

The Model Millionaire

- Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde (16/10/1854-30/11/1900) was an Irish playwright, novelist, poet and, short-story writer. Known for his barbed and clever wit, he was one of the most successful playwrights of the late Victorian London, and one of the greatest celebrities of his day.



Written in an era when the gap between the privileged and the deprived was vast, this short-story tells us how a poor yet kind young man gets the recognition he deserved.

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. He was wonderfully good-looking, 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 bequeathed him his cavalry sword, and a '*History of the Peninsular War*' in fifteen volumes. He lived on two hundred a year that an old aunt allowed him. He had tried everything. He had gone to the Stock Exchange for six months. He had been a tea-merchant for a little longer. Then he had tried selling dry sherry. Ultimately he became nothing, a delightful, ineffectual young man with a perfect profile and no profession.

To make matters worse, he was in love. The girl he loved was Laura Merton, the daughter of a retired colonel—the two of them could easily make the handsomest couple in London. Laura adored him. The colonel was very fond of Hughie, but would not hear of any engagement.

“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 on those days, and had to go to Laura for consolation.

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. 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 on account of his personal charm. 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 *entrée* to his studio. When Hughie came

privilege / 'prɪvəlɪdʒ /
 profile / 'prəʊfaɪl /
 cavalry / 'kævlrɪ /
 freckled / 'frekl /
 buoyant / 'bɔɪənt /

deprived / dɪ'praɪvd /
 sherry / 'ʃerɪ /
 consolation / kɒnsə'leɪʃn /
 reckless / rekles /

prosaic / prə'zeɪk /
 bequeathed / bɪ'kwɪːð /
 ineffectual / ɪnɪ'fektʃuəl /
 ragged / 'ræɡɪd /

into the studio, he found Trevor putting the finished 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 shoulders was falling a coarse brown cloak, all tatters and tears 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.

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

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

“Poor Old Chap!” said Hughie, 'How miserable he looks!'

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

'How much does a model get for sitting?' asked Hughie.

'A shilling an hour'

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

'Oh, for this I get two thousand Pounds!'

'Well, I think the model should have a share,' 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.'

After some time the servant came in, and told Trevor that the framemaker 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 could not help pitying him and felt in his pocket 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,' and he walked across the studio and slipped the sovereign into the beggar's hand.

The old man started, and a faint smile flitted 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.

That night he strolled into the Palette Club about eleven o'clock and found Trevor sitting by himself.

'Well, Alan, did you get the picture finished all right?', he said.

'Finished and framed, my boy!' answered Trevor, 'and, by-the-by, you have made a

wrinkled / 'rɪŋkl /
parchment / 'pɑːtʃmənt /
extravagance / ɪk'strævəgəns /
piteous / 'piːʃəs /

coarse / kɔːs /
strolled / strɒld /
easel / 'iːzl /
forlorn / fɔːlɔːn /

wretched / 'retʃɪd /
sovereign / 'sɒvrɪn /

conquest, The 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 anyone 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. However, I'll tell him of your offer. 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 ten thousand pounds.'

'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 overdrawing his account.

'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 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 Hausberge!' cried Hughie. 'Good heavens! I gave him a sovereign!' and he sank into an armchair 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 it never entered my mind that you went about distributing alms in that reckless way. Beside, the fact is that I really was not at home today to anyone, and when you come in I didn't know whether Hausberg would like this 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 sprits 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 anyone.' Hughie walked home, feeling very unhappy, and leaving Alan Trevor in fits of laughter.

splendid / 'splendɪd /
relentless / rɪ'lentləs /
colonel / 'kɜːnl /
duffer / 'dʌfə /

magnificent / məg'nɪfɪsnt /
dismay / dɪs'meɪ /
apology / ə'pɒlədʒi /

sulkily / -ɪli /
reckless / 'rekləs /
invest / m'vest /

The next morning, as he was at breakfast, the servant brought him up a card on which was written 'Monsieur Gustave Naudin, messenger from 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 gentleman with gold spectacles and gray hair came into the room and said, '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 ten thousand pounds.

