

# **ELSIE AND THE RAYMONDS**

**BY**  
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# **ELSIE AND THE RAYMONDS.**

## CHAPTER I.

“Excuse me, Miss, but do you know of any lady who wants a seamstress?” asked a timid, hesitating voice.

Lulu Raymond was the person addressed. She and Max had just alighted from the Woodburn family carriage—having been given permission to do a little shopping together—and she had paused upon the pavement for a moment to look after it as it rolled away down the street with her father, who had some business matters to attend to in the city that afternoon, and had appointed a time and place for picking the children up again to carry them home.

Tastefully attired, rosy, and bright with health and happiness, Lulu’s appearance was in strange contrast to that of the shabbily dressed girl, with pale, pinched features that wore an expression of patient suffering, who stood by her side.

“Were you speaking to me?” Lulu asked, turning quickly at the sound of the voice, and regarding the shrinking figure with pitying eyes.

“Yes, Miss, if you’ll excuse the liberty. I thought you looked kind, and that maybe your mother might want some one to do plain sewing.”

“I hardly think she does, but I’ll ask her when I go home,” replied Lulu. “Are you the person who wants the work?”

“Yes, Miss; and I’d try to give satisfaction. I’ve been brought up to the use of my needle, and the sewing machine too. And—and”—in a choking voice—“I need work badly; mother’s sick, and we’ve only what I can earn to depend on for food and clothes, and doctor, and medicine, and to pay the rent.”

“Oh, how dreadful!” cried Lulu, hastily taking out her purse.

“You are very kind, Miss; but I’m not asking charity,” the girl said, shrinking back, blushing and shamefaced.

“Of course not, you don’t look like a beggar,” returned Lulu with warmth. “But I’d be glad to help you in some suitable way. Where do you live?”

At this instant Max, whose attention had been drawn for a moment to some article in the show-window of a store near at hand, joined his sister, and with her listened to the girl’s reply.

“Just down that alley yonder, Number five,” she said. “It’s but a poor place we have; a little bare attic room, but—but we try to be content with it, because it’s the best we can do.”

“What is it she wants?” Max asked, in a low aside to Lulu.

“Sewing. I’m going to ask Mamma Vi and Grandma Elsie if they can find some for her. But we’ll have to know where she can be found. Shall we go with her to her home?”

“No; papa would not approve, I think. But I’ll write down the address, and I’m sure papa will see that they’re relieved, if they need help.”

Turning to the girl again, as he took notebook and pencil from his pocket, "What is the name of the alley?" he asked.

"Rose," she answered, adding, with a melancholy smile, "though there's nothing rosy about it except the name; it's narrow and dirty, and the people are poor, many of them beggars, drunken, and quarrelsome."

"How dreadful to have to live in such a place!" exclaimed Lulu, looking compassionately at the speaker.

"Rose Alley," murmured Max, jotting it down in his book, "just out of State Street. What number?"

"Number five, sir; and it's between Fourth and Fifth."

"Oh, yes; I'll put that down, too, and I'm sure the place can be found without any difficulty. But what is your name? We will need to know whom to inquire for."

"Susan Allen, sir."

The girl was turning away, but Lulu stopped her.

"Wait a moment. You said your mother was sick, and I'd like to send her something good to eat. I dare say she needs delicacies to tempt her appetite. Come with me to that fruit-stand on the corner," hurrying toward it as she spoke, the girl following at a respectful distance.

"That was a good and kind thought, Lu," Max remarked, stepping close to his sister's side as she paused before the fruit-stand, eagerly scanning its tempting display of fruits and confections.

“You don’t doubt papa’s approval of this?” she returned interrogatively, giving him an arch look and smile.

“No; not a bit of it; he always likes to see us generous and ready to relieve distress. I must have a share in the good work.”

“Then they’ll have all the more, for I shan’t give any less because you’re going to give, too. Oh, what delicious looking strawberries!”

