

THE MODEL MILLIONAIRE

OSCAR WILDE

simple right A poor man has no right to fall in love.

Unless one is wealthy there is no use in being a charming fellow. Romance is the privilege of the rich, not the profession of the unemployed. The poor should be practical and prosaic. It is better to have a permanent income than to be fascinating. These are the great truths of modern life which Hughie Erskine never realised. Poor Hughie! Intellectually, we must admit, he was not of much importance. He never said a brilliant or even an ill-natured thing in his life. But then he was wonderfully goodlooking, with his crisp brown hair, his clear-cut profile, and his grey eyes. He was as popular with men as he was with women, and he had every accomplishment except that of making money. His father had bequeathed him his cavalry sword and a *History of the Peninsular War* in fifteen volumes. Hughie hung the first over his looking-glass, put the second on a shelf between *Ruff's Guide* and *Bailey's Magazine*, and lived on two hundred a year that an old aunt allowed him. He had tried everything. He had gone on the Stock Exchange for six months; but what was a butterfly to do among bulls and bears? He had been a tea-merchant for a little longer, but had soon tired of pekoe and souchong. Then he had tried selling dry sherry. That did not answer, the sherry was a little too dry. Ultimately he became nothing, a delightful, ineffectual young man with a perfect profile and no profession. tried his hand at various jobs

To make matters worse, he was in love. The girl he loved was Laura Merton, the daughter of a retired Colonel who had lost his temper and his digestion in India, and had

did not want his daughter to marry a poor man.
never found either of them again. Laura adored him, and he was ready to kiss her shoe-strings. They were the handsomest couple in London, and had not a penny-piece between them. The Colonel was very fond of Hughie, but would not hear of any engagement. *liked to make 10000*

'Come to me, my boy, when you have got ten thousand pounds of your own, and we will see about it,' he used to say; and Hughie looked very glum in those days, and had to go to Laura for consolation. *and*

One morning, as he was on his way to Holland Park, where the Mertons lived, he dropped in to see a great friend of his, Alan Trevor. Trevor was a painter. Indeed, few people escape that nowadays. But he was also an artist, and artists are rather rare. Personally he was a strange rough fellow, with a freckled face and a red, ragged beard. However, when he took up the brush he was a real master, and his pictures were eagerly sought after. He had been very much attracted by Hughie at first, it must be acknowledged, entirely on account of his personal charm. 'The only people a painter should know,' he used to say, 'are people who are *bete* and beautiful, people who are an artistic pleasure to look at and an intellectual repose to talk to. Men who are dandies and women who are darlings rule the world, at least they should do so.' However, after he got to know Hughie better, he liked him quite as much for his bright, buoyant spirits and his generous, reckless nature, and had given him the permanent *entree* to his studio. *could*

When Hughie came in he found Trevor putting the finishing touches to a wonderful life-size picture of a beggar-man. The beggar himself was standing on a raised platform in a corner of the studio. He was a wizened old man, with a face like wrinkled parchment, and a most piteous expression. Over his shoulder was flung a coarse brown cloak, all tears and tatters; his thick boots were patched and cobbled, and with one hand he leant on a rough stick, while with the other he held out his battered hat for alms. *and*

'What an amazing model!' whispered Hughie, as he shook hands with his friend.

'An amazing model?' shouted Trevor at the top of his voice; 'should think so! Such beggars as he are not to be met with every day..

'Poor old chap!' said Hughie, 'how miserable he looks. But I suppose, to you painters, his face is his fortune?'

'Certainly,' replied Trevor, 'you don't want a beggar to look happy, do you?'

'How much does a model get for sitting?' asked Hughie, as he found himself a comfortable seat on a divan.

'A shilling an hour.'

'And how much do you get for your picture, Alan?'

'Oh, for this I get two thousand!'

'Pounds?'

'Guineas. Painters, poets, and physicians always get guineas.'

'Well, I think the model should have a percentage,' cried Hughie, laughing: 'they work quite as hard as you do.'

