It's not such an easy thing to look after a house, and any man with some sense always manages to get a clever girl, believe you me."

"But nobody would have me, that's for sure," objected Selma, emphatically earnest.

Her uncle coughed. It was an artificial, cautionary cough.

"Now you can go in and eat, Selma," said her aunt.

Her uncle watched her leave, to see when she was out of hearing range.

"It may be a good thing in any case, not having to throw yourself away on just any fellow, " he said.