“And every bit as good as they look, Miss,” said the keeper of the stand.

“What’s the price?”

“Dollar a box, Miss. They always come high the first o’ the season, you know; they were a dollar-ten only yesterday.”

“Do you think your sick mother would enjoy them?” Lulu asked, turning to Susan, who was looking aghast at the price named.

“Oh, yes, indeed, Miss; but—but it’s too much for you to give; we have hardly so much as that to spend on a week’s victuals.”

“Then I’m sure you ought to have a few luxuries for once,” said Lulu. “I’ll take a box for her,” addressing the man, and taking out her purse as she spoke.

“A dozen of those oranges, too, a pound of your nicest crackers, and one of sugar to eat with the berries,” said Max, producing his porte-monnaie.

They saw the articles put up, paid for them, put them into Susan’s hands, and hurried on their way, followed by her grateful looks.

In trembling, tearful tones she had tried to thank them, but they would not stay to listen.

“How glad she was,” said Lulu. “And no wonder, for she looks half starved. And, O Max, just think, if we hadn’t a father to take care of and provide for us we might be as poor and distressed as she is!”

“That’s so,” returned Max; “we’ve hardly a thing worth having that hasn’t come to us through my father.”

“My father, sir,” asserted Lulu, giving him a laughing glance.

“Yes, our father; but he was mine before he was yours,” laughed her brother. “Well, here we are at Blake’s, where you have an errand; at least, so you said, I think.”

They passed into the store, finding so many customers there that all the clerks were engaged; and while waiting till some one could attend to their wants, they amused themselves in scrutinizing the contents of shelves, counters, and show-cases. Some picture-frames, brackets, and other articles of carved wood attracted their attention.

“Some of those are quite pretty, Max,” Lulu remarked in an undertone; “but I think you have made prettier ones.”

“So have you; and see,” pointing to the prices attached, “they pay quite well for them. No, I’m not so sure of that, but they ask good prices from their customers. Perhaps we could make a tolerable support at the business, if we had to take care of ourselves,” he added in a half-jesting tone.

“Earn enough to buy bread and butter maybe, but not half the good things papa buys for us,” said Lulu.

“Is no one waiting upon you?” asked the proprietor of the store, drawing near.

“No, sir; they all seem to be busy,” answered Lulu.

“Yes. What can I show you? Some of this carved work? We have sold a good deal of it, and I’m sorry to say that the young lady who supplied it has decided to give up the business—and go into matrimony,” he added, with a laugh.

A thought seemed to strike Lulu, and she asked, coloring slightly as she spoke, “Does it pay well?”

The merchant named the prices he had given for several of the articles, and asked in his turn if she knew of any one who would like to earn money in that way.

“I—I’m not quite sure,” she answered. “I know a boy, and a girl too, who are fond of doing such work, and I think can do a little better than this, but—”

“You doubt if they would care to make a business of it, eh?” he said inquiringly, as she paused, leaving her sentence unfinished.

“Yes, sir; I’m not sure they would want to, or that their parents would be willing to have them do so. If you please, I should like to look at materials for fancy work.”

“Yes, Miss. This way, if you please. We have them in great variety, and of the best quality.”

Captain Raymond expected a friend on an incoming train, and had directed the children to be at the depot a few minutes before it was due. Punctuality was one of the minor virtues he insisted upon, and while interested in their shopping, they were not forgetful of the necessity for keeping their appointment with him. Their watches were consulted frequently, and ample time allowed for their walk from the last store visited to the depot.

“We are here first; our carriage isn’t in sight yet,” remarked Lulu with satisfaction, as they reached the outer door of the building.

“Yes,” said Max, “but papa will be along presently, for it wants but ten minutes of the time when the train is due.”

“And he’s never a minute late,” added Lulu.

Max led the way to the ladies’ room, seated his sister comfortably in an arm-chair, and asked if there was anything he could get, or do for her; treating her with as much gallantry as if she had been the sister of somebody else.

