



## CHAPTER 1

### Ragged Dick Is Introduced to the Reader

**“W**ake up there, youngster,” said a rough voice.

Ragged Dick opened his eyes slowly. He stared blankly in the face of the speaker but did not move to get up.

“Wake up, you young loafer!” said the man a little impatiently. “I suppose you’d lay there all day, if I hadn’t called you.”

“What time is it?” asked Dick.

“Seven o’clock.”

“Seven o’clock! I oughter have been up an hour ago. I went to the show at the Old Bowery last night, and didn’t turn in till past twelve. No wonder I overslept.”

“You went to the Old Bowery? Where’d you get your money?” asked the man. He was a messenger who worked for a business on Spruce Street.

“Made it shining shoes, of course. My guardian don’t allow me no money for theaters, so I have to earn it,” he added with a grin.

“Some boys get it easier than that,” said the messenger significantly.

“You don’t catch me stealin’, if that’s what you mean,” said Dick.

“Don’t you ever steal, then?”

“No, and I wouldn’t. Lots of boys does it, but I wouldn’t.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear you say that. I believe there’s some good in you, Dick, after all.”

“Oh, I’m a rough customer!” said Dick. “But I wouldn’t steal. It’s mean.”

“I’m glad you think so, Dick.” The rough voice sounded gentler than at first. “Have you got any money to buy your breakfast?”

“No, but I’ll soon get some.”

While this conversation had been going on, Dick had gotten up. His bedroom had been a wooden box half-full of straw. The young boot-black had slept in his clothes.

He jumped out of the box, shook himself, and picked out one or two straws that had found their way into tears in his clothes. Pulling his well-worn cap over his uncombed hair, he was all ready for the business of the day.

Dick’s appearance as he stood beside the box was rather peculiar. His pants were torn in several places. They had apparently once belonged to a boy two sizes larger than he was. His vest had only two buttons. Out of it peeked a shirt that looked as if it had been worn for a month. To complete his costume he wore a ragged coat that was too long for him.

Dick was above such refinements as washing his hands and face. He had no particular dislike of dirt and did not think it necessary to remove several dark streaks on his face and hands. But in spite of his dirt and rags, there was something about him that caught people's attention. He had a frank, straightforward manner that made him appealing. He had a surprising maturity for a fourteen year old.

Dick's business hours had commenced. He had no office to open. His shoeshine box was ready for use, and he looked sharply in the faces of all who passed, asking each, "Shine yer boots, sir?"

"How much?" asked a gentleman on his way to his office.

"Ten cents," said Dick, sinking to his knees on the sidewalk, flourishing his brush with the air of one skilled in his profession.

"Ten cents! Isn't that a little steep?"

"Well, you know 'taint all clear profit," Dick said, setting to work. "There's the polish costs something, and I have to get a new brush pretty often."

"And you have a large rent too, I imagine," the gentleman joked, as he looked at a large tear in Dick's coat.

"Yes, sir," said Dick, always ready to joke. "I have to pay such a big rent for my mansion up on Fifth Avenue that I can't afford to take less than ten cents a shine. I'll give you a bully shine, sir."

"Be quick about it. I am in a hurry. So your house is on Fifth Avenue, is it?"

“It isn’t anywhere else,” grinned Dick, for he spoke the truth there.

“Who is your tailor?” asked the gentleman, looking over Dick’s clothing.

“Would you like to go to the same one?” asked Dick.

“Well, no. It strikes me that he didn’t give you a very good fit.”

“This coat once belonged to General Washington,” said Dick, comically. “He wore it all through the Revolution, and it got torn some, ‘cause he fought so hard. When he died he told his widow to give it to some smart young feller that hadn’t got no coat of his own. So she gave it to me. But if you’d like it, sir, to remember General Washington by, I’ll let you have it reasonable.”

“Thank you, but I wouldn’t want to deprive you of it. It seems you have distinguished friends. Now, my lad, I suppose you would like your money.”

“I don’t have any objection,” said Dick.

“I believe,” said the gentleman, examining his change, “I haven’t got anything smaller than twenty-five cents. Have you got any change?”

“Not a cent,” said Dick. “All my money’s invested in the Erie Railroad.”

“That’s unfortunate.”

“Shall I get the money changed, sir?”

“I can’t wait; I’ve got an appointment. I’ll give you a quarter, and you can leave the change at my office any time during the day.”



“All right, sir. Where is it?”

“125 Fulton Street. Will you remember?”

“Yes, sir. What name?”

“Greyson. The office is on the second floor.”

“All right, sir. I’ll bring it.”

“I wonder whether the little scamp will prove honest,” said Mr. Greyson to himself, as he walked away. “If he does, I’ll give him my business regularly.”

Mr. Greyson didn’t understand Dick. He wasn’t a model boy in all respects. He swore sometimes, and now and then he played tricks upon boys from the country, or gave a wrong direction

to honest old gentlemen unused to the city.

Another of Dick's faults was his extravagance. Because he was always on the lookout for business, he earned enough to have supported himself comfortably and respectably. But Dick was careless with his earnings. However much he managed to earn during the day, all was generally spent before the next morning. He liked going to the Old Bowery Theater. If he had any money left afterward, he would invite some of his friends in somewhere to have an oyster stew.

There was another way in which Dick sometimes lost money. There was a noted gambling-house on Baxter Street. In the evening it was sometimes crowded with boys like Dick. They bet their hard earned money, generally losing of course, and refreshed themselves from time to time with a vile mixture of liquor at two cents a glass. Sometimes Dick strayed in there and spent the evening gambling.

But there were some good points about Dick in spite of his faults. He was above doing anything mean or dishonorable. He would not steal, or cheat, or bully younger boys. He was frank and straightforward, resourceful and self-reliant. His nature was a noble one.