

At The Mill

BY MARY KYLE DALLAS. At dinner time Ruth came out of the factory and sat upon a stone step in the stone yard with her lunch-basket. I had been here for some time in the midst of the other girls, the merriest of them all, at this time, but now she wanted to get by herself. She wanted to think, as we generally do, when we are in that condition of mind when we could almost fancy ourselves to have a dual identity. One Ruth Rawdon seemed to hold an argument with another Ruth Rawdon in this wise: The first was the old Ruth she had known for nineteen years—the mother's obedient daughter, the good Sunday-school scholar, the steady, sensible little Ruth to whom duty was before everything else. That Ruth talked in this way. "I am engaged to Charles Arthur. I am very fond of him. I ought to be to his good, so fond of me. We have been promised in marriage a long while. I have been so sorry for him since he met with that accident, through which my mother and I nursed him. Now that he has the engineer's place in the factory, we need wait no longer. I ought to be very glad. I am glad. I shall not work in the mill after that. I shall keep his house for him. Everybody respects him, everybody likes him; I shall be proud of him. What is this strange, wicked feeling at my heart? What does it mean?" "The other Ruth—a new Ruth—seemed to say this: "I engaged myself to Charles Arthur before I knew my own mind. I never really loved him; he is very much older than I; he has a jealous disposition. The pity I feel for his heart does not keep me from knowing that it disgraces him. I have met the man I love; I cannot help loving him. I know I shall be miserable if I do not. I won't stick to my engagement; I will break it. I love Ben. Barton, and he loves me." "Which was the real Ruth? The poor girl did not know. She felt that though she must really be going quite out of her mind. Meanwhile, at the window of his room, the engineer sat moodily, his face dark with trouble. He ought to have been happy, it seemed. When, three years before, he had lost a good position through what was called "carelessness," he had never hoped to get another so good. He had named himself for life, and had been haunted for a long while by deep remorse. Something had happened that had absorbed his whole attention, and he had forgotten his engine, and the result was a terrible one. He had retrieved his character, however. He had a good position again. He was about to be married to the prettiest girl he knew, and there were many who thought him a very enviable fellow. On the contrary, he was very wretched, for he had just made sure that Ruth cared more for Ben. Barton than she did for him, and he was furious with jealousy. He had made up his mind to talk to Ruth that noon, but the assistant engineer had been taken ill and was at home, and the engine could not be deserted. All he could do was to get near the window and watch, hoping that she would pass. If she should come that way on purpose, knowing that he was tied in that room, and look up at him and smile, then he would know she cared for him still. Where was she! Talking to Ben. Barton, perhaps; and, at this thought, he could have killed the young fellow. Before his accident he could have dared to run down into the yard and look for her, catch a kiss, and be back again; but it would take too long now. His mind went back to the day when he had forgotten his engine in the wrath he felt for a fancied insult. "What a fool I was!" he muttered. "What a comforted fool! But I repaid for it. I used to be the strongest fellow I knew, if I was not the hand-somest. How can I expect a girl to like me now?" Then a memory came to him. Once she had told him she loved him all the better for his hurt. She meant it, too, but she had not seen Ben. Barton when she said it. The big dark man with his face all blackened with his oil in his rough clothes, and with the light of the furnace on his face, might have been taken by a romantic stranger, peeping into the engine-room, for something almost demonaic, at that moment, but his heart was softening very much. He remembered the soft touch of Ruth's fingers on his brow, when he was ill—her cooling voice, "She said she loved me," he said, and he left his window and went to the other side of the room, and peeped through a crack in the boards. Then he could see the court-yard and step-stones, and there sat Ruth alone, eating her dinner out of her little basket—alone waiting for him, perhaps. All that was tender in his heart thrilled within him now. "Ruthy," he said, softly smiling unseen upon her. He whistled, but he repeated, "I am a jealous beast, so-and-so did not reacher." "Little Ruthy, I've frightened you. Why should you have a dance now and then, child? Why should you know you are pretty? I could beat myself." "Lots of steam up," said a workman, passing by the engine-room. "But I suppose the fellow knows what he's about." To strike the ground heavily with it signifies, "I am a broken stick." To open an umbrella quickly, but it is said, "My life is insured." To carry your umbrella in a case signifies that it is a shabby one. To punch an umbrella into another's ribs means, "I hope I don't bore you." To carry an open umbrella just high