“Thank you, Maxie, I’m really comfortable, and in want of nothing,” she replied. “I’ll be glad if that gentleman doesn’t come,” she went on, “for it’s so much nicer to have papa all to ourselves driving home.”

“Yes; and afterward too. But we mustn’t be selfish, and perhaps he would be disappointed if his friend shouldn’t come.”

“Oh, I hadn’t thought of that! And if papa would rather have him come, I hope he will.”

“Of course you do. Ah, here comes papa now,” as a tall, remarkably fine-looking man, of decidedly military bearing, entered the room and came smilingly toward them.

“Good, punctual children,” he said. “I hope you have been enjoying yourselves since we parted?”

“Oh, yes, papa,” they answered, speaking both at once; “we did all our errands, and are ready to go home.”

“The train is just due,” he said, consulting his watch. “Ah, here it comes,” as its rush and roar smote upon their ears.

Lulu sprang up hastily.

“Wait a little, daughter,” the captain said, laying a gently detaining hand on her shoulder; “we need not be in haste, as we are not going on the train.”

“Everybody else seems to be hurrying out, papa,” she said.

“Yes; they are probably passengers. Ah, the train has arrived and come to a standstill, so we will go now. Max, you may help your sister into the carriage, while I look about for our expected guest.”

The captain scanned narrowly the living stream pouring from the cars, but without finding him of whom he was in quest. He turned away in some disappointment, and was about to step into his carriage, when a not unfamiliar voice hailed him.

“Good-evening, Captain Raymond. Will you aid a fellow-creature in distress? It seems that by some mistake my carriage has failed to meet me, though I thought they

understood that I would return home by this train. If you will give me a lift as far as your own gate I can easily walk the rest of the way to Briarwood.”

“It will afford me pleasure to do so, Mr. Clark, or to take you quite to Briarwood,” responded the captain heartily. “We have abundance of room. Step in, and I will follow.”

This unexpected addition to their party gave Lulu some slight feeling of vexation and disappointment, but her father’s proud look and smile, as he said, “My son Max and daughter Lulu, Mr. Clark,” and the affectionate manner in which, on taking his seat at her side, he put his arm about her waist and drew her close to him, went far to restore her to her wonted good-humor.

Mr. Clark said, “How do you do, my dears?” then engaged the captain in conversation, taking no further notice of the children.

But they were intelligent, well-instructed children, and when the talk presently turned upon one of the political questions of the day they were interested; for their father had taken pains to give them no little information on that and kindred topics. He did not encourage their reading of the daily secular papers—indeed forbade it, because he would not have their pure minds sullied by the sickening details of crime, or love of the horrible cultivated by minute descriptions of its punishment in the execution of murderers; but he examined the papers himself and culled from them such articles, to be read aloud in the family, as he deemed suitable and instructive or entertaining; or he would relate incidents and give instruction and explanations in his own words, which the children generally preferred to the reading.

The gentlemen were in the midst of their conversation, and the great gates leading into the avenue at Woodburn almost reached, when Mr. Clark caught sight of his own carriage approaching from the opposite direction.

He called and beckoned to his coachman, and with a hasty good-by and hearty thanks to Captain Raymond, transferred himself to his own conveyance, which at once faced about and whirled away toward Briarwood, while the Woodburn family carriage turned into the avenue and drove up to the house.

Violet and the three younger children were on the veranda, waiting for its coming, and ready with a joyful welcome to its occupants.

"Papa, papa!" shouted little Elsie, as they alighted, "Max and Lu, too! Oh, I'se so glad you all tum back adain!"

"Are you, papa's sweet pet?" returned the captain, bending down to take her in his arms with a tender caress.

Then he kissed his wife and the lovely babe crowing in her arms and reaching out his chubby ones to be taken by his father, evidently as much rejoiced as Elsie at his return.

