

Special Lesson The Model Millionaire

The Model Millionaire

Hughie Erskine was a wonderfully good-looking man, with crisp brown hair, a sculpture-like profile, and grey eyes. He had every accomplishment except that of making money. He lived on two hundred pounds a year that an old aunt gave 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. Ultimately, he became nothing. He was a delightful, incompetent 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. Laura loved Hughie, too, and the colonel was very fond of him. However, he would not hear of any engagement. He would say "Come to me, my boy, when you have got ten thousand pounds of your own, and we will talk about it."

One morning, Hughie dropped in to see a great friend of his, Alan Trevor. Trevor was a painter. He was a strange, rough fellow with a bushy red beard. However, when he took up the brush, he was a real master, and his pictures were eagerly sought after. When Hughie came into the studio, he found Trevor putting the finishing touches on a wonderful life-size picture of a beggar. The beggar was standing on a raised platform in a corner of the studio. He was a wrinkly old man with a pitiful expression. He wore a ragged brown cape, and he leaned on a rough stick with one hand while holding out his hat for donations with the other.

"What an amazing model!" said Hughie, as he shook hands with his friend. "How miserable he looks! How much does the model get for posing?"

"A penny an hour."

"And how much do you get for your painting, Alan?"

"Oh, I get two thousand pounds for this!"

"Well, I think the model should have a share," cried Hughie, laughing. "He is working just as hard as you!"

After some time, a 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 took advantage of Trevor's absence to rest for a moment on a bench that was behind him. He looked so exhausted and miserable that Hughie could not help pitying him. Hughie reached into his pocket to see how much money he had. All he could find was a few coins. "Poor old fellow," he thought to himself. "He needs money more than I do." He walked across the studio and slipped a gold coin into the beggar's hand.

The old man was startled, and a faint smile came across his dry lips. "Thank you, sir," he said. "Thank you."

When Trevor returned, Hughie said goodbye and left the studio, blushing a little at what he had done, and he walked home.

That night, about eleven o'clock, he wandered into a café and found Trevor sitting by himself.

"Well, Alan, did you get the picture finished all right?" he asked.

"Finished and framed, my boy!" answered Trevor.

"And, by the way, the old model you saw is quite curious about you. I had to tell him all about you: who you are, where you live, what your income is, and what prospects you have."

"My dear Alan," cried Hughie, "I will probably find him waiting for me when I get home. Poor old man! I wish I could do something for him. I think it is dreadful that anyone should be so miserable. I have piles of old clothes at home. Do you think he would care for any of them? His rags were falling to bits."

"But he looks marvelous in them," said Trevor. "I wouldn't paint him in a fancy coat for anything. I'll tell him about your offer, though. By the way, tell me how Laura is. The old model was quite interested in her."

"What? Did you even tell him about her?" asked Hughie.

"Of course! He knows all about the strict colonel, the charming Laura, and the ten thousand pounds."

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

"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 of London tomorrow with the money in his account."

"What on earth do you mean?" shouted Hughie.

"The old man you saw today in the studio," said Trevor, "was Baron Hausberg. He is a great friend of mine, and he buys all my pictures. He gave me a commission to paint him as a beggar. And I must say he looked magnificent 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 gold coin!" Hughie sank into the chair in shock.

"A gold coin!" shouted Trevor and burst out laughing.

"You should have told me, Alan," said Hughie. "Now I've made a fool of myself."

"Well, when you came in, I didn't know whether Hausberg would like his name mentioned. After all, he wasn't fully dressed."

"What a fool he must think I am!" said Hughie.

"Not at all. He was in the highest spirits after you left. He kept smiling to himself and rubbing his old, wrinkled hands together. I couldn't understand why he was so interested to know all about you, but I see it all now."

Hughie sighed. "The best thing I can do is go to bed," he said. "And my dear Alan, you mustn't tell anyone." Hughie walked home feeling very unhappy.

The next morning, as Hughie was at breakfast, a servant brought him 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 let the visitor in.

An old gentleman with gold spectacles and grey hair came into the room and said, "Do I have the honor of addressing Monsieur Erskine?"

Hughie bowed.

"I have come from Baron Hausberg," continued the messenger. "The Baron—"

"I beg, sir, that you will offer him my deepest apologies," stammered Hughie.

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

On the outside was written, "A wedding present to Hughie Erskine and Laura Merton, from an old beggar." Inside was a check for ten thousand pounds.

When Hughie and Laura got married, Alan Trevor was the best man and the Baron made a speech at the wedding breakfast.

"Millionaire models," remarked Alan, "are quite rare.

But model millionaires are even rarer."