'Nonsense, nonsense! Why, look at the trouble of laying on the paint alone, and standing all day long at one's easel! It's all very well, Hughie, for you to talk, but I assure you that there are moments when Art almost attains to the dignity of manual labour. But you mustn't chatter; I'm very busy. Smoke a cigarette, and keep quite.'

After some time the servant came in, and told Trevor that the frame-maker wanted to speak to him.

'Don't run away, Hughie,' he said, as he went out, 'I will be back in a moment.'

The old beggar-man took advantage of Trevor's absence to rest for a moment on a wooden bench that was behind him. He looked so forlorn and wretched that Hughie

Lonely miserable

small wine
could not help pitying him, and felt in his pockets to see what money he had. All he could find was a sovereign and some coppers. 'Poor old fellow,' he thought to himself, 'he wants it more than I do, but it means no hansoms for a fortnight'; and he walked across the studio and slipped the sovereign into the beggar's hand. *paund*

dried The old man started, and a faint smile *spread* litted across his withered lips. 'Thank you, sir,' he said, 'thank you.'

Then Trevor arrived, and Hughie took his leave blushing a little at what he had done. He spent the day with Laura, got a charming scolding for his extravagance, and had to walk home. *back home*

That night he *went* strolled into the Palette Club about eleven o'clock, and found Trevor sitting by himself in the smoking-room drinking hock and seltzer.

was all praise for him 'Well, Alan, did you get the picture finished all right?' he said, as he lit his cigarette. *remain while doing some work*

'Finished and framed, my boy!' answered Trevor; and, by the bye, you have made a conquest. That old model you saw is quite devoted to you. I had to tell him all about you - who you are, where you live. What your income is, what prospects you have.'

'My dear Alan,' cried Hughie, 'I shall probably find him waiting for me when I go home. But, of course, you are only joking. Poor old wretch! I wish I could do something for him. I think it is dreadful that any one should be so miserable. I have got heaps of old clothes at home - do you think he would care for any of them? Why, his rags were falling to bits.'

'But he looks splendid in them,' said Trevor. 'I wouldn't paint him in a frock coat for anything. What you call rags I call romance. What seems poverty to you is picturesqueness to me. However, I'll tell him of your offer.'

'Alan, said Hughie seriously, 'you painters are a heartless lot.'

'An artist's heart is his head,' replied Trevor, 'and besides, our business is to realise the world as we see it, not to reform it as we know it. And now tell me how Laura is. The old model was quite interested in her.'

'You don't mean to say you talked to him about her?' said Hughie.

'Certainly I did. He knows all about the relentless colonel, the lovely Laura, and the \$ 10,000.'

'You told that old beggar all my private affairs?' cried Hughie, looking very red and angry.

'My dear boy,' said Trevor, smiling, 'that old beggar, as you call him, is one of the richest men in Europe. He could buy all London tomorrow without even drawing his account. He has a house in every capital, dines off gold plate and can prevent Russia going to war when he chooses.'

'What on earth do you mean?' exclaimed Hughie.

'What I say,' said Trevor. 'The old man you saw today in the studio was Baron Hausberg. He is a great friend of mine, buys all my pictures and that sort of thing, and gave me a commission a month ago to paint him as a beggar. And I must say he made a magnificent figure in his rags, or perhaps I should say in my rags; they are an old suit I got in Spain.'

'Baron Hausberg!' cried Hughie. 'Good heavens! I gave him a sovereign!' and he sank into an arm chair the picture of dismay.

'Gave him a sovereign!' shouted Trevor, and he burst into a roar of laughter. 'My dear boy, you'll never see it again.'

'I think you might have told me, Alan,' said Hughie sulkily, 'and not have let me make such a fool of myself.'

'Well, to begin with, Hughie,' said Trevor, 'it never entered my mind that you went about distributing alms in that reckless way. I can unde and your kissing a pretty

model, but your giving a sovereign to an ugly one - by Jove, not! Besides, the fact is that I really was not at home today to any one; and when you came in I didn't know whether Hausberg would like his name mentioned. You know he wasn't in full dress.'

'What a duffer he must think me.!' said Hughie.