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 model millionaires are rarer still.'

Glossary

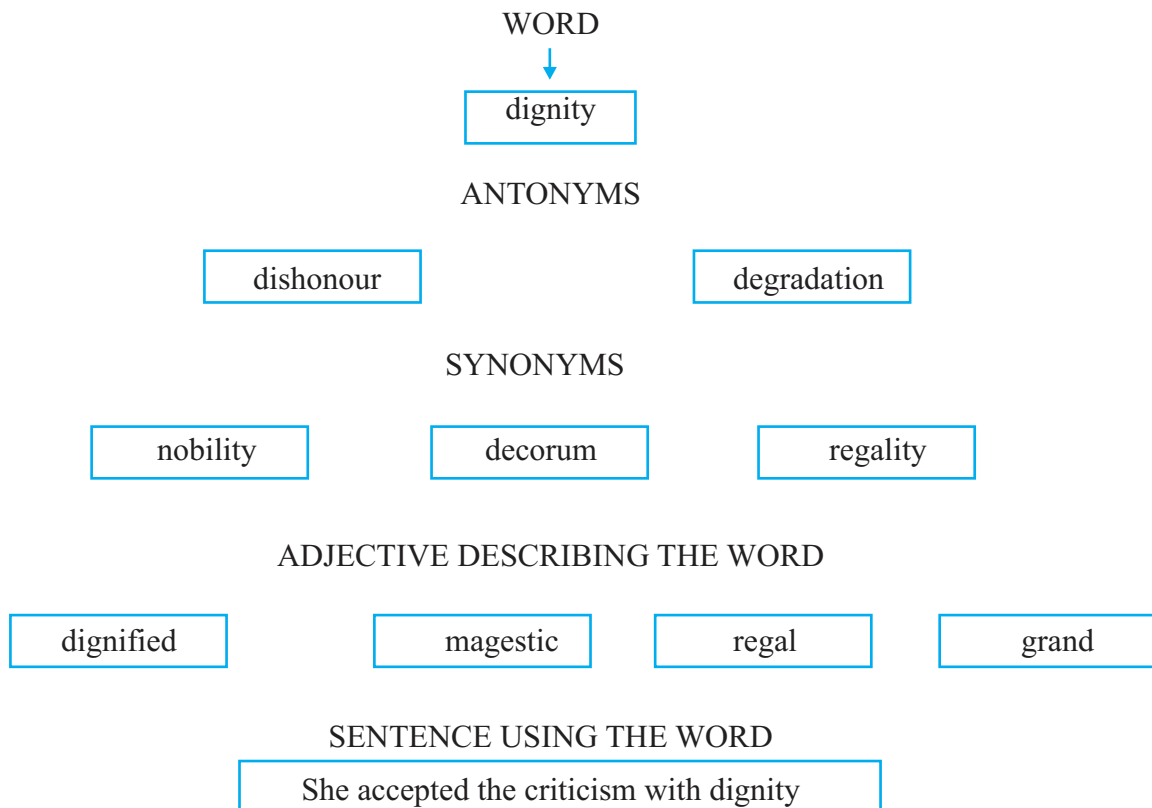
romance	-	a feeling of excitement and adventure
prosaic	-	ordinary; not showing any imagination
accomplishment	-	achievement
bequeath	-	bestow through a will
cavalry	-	army on horse back
ineffectual	-	incompetent
sherry	-	a type of sweet wine usually taken before meal in England
consolation	-	comfort, solace
freckled	-	filled with small pale brown spots
buoyant	-	cheerful; feeling sure that things will be successful
entrée	-	the right to enter in an instruction or social group
wizened	-	shriveled, showing signs of age
parchment	-	an old piece of paper
cobbled	-	repaired, mended
battered	-	torn
forlorn	-	dejected; feeling lonely and unhappy
wretched	-	feeling sick or unhappy
sovereign	-	old British gold-coin
coppers	-	change; copper coins that do not have much value
withered	-	shrunk; very dry
extravagance	-	reckless spending