"In a moment, Ned," laughed the captain, stooping to give a hug and kiss to Gracie waiting at his side; then taking possession of an easy-chair, with a pleasant "Thank you, my dears," to Max and Lulu, who had hastened to draw it forward for him, he took a baby on each knee, while the three older children clustered about him, and Violet, sitting near, watched with laughing eyes the merry scene that followed.

“Gracie and Elsie may search papa’s pockets now and see what they can find,” said the captain.

Promptly and with eager delight they availed themselves of the permission.

Grace drew forth a small, gilt-edged, handsomely bound volume.

“That is for your mamma,” her father said; “you may hand it to her; and perhaps, if you look farther, you may find something for yourself.”

Violet received the gift with a pleased smile and a hearty “Thank you, Gracie. Thank you, my dear. I shall be sure to prize it for the sake of the giver, whatever the contents may be.”

But the words were half drowned in Elsie’s shouts of delight over a pretty toy and a box of bon-bons.

“Hand the candy round, pet; to mamma first,” her father said.

“May Elsie eat some too, papa?” she asked coaxingly, as she got down from his knee to obey his order.

“Yes; a little to-night, and some more to-morrow.”

Grace had dived into another pocket. “Oh! is this for me, papa?” she asked, drawing out a small paper parcel.

“Open it and see,” was his smiling rejoinder.

With eager fingers she untied the string and opened the paper.

“Three lovely silver fruit-knives!” she exclaimed. “Names on ’em, too. Lu, this is yours, for it has your name on it; and this is mine, and the other Maxie’s,” handing them to the owners as she spoke. “Thank you, papa, oh, thank you very much, for mine!” holding up her face for a kiss.

Bestowing it very heartily, “You are all very welcome, my darlings,” he said, for Max and Lulu were saying thank you too.

And now they hastened to display their purchases of the afternoon and present some little gifts to Grace and Elsie.

These were received with thanks and many expressions of pleasure, and Lulu was in the midst of an animated account of her shopping experiences when her father, glancing at his watch, reminded her that she would have barely time to make herself neat for the tea-table if she repaired to her room at once.

“Max and I, too, must pay some attention to our toilets,” he added, giving the babe to its nurse, who had just appeared upon the scene.

“Now, papa, let’s run a race, and see who’ll be down first,”—proposed Lulu laughingly, as she went skipping and dancing along the hall just ahead of him.

“Very well, and I’ll give you a dollar if you are first,—and there are no signs of haste or negligence in your appearance.”

“And is the offer open to me too, papa?” asked Max, coming up behind.

“Yes; I shall not be partial,” answered the captain, suddenly lifting Lulu off her feet and starting up the stairs with her in his arms.

“O papa, you’ll tire yourself all out!” she exclaimed with a merry laugh; “I’m so big and heavy.”

“Not a bit,” he said. “I’m so big and strong. There, now for our race,” as he set her down in the upper hall.

“It’s nice, nice, to have such a big, strong papa!” she said, lifting a flushed, happy face to his and reaching up to give him a hug and kiss.

“I’m glad my little daughter thinks so,” he returned, smiling down on her and laying his hand tenderly on her head for an instant.

The captain and Lulu met in the upper hall just as the tea-bell rang, and at the same instant Max came down the stairs from the third story almost at a bound.

A merry peal of laughter from all three, and the captain said, “So nobody is first; we shall all reach the tea-room together.”

“And you won’t have any dollar to pay, papa,” said Lulu, her face very bright and no disappointment in her tone. She was clinging to her father’s hand as they went down the stairs, Max close behind them.

“But I don’t care to save it,” was the reply, “so what shall be done with it? Suppose I divide it between you and Max.”

“And yourself, papa,” added Max laughingly.

His father smiled. "Perhaps a better plan would be to put it into our missionary box," he said.

"Oh, yes, sir!" exclaimed both the children, "that would be the best thing that could be done with it."

They had taken their seats at the table, and all were quiet while the captain asked a blessing on their food.

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