hurt, and she had meant it from her soul. It came to her that this new emotion was, perhaps, a fleeting passion; that the long, old-time home tenderness was all Arthur's, and she listened to what Ben. Barton said very quietly. "I've been looking for you, Ruth," he said. "I have something I want to tell you. I can't rest until you know it. I like you so much I want you to like me. I want you to be my wife, my dear. Will you?" Ruth's heart gave one great leap. Then, to her joy, she felt that it was true to his love, after all. The words came to her. "Oh! I do like you, Mr. Barton, very much, but you are a friend. I am engaged to be married, and, of course, I could not like any one else in any other way." The blood rushed into the young man's face. "I can't say you have acted much like an engaged girl," he said. "Well, perhaps I've been wrong," said Ruth, smiling, feeling the reproach a just one, "but I thought every one knew, it is Charles Arthur. We are to be married very soon now. We've been engaged ever since I was sixteen. He is very fond of me." "That's no reason you should marry him, if you like me best," said Ben; and, really, I can't see, since it is Charles Arthur, why you shouldn't be his about the last person I should fancy a girl could like." "You see," said Ruth, "people can't tell about that." And she had scarcely ever felt so lovingly to her betrothed husband before. Little he knew it, as he watched her through the crevice in the boards, his eyes growing crimson with wrath; all forgotten but the sight he saw. He could not hear what Ruth said, and the attitude of the young man was very love-like. The engine was throbbing like a mad thing, like his own heart. A shivering little boy, with all a little boy's observing power, paused at the door, feeling that something was wrong. "There'll be a bust up," he said. Then he called: "Mister! Mister!" and at last went in and pulled him by the coat. But the engineer was an engineer no longer—only a jealous lover. Furious to be spied upon, he turned and gave the boy a kick. Meanwhile Ben. Barton had arisen. "Well, I'm not one to stand in another fellow's way," he said. "Good-by, Ruth. I ain't say you again very soon. I suppose, and I've liked you a good deal. Will you let me have one kiss; just one, you know, to say all is over." "I think there can be no harm in that," said Ruth. Charles Arthur's eye was at the crevice again just in time to see that kiss. "I'm right! He's got her!" he yelled. And then—what was it—the noise, the beating pulse, that shook the building? He turned—a memory of that past scene of horror and destruction rushing over him. "Again! again! again!" he shrieked, and flew to his engine. It was too late! What had happened? Ruth did not know. Bewildered, shaken, horrified, she stood amongst fallen beams and burning boards, and found herself unharmed. Ben held her tight. Neither were injured, but at their feet, cast there as it seemed, through the broken wall, lay a dead man—torn, mutilated, terrible to see, with that look of horror frozen on his face; and she knew him. The engineer was the only man killed by that explosion, though others escaped only as it seemed, by a miracle. At the instant the boy who had called him gave his evidence. "I saw something was going to bust, and I called him, but he was peekin' through a crack. I peeked too—he was watchin' another fellow kiss his gal. I guess that made him so mad he didn't care what bust." It was the week after Charles Arthur's funeral that Ben. Barton met Ruth Rawdon near her father's house, and went up to her and held out his hand. Ruth did not take it. She turned away. "I could not touch your hand," she said. "I hate you. Never, never speak to me again. Oh! my Charley—my Charley!" "Umbrella Flirtation." To place your umbrella in a rack indicates that it is about to change owners. To open it quickly in the street means that somebody's eye is going to be put out. To shut it, that a hat or two is to be knocked off. An umbrella carried over the woman the man getting nothing, but the dripping of the rain, signifies courtship. When the man has the umbrella, and the woman the drippings, it signifies marriage. To punch your umbrella into a person and then open it, means, "I dislike you." To swing your umbrella over your head signifies, "I am making a nuisance of myself." To trail your umbrella along the sidewalk means that the man behind you is thirsting for your blood. To carry it at right angles under your arm signifies that an eye is to be lost by the man who follows you. To let it fall on the ground indicates that it will become muddy. To wipe your face with it means, "I have no handkerchief. This is a severe wipe." To strike the ground heavily with it signifies, "I am a broken stick." To open an umbrella quickly, but it is said, "My life is insured." To carry your umbrella in a case signifies that it is a shabby one. To punch an umbrella into another's ribs means, "I hope I don't bore you." To carry an open umbrella just high

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