stroll	-	a slow, relaxed walk
conquest	-	victory
frock-coat	-	a long coat worn in the past by men
commission	-	a formal request
magnificent	-	extremely attractive and impressive
sulkily	-	disapprovingly
duffer	-	stupid
chuckling	-	laughing quietly
apology	-	request for forgiveness
stammered	-	spoke with difficulty, repeating words, stopping before saying things correctly
best-man	-	a male friend of the bridegroom at a wedding who helps him during the wedding.

Exercises

Word Power

- I. The word 'dignity' has been picked up from the story and a word-pyramid for the word has been constructed as given below:



Now construct similar word-pyramids for the following words:
generosity, recklessness, conquest, popularity, absence

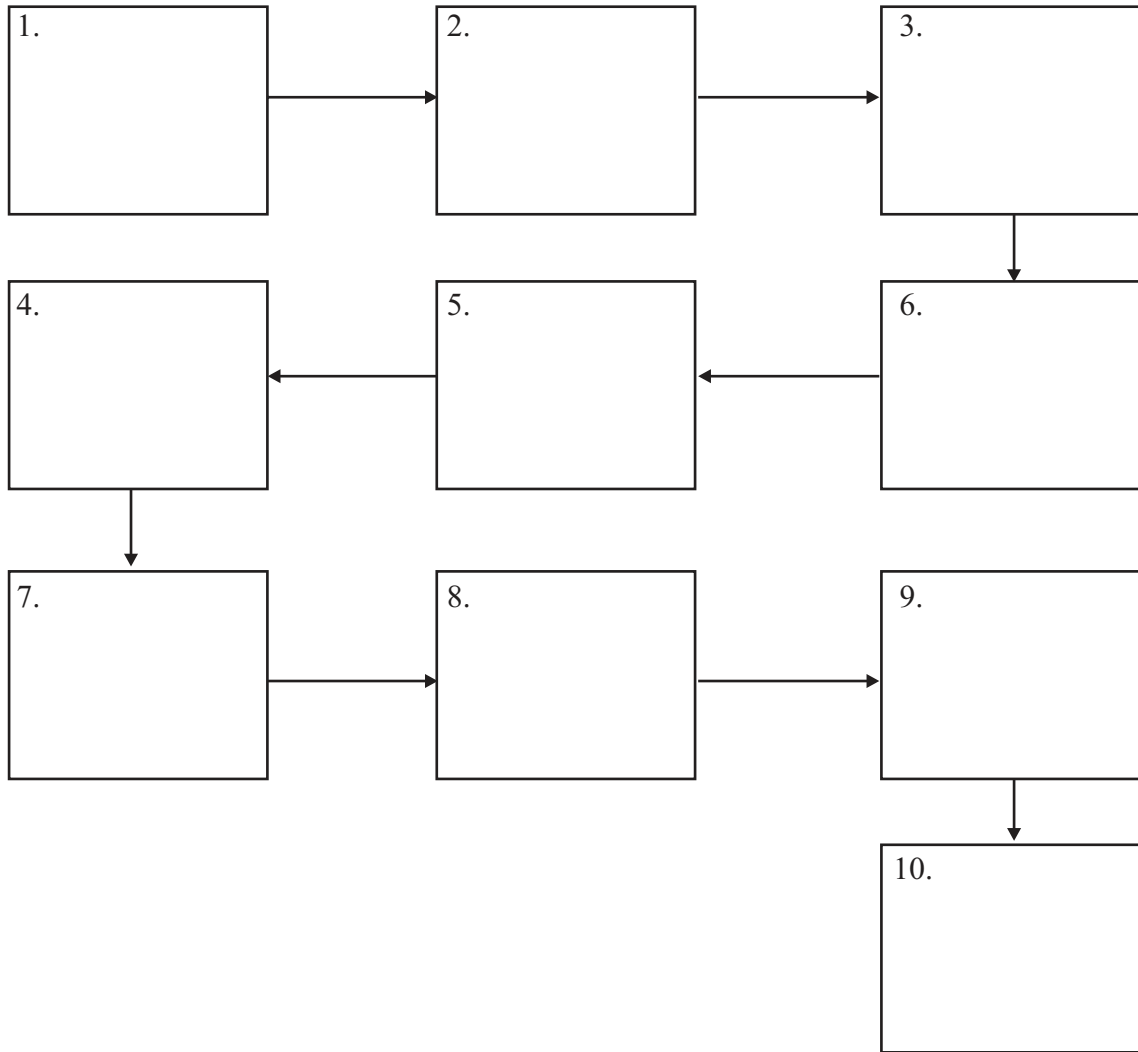
II. Complete the table by explaining the following phrasal verbs from the story:

