

Lesson 3 From Words to Worlds

The Model Millionaire

Hughie is a charming young man who has achieved everything except making money. He is in love with Laura Merton, the daughter of a retired colonel. Laura loves him sincerely, but the Colonel won't let them marry until Hughie has 10,000 pounds.

One day, Hughie dropped by to see his friend Alan Trevor, a painter. He was adding the finishing touches to a painting of a beggar. In the studio, the beggar himself was standing on a raised platform. He was an old man with a very pitiful face. His clothes were old and worn out.

"Poor old man!" said Hughie. "How unfortunate he looks! But I suppose, for you painters, his face is his fortune?"

"Certainly," replied Alan, "you wouldn't want a beggar to look happy, would you?"

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

"A shilling an hour," answered Alan.

"And how much do you get for your picture, Alan?" asked Hughie.

"Oh, for this I get two thousand!"

"Pounds?"

"Guineas. Painters, poets, and doctors always get guineas."

"Well, I think the model should get a fair share of that," cried Hughie, laughing. He continued, "as they work just as hard as you do."

"Nonsense, nonsense! Look at the effort it takes to draw and paint and stand in front of the canvas all day! You mustn't talk. I'm very busy. Keep quiet," said Alan.

After a while, the servant came in and told Alan that the frame-maker wanted to see him. Alan said, "I will be back in a moment," as he went out. The old beggar took advantage of Alan's absence to rest for a moment on a chair. He looked so sad and lonely. Hughie couldn't help pitying him and felt his own pockets to see what money he had. All he could find, however, was a few coins. "Poor old fellow, he wants them more than I do, but it means no carriage for two weeks," he thought to himself. He walked across the studio and put the coins into the beggar's hand.

The old man was surprised and smiled faintly. "Thank you, sir," he said. Then Alan arrived, and Hughie said goodbye, blushing a little at what he had done.

Hughie spent the day with Laura, received a gentle scolding for his actions, and had to walk home.

That night he walked into the Palette Club about eleven o'clock and found Alan sitting alone. Hughie asked, "Hey, Alan! Have you got that picture finished?" and Alan replied, "Finished and framed!"

Then, Alan continued, "And by the way, that old model you saw is quite devoted to you. He wanted to know who you are, where you live, and what your prospects are."

"My dear Alan," cried Hughie, "I shall probably find him waiting for me when I go home. Poor old man! I wish I could do something for him. I have some old clothes at home—do you think he would like any of them? His clothes were worn, falling to pieces."

"But he looks wonderful in them," said Alan. "What you call worn clothes I call romance. I find them romantic and appealing. However, I'll tell him about your offer."

When Hughie commented seriously, "You painters are heartless," Alan replied, "An artist's heart is his head. Our job is to show the world as we see it, not to reform it as we know it. 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.

"Sure I did. He knows all about the Colonel, Laura, and the 10,000 pounds," replied Alan.

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

"My dear boy," said Alan, smiling, "that old beggar, as you call him, is one of the richest men in Europe. He is Baron Hausberg. He is a great friend of mine, buys all my pictures, and asked me a month ago to paint him as a beggar."

"Baron Hausberg!" cried Hughie, feeling embarrassed.

"Good heavens! I gave him some coins," he said, sinking into an armchair.

"What? You gave him coins?" cried Alan, bursting into laughter. He went on, "Well, it never occurred to me that you would distribute money in that way. Besides, when you came in, I didn't know if Hausberg would like his name mentioned. You know he wasn't in full dress."

"Oh no, what did I do? The best thing I can do is to go to bed, and, my dear Alan, you mustn't tell anyone," said Hughie, and he went home, feeling very unhappy.

The next morning, when Hughie was having breakfast, an old gentleman visited his house. The man said, "I have come from Baron Hausberg," and continued, "The Baron" Hughie interrupted, "I beg, sir, that you will offer him my sincerest apologies." Then, with a smile, the old gentleman said, "The Baron has asked me to bring you this letter," and gave Hughie a sealed envelope. On the outside was written, "A wedding present to Hughie Erskine and Laura Merton, from an old beggar," and inside was a check for 10,000 pounds.

When they were married, Alan was the best man, and the Baron made a speech at the wedding. "Millionaire models," remarked Alan, "are rare enough, but model millionaires are rarer still!"