'Not at all. He was in the highest spirits after you left; kept chuckling to himself and rubbing his old wrinkled hands together. I couldn't make out why he was so interested to know all about you; but I see it all now. He'll invest your sovereign for you, Hughie, pay you the interest every six months, and have a capital story to tell after dinner.'

'I am an unlucky devil,' growled Hughie. 'The best thing I can do is to go to bed; and, my dear Alan, you mustn't tell any one. I shouldn't dare show my face in the Row.'

'Nonsense! It reflects the highest credit on your philanthropic spirit, Hughie. And don't run away. Have another cigarette, and you can talk about Laura as much as you like.'

However, Hughie wouldn't stop, but walked home, feeling very unhappy, and leaving Alan Trevor in fits of laughter.

The next morning, as he was at breakfast, the servant brought him up a card on which was written, 'Monsieur Guastave Naudin, de la part de M. Le Baron Hausberg.' 'I suppose he has come for an apology,' said Hughie to himself; and he told the servant to show the visitor up.

An old geneleman with gold spectacles and grey hair came into the room, and said, in a slight French accent, 'Have I the honour of addressing Monsieur Erskine?' Hughie bowed.

'I have come from Baron Hausberg,' he continued. 'The Baron--'

'I beg, sir, that you will offer him my sincerest apologies,' stammered Hughie.

'The Baron,' said the old gentleman with a smile, 'has commissioned me to bring you this letter, 'and he extended a sealed envelope.

On the outside was written, 'A wedding present to Hugh Erskine and Laura Merton, from an old beggar;' and inside was a cheque for \$ 10,000.

When they were married Alan Trevor was the best man, and the Baron made a speech at the wedding breakfast.

'Millionaire models,' remarked Alan, 'are rare enough; but by Jove, model millionaires are rarer still !'

AUTHOR

OSCAR WILDE (1854-1900) was a significant writer of the late nineteenth century. He was one of the leaders of the movement of 'art for art's sake.' He was a prolific writer, whose works are full of wit and irony. His well-known works are : *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) a novel two famous plays; *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of being Earnest* (1895); and the poems *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898).

The Model Millionaire is one of the finest short stories of the author. In a small compass, it brings out all the good qualities of Wilde as an artist. His sparkling wit, his ability to create suspense, his view that art is superior to life, and his lucid style make him a great master of English language - all these elements are depicted in *The Model Millionaire*.

ANNOTATIONS

1. *History of the Peninsular War* : refers to England's war with Napoleon Bonaparte of France; most of it was fought in the Iberian Peninsula, in the early part of the nineteenth century.

No such book by this title exists in fifteen volumes. An imaginary reference, the intention of which appears to create the atmosphere of the habits of the English aristocratic class in the nineteenth century.

2. *Ruff's Guide* : The full title is *Ruff's Guide to the Turf*, an annual publication devoted to horse-racing; originated in 1842 by William Ruff (1807-56).
3. *Bailey's Magazine* : refers to the law journal which published criminal proceedings of the Old Bailey, the seat of the central criminal Court in London.
4. *bulls and bears* : operations on stock exchange : *bull* - a person who speculates or operates in stocks or commodities to profit from (*or cause*) a rise in prices.
bear - a person who sells stock short in the hope of buying later at lower price.
5. *Row* : Saville Row, a fashionable shopping centre in London in the nineteenth century.

GLOSSARY

bequeathed (v) : to give property, etc. at death

pekoe (n) : high grade black tea.

souchong (n) : a kind of black tea made from tender leaves.

bete: *bete* is a French word which in this context means stupid or silly.

entree : a French word which means right or privilege of admission.

- wizened* (adj) : having dried up appearance; shrivelled.
- easel* (n) : wooden frame to support a picture or a black-board.
- hock* (n) : a German white wine.
- sheltzer* (n) : is the brand name of German sodawater.
- picturesque* (adj) : strikingly vivid, quaint, visually charming.
- picturesqueness* (n) : vividness, quaintness.