Phrasal Verb	Explanation
burst into	to start producing something suddenly with great force
care for	
crop in	
go about	
take up	
look up	
see about	
show up	
sink into	
on account of	
hold out	

Comprehension

A) Complete the given flow chart with the proper sequence of events that take place in the story from the sentences given below:

1. Luara scolded him for his recklessness.
2. Alan Trevor was the best man at their wedding.
3. Hughie Erskine had tried every profession but ultimately he had to give up.
4. The Baron gave him ten thousand pounds as a wedding gift.
5. Taking pity on him, he gave the beggar the one pound he had in his pocket.
6. The Baron called Hughie a model millionaire.
7. He visited Alan's studio and found him busy painting a portrait of a beggar.
8. When Hughie found out the truth about the beggar, he felt very unhappy while Alan laughed at him.
9. He was in love with Laura Merton but he could not marry her because her father wanted him to earn ten thousand pounds.
10. The beggar was, in fact, Baron Hausberg, who was one of the richest men in the country.



B) Choose the correct alternative:

1. Which of the following is not a characteristic of Hughie Erskine's face?
 - a. good looks
 - b. brown hairs
 - c. grey eyes
 - d. large ears
2. Which of the following works Hughie Erskine did not try to earn his living from?
 - a. work as a professional jester
 - b. work at the Stock Exchange
 - c. work as a wine merchant
 - d. work as a tea merchant

3. Which of the following is not an attribute of Alan Trevor's face?
 - a. puckered face
 - b. blue eyes
 - c. rugged beard
 - d. rough exterior
4. Where was the beggar-man placed in the study of Alan Trevor when he was being painted?
 - a. on a carpet
 - b. on a chair
 - c. in the corner
 - d. on the floor
5. What was Hughie doing when Baron Hausberg's messenger came to him with a letter?
 - a. having lunch
 - b. having a nap
 - c. having dinner
 - d. having breakfast
6. Who scolded Hughie for giving a sovereign to a beggar?
 - a. Trevor
 - b. Col. Merton
 - c. Laura
 - d. None of the above

C) Write answers to the following questions in two or three sentences:

1. Hughie Erskine remained poor. What professions he adopted but could not succeed?
2. Describe the appearance of the beggar-man as he stood in the studio of Alan Trevor?
3. Describe how and through whom Hughie got ten thousand pounds.

D) Pick the sentences from the text which suggest the following:

1. Hughie's father was a soldier.
2. Hughie was allowed to come to Trevor's studio whenever he liked.
3. Hausberg would invest Hughie's sovereign in business.
4. Baron Hausberg was an ideal rich man.

