

say was: how could I, not why should I. But you ought to have known."

He would not digress from his subject to dispose of trivial matters.

"Why," he continued, "if I stay in this dump—"

"Dump?"

"Well, Barnsville. If I stay here all my life I'll never amount to anything. Take a bird's-eye view of that bunch of corner-store loafers, Bertha; you know as well as I do that they've gone to the very worst kind of seed just from hanging around Barnsville."

He waited for her to gainsay the fact, but she made no attempt to do so. She merely made some vague remark about his age, which started him off afresh. As dusk came on his spirits darkened a little, however, and he talked less and less of himself and his future.

Bertha tactfully subdued him by references to the happy times they had spent together in their hometown. And if the summer moon that rose above the surface of the lake had had ears as well as eyes it might have heard Ward say:

"You see, Bertha, it's really for your sake that I want to do something. We'll be twenty pretty soon now, you know, and it's time I was getting somewhere."

The thought that he was, after all, working for her was too sweet to question: she said nothing.

For the next few days Ward was morose at his work. The efforts of Mr. Ned Thomas to atone for his harsh words were manifestly—not to say ludicrously—sincere; but in proportion as he made himself agreeable did his clerk become disagreeable. Finally the merchant, to whom all village sons under