QUESTIONS

1. Justify the title of the story.
2. Analyse the elements of suspense in the story.
3. "An artist's heart is his head," replied Trevor, "and besides, our business is to realise the world as we see it, not to reform it as we know it." Discuss and illustrate the remark with reference to the story.
4. Discuss the characters of Hughie and Trevor.
5. What is Hughie's real predicament? How is it resolved? Give a reasoned answer in about 200 words.

'The Model Millionaire'

Pg-1.

CLASSMATE

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⇒ Hughie's Real Predicament — How is it resolved.
Hughie was a handsome young man. He had crisp brown hair with a clear-cut profile and grey eyes. He was very popular with men and women. Intellectually, he was not brilliant. He did not know the art of earning money. He had failed in everything. A young girl named Laura Merton loved him. She wanted to marry Hughie. But Laura's father, Colonel Merton did not agree to marry his daughter to a person who had no job. He would not hear of any engagement between his daughter and Hughie unless he had ten thousand pounds of his own. Hughie felt very helpless and sad as he had no money. Poverty stood in the way of his marriage. He did not know that poverty is like a banana-skin on the door step of romance.

One morning he went to see a great friend of his, Alan Trevor. Alan Trevor was a painter and an artist. Alan like Hughie very much for his charm and good nature. That's why he allowed him to come to his studio whenever Hughie liked to come. This time when Hughie came to his studio, Alan was making a life-size picture of a beggar-man. Almost finishing touches he was giving to that picture. Hughie observed

that the beggar-man was an amazing model. Trevor agreed with Hughie. He said that such beggars are very rare. Hughie said that the beggar looked miserable and almost pitied him.

After sometime the servant came in and told Alan that the frame-maker wanted to speak to him. In Alan's absence, Hughie could not help pitying the beggar-man. He had only a pound and some small coins in his pocket. He went to the beggar and put one pound in his hand. The beggar was surprised. Then he smiled and thanked Hughie. Trevor came back. Hughie took leave of Alan and then spent rest of the day with Laura. She rebuked him for his extravagance.

At night Hughie goes to a club and meets Alan again. Alan tells Hughie that the beggar was all praise for him and he has also told him about his love affair with Laura and also the condition of money fixed by Laura's father.

Hughie does not feel happy on hearing that. He thinks that Alan has damaged his image by telling the beggar about his love for Laura and his need of 10000 pounds. He was angry that Alan had told the beggar about his private affairs.

Trevor smiled and told Hughie that the model beggar was one of richest men in Europe. He was so rich that he could buy the whole city of London. His name was Baron Hamsberg. He was a famous millionaire. He had given him the task to paint him as a beggar. He had made him a very big offer ~~to~~ as payment for the work.

Hughie was shocked. He told Trevor that he had given the millionaire one pound. He requested Alan not to tell anyone about his foolishness in giving charity to a millionaire. But Trevor told him that Hamsberg was deeply impressed by Hughie's noble nature. Later he enquired all about Hughie from Trevor. He came to know of Hughie's problem in love.

This man sent 10000 pounds to Hughie. Thus he helped him in marrying the girl of his choice. The millionaire also took part in the ceremony along with Alan Trevor.

Theme: The story 'The Model Millionaire' is based on the theme that millionaire models are rare but model millionaires are rarer still. The rich are often said to be mean and greedy. Wealth has something evil

about it. The writer of this story, Oscar Wilde, once said that those who have much are often greedy, those who have little always share. It means that rich people are rarely generous.

In the present story, the millionaire model was actually a model millionaire. He was very generous and human. He showed his generosity by helping a poor young man in his hour of need. Baron Haversberg satisfied the two meanings of the word 'model'. He posed as a model beggar for Trevor. He also acted as a model millionaire in case of Hughie Erskine.

Important questions:

- Q1. Comment on the title of the story 'The Model Millionaire'.
- Q2. Analyse the elements of suspense in the story.
- Q3. What is the theme of the story 'The Model Millionaire'.
- Q4. Character sketch of :
 - i) Hughie Erskine
 - ii) Baron Haversberg
 - iii) Alan Trevor

—X—