E) Write answers to the following questions in about 150-200 words each:

1. Write a character sketch of Baron Hausberg highlighting
 - (a) his fortune as described by Trevor
 - (b) his desire to be painted as a beggar
 - (c) his conduct as a model for a painter
 - (d) his compassion and help for Hughie Erskine

2. Write a character sketch of Hughie Erskine highlighting
 - (a) his appearance
 - (b) his professional and monetary conditions
 - (c) his attitude to money
 - (d) his love for Laura
 - (e) his good luck
3. Imagining yourself to be Baron Hausberg, relate the story in the first person as a personal experience. Begin “I am Baron Hausberg.....”

F) Briefly explain the following statements from the text:

1. Romance is the privilege of the rich, not the profession of the unemployed.
2. It is better to have a permanent income than to be fascinating.
3. I assure you that there are moments when Art almost attains the dignity of manual labour.
4. He could buy all Landon tomorrow without overdrawing his account.
5. Millionaires are rare enough, but model millionaires are rarer still.

Speaking Activity

Work in pairs. You are a reporter from a News Channel in English. Your partner is a poor person who has won a one-crore lottery. Interview your partner. Then change roles. You can use the following clues for the interview:

This is from News reporting live from With Mr./Ms who has become a multi-millionaire overnight. Mr./Ms. would you like to tell our viewers about how you came about to purchase the ticket? So, you say you did not purchase it on the pavement? How lucky you are! What were your thoughts when How do you plan

Writing Activity

- I. Write a letter to your friend congratulating him on being selected for famous TV Quiz show. Give him tips on how to prepare for the quiz, how to overcome nervousness on facing the camera, and how to react on winning.

- II. Hughie was wonderfully good looking.....

What other characteristics of Hughie have been described in the story? Pick out the describing words and attribute them to Hughie, Alan and the Baron:

magnificent, wealthy, forlorn, model, charming, real master, duffer, wizened old man, clear-cut profile, unlucky devil, miserable, unemployed, grey eyes, popular, delightful, rough fellow, freckled face, reckless, piteous,

S. No.	Character	Describing words
1.	Hughie Erskine	
2.	Alan Trever	
3.	Baron Hausberg	

Think it over

- A. Imagine yourself to be a millionaire. Complete the following chart with things you would buy, places you would visit, people you would like to help and other things you would like to do.

* Things I would buy		* Places I would visit
	If I were a millionaire	
* People I would like to help.		* Other things I would like to do.

- B. 1. Write the following descriptions against the name of the person who fits the character.

Freedom fighter who laid down her life for her country,

She is known for her work as a missionary,

The lady known for her space expedition,

She was a messiah for the poor and the destitutes.

She lost her life on her way back to earth.

Classical singer of 20th century.

First lady to climb Mt. Everest,

A great exponent of classical music.

1. Kalpna Chawla

2. Mother Teresa _____

3. Bachendri pal _____

4. M.S. Subbalaxmi _____

5. Maharani Laxmi Bai _____

2. Write two sentences about **any two** of these to bring out their special endowments:
 1. Sportspersons.
 2. An artist/dancer/singer/painter

Things to do

Let's play with letters. Take a word 'Lives' on arranging the letters of this word we get 'Elvis' which is called an anagram. An ANAGRAM is a word or a phrase that is made by arranging the letters of another word or phrase.

Examples:

1. Dormitory Dirty room
2. Microwave Warm voice
3. Debit card Bad Credit

A. Now think anagrams for the words given below:

1. Heavy rain _____
2. Schoolmaster _____
3. Mother-in-law _____
4. Eleven plus two _____
5. The country side _____
6. Funeral _____
7. The Morse Code _____
8. The eyes _____
10. Volley ball _____

B. We use a string of adjectives beginning with the first letter of the name when writing cards.

For example:

- A- admirable
- M- modest
- R- radiant
- I - intelligent
- T- talented

Construct similar string of adjectives for your name, your father's name, your mother's name, your friend's name and name of the person you don't like. Remember, there must be some truth about the qualities, the person possesses that you mention.