

# The Storyteller

## HER FATHER'S GUARDIAN.

Mr. Baxton Miller was the wealthy owner of a steel plant in Northern Illinois. It appeared to be no trouble to him to accumulate dollars; but it did appear to the outside working world that Mr. Miller's ever-increasing wealth was accompanied by an equal increase of avarice and an unbearable tyranny over his employees. The more they did the more he exacted from them, while he invariably refused to raise their wages. In fact, things had reached such a pitch that the men would bear it no longer, and the result was a general strike.

Things were in this unsettled state when one day a group of the strikers congregated outside their place of labor in no very peaceful frame of mind, judging from the expression of their faces. It was noon hour, and a very hot day in July.

Prominent among the men was one Anthony Dwyer, a noted desperado, for whom nothing was too daring. He was the centre of attraction just then, for he was in the act of telling his companions that he would do something desperate to end their troubles.

'To-day, my friends, to-day,' he said, 'not later than to-day,' and as though to add earnestness and determination to his threats, he disclosed the shining muzzle of a loaded revolver, which he had concealed in an inside pocket.

Look well at him, dear reader, as the demon of murder takes possession of his soul. See his haggard face and wandering eye. Watch him as he leaves the others and steals into his master's garden with a grim smile of satisfaction as he spies the object of his search, Mr. Baxton Miller, among the flowers. That gentleman is giving instructions to his head gardener, utterly unconscious of the danger that lurks near him.

Dwyer, pleased with the situation, crouched behind the shrubbery to await a satisfactory moment in which to do his cowardly deed.

It came sooner than he expected. Mr. Miller finished his instructions and walked off to a more secluded part of the grounds, where he sought a rustic seat, deep in thought.

'There he is!' thrust Dwyer between his teeth, as though communicating with an unseen companion. 'Doesn't he hide well his rascality? Oh, how I hate him! See, his sins are weighing him down. Now's my chance,' and with a devilish chuckle he stole through the shrubs till he found himself close behind his hated master. His hand sought his revolver and with an other fiendish glare of triumph was just about to pull the trigger, when a tiny girlish form sprang upon Miller's knee and broke the awful stillness with her rippling laughter.

'I knew I would surprise you, papa,' she said, settling herself on his knee. 'I've been hunting you high up and low down. And now that I've found you I'm very tired and would just like to stay here and rest.'

'You can rest here, darling, but I'm afraid papa will not be able to stay with you, for he has important work to attend to.'

'Oh, papa, you have always 'portant work to do. Don't you think that I am a little bit 'portant sometimes. Since mamma died I've only you, and you know, papa, I ran away from nurse just to talk with you. And now you won't stay with me,' and with a suppressed baby sigh she hid her curly head on his shoulder.

'Now, Hetty, don't be unreasonable, child. I thought that all good little girls understood that their papas had to work to make money.'

'Work, indeed!' thought Dwyer, as he studied the contrast between father and child. 'You would be a darned side better if you did have to work, you hardened scoundrel! How I would love to put this bullet through you; but the sight of that little angel unmans me. Heavens! I feel as if I had no strength left! Why did she come here at this minute?'

'But why must you have money, papa,' she was saying. 'Everybody isn't rich and they can live just as well as we can.'

'Perhaps,' he replied absently. 'Sometimes I think it isn't worth the trouble. But then there is the glory of it.'

'I don't know anything about glory,' said the little daughter, 'but I s'pose I will when I get big.'

'Yes, that's it, Hetty, that's it, dear,' and he stroked her golden hair. 'When you get big, I can talk of these things to you, but now you are too young.'

'You may play with your dollies now, pet, or run after butterflies in the meadow while I go and arrange my business. Want a kiss? All right. Now, good-bye.'

He took the garden path towards the house, while Hetty, overjoyed at the permission to hunt butterflies in the meadow, skipped off in that direction, her large lace hat dangling by its strings from her neck. Dwyer followed and kept her within sight.

'Butterflies, butterflies, come when I call,  
High-a-fly, sky-a-fly, over the wall;  
Yellow or red or purple or blue,  
Butterflies, butterflies, I will catch you.'

Over and over again she sang these lines with an air all her own, as she ran heedlessly along among the sweet-smelling clover. Presently a big yellow butterfly fluttered just under her eyes, and dared her to follow him in his uncertain course.

'Isn't he a beauty,' she exclaimed, as she darted after it.

First on one flower, then on another he alighted, but however quietly she tiptoed after him, he always eluded her little fingers.

This and many similar attempts and failures were experienced until at last the child, tired out and over come by the oppressive heat, threw herself gladly in the long grass, and, ignorant of the fact that Dwyer was near-by watching her, was soon fast asleep. Her sun-bonnet, which had since come undone, was caught carelessly in one plump hand, while the other reposed under her rosy cheek. She looked what she was, a perfect picture of lovely innocence. As Dwyer gazed down at her, strange emotions filled his soul.

Why did he so readily forsake that chance of taking his master's life? Had he not waited for it—longed for it? It came, but he did not profit by it. Why did he not dodge the father's footsteps instead of coming after his innocent child? He did not mean to harm her. Then why did he follow her?

To none of these questions could Dwyer find an answer. Some unseen power had forced him to abandon his murderous intentions and keep watch over the little wanderer.

'After all, how could I harm the father of that angel?' he thought as he continued to look at her. 'To kill the father would mean to leave the child an orphan, and surely what would be more cruel! Oh, no, my God!' he cried, and his strong frame shook with emotion. 'I will not do it. Heaven help me to be strong. How sweetly and calmly she sleeps,' he thought 'all unconscious that she has saved her father's life, and me from becoming a murderer!'

He shuddered at the awful meaning of the word became clear to him, and from the depths of his soul rose a prayer for pardon which pierced the clouds and found favor with God.

Hetty turned her golden head, and a smile—Dwyer thought it a heavenly one—played around her dimpled mouth.

He moved cautiously away lest he should wake her, and sitting down at a short distance he continued to keep his vigil over her.

Before long, discordant sounds broke on the still air, and lending an attentive ear, Dwyer discovered that they were the voices of his enraged fellow-laborers, coming no doubt in maddened desperation to seek redress of grievance at the master's house.

In an instant Dwyer was up, his blood boiling with anger as the old rebellious feelings were awakened on hearing the shouts of his comrades. But one glance at the little form outstretched in sleeping beauty, and all rebellious thoughts were stilled within his breast.

On came the noisy band of strikers from their cottages. They were now in the meadow, and close upon the spot where lay Hetty asleep and Dwyer concealed.

'Hello! what's this?' shouted the foremost, as he caught sight of the child. 'I'll be blown if it isn't the boss's young 'un. What d'ye say, boys, if we make short work of her to begin with,' and he advanced to the now awakened and terrified Hetty.

'Stand back, you infernal murderers,' yelled Dwyer, springing at them like a tiger. 'Stand back, I say! Touch not a hair of her head or it is with me you will have to deal,' and he took the weeping baby in his arms.

'Now stand aside, and tell me what brought you here?'

His comrades looked at him and at one another, unable for the instant to give an explanation. Then one stepped out.

'We want what we have always wanted and what you want yourself—fair treatment. You told us this morning you were going to free us, and an hour after you had made your escape no one knew where, while the boss extorts more unbearable regulations. We won't stand it. We want justice.'

'And you will get it if you let me have my own way,' replied Dwyer, cooling down. 'Return to your homes, and if in the morning you are not satisfied with the outlook of things, you can follow your own course.'