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The Model Millionaire

WARM UP

Do we always get the results of our actions? Does our success in life depend on our good and bad deeds? Is our destiny governed by what we do? Or is there an element of fate in the affairs of man? Does a man's life change with the turns of the wheel of fortune?

Discuss this point in groups in the light of your own experiences and that of people around you. Present each group's point of view before the class.



LISTENING

Listen to the passage 'Learning to See' and answer the questions given below.

1. What did the visitors to the museum actually notice in the painting?
2. How old was the painting?
3. How did the guide help the visitors to see the painting better?
4. What was the connection between Brueghel's painting and Noah's ark?
5. What happened when the visitors came out of the museum?

READING

Here is the story of a young man who was handsome and warm-hearted. His life seemed a failure because he had neither a job nor money. Then something happened that changed his life.

The Model Millionaire

Oscar Wilde

Unless one is wealthy there's 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 realized. 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 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 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.

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 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.

'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.

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 *bête* 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 *entrée* to his studio.

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.

'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 met with every day. *A trouvaille, mon cher*; a living **Velasquez**! My stars! what an etching **Rembrandt** would have made of him!'

'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 quiet.'

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 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 **hansom** for a fortnight;' 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 in the smoking-room drinking hock and seltzer.

'Well, Alan, did you get the picture finished all right?' he said, as he lit his cigarette. 'Finished and framed, my boy!' answered Trevor; 'and, by the by, 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 realize the world as we see it, not to reform it as we know it. *A chacun son métier*. 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. 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. *Que voulez-vous? La fantaisie d'un millionnaire!* 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. *Son affaire c'est l'argent des autres.*'

'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 understand your kissing a pretty model, but your giving a sovereign to an ugly one – by Jove, no! 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**¹ Gustave 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 gentleman 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!'

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) was a versatile Irish writer of great wit and brilliance. He had his education at Trinity College, Dublin, and Magdalen College, Oxford. His erratic lifestyle led to imprisonment for two years. But Wilde remained a non-conformist throughout his life. Poet, dramatist and short story writer, Oscar Wilde is best-known for his brilliant, witty comedies. Among his important works are *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (1888), *The House of Pomegranates* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

¹/mə'sjə:/

GLOSSARY

romance	: love, adventure
prosaic	: uninteresting
bequeathed	: passed on by someone after his/her death
bulls	: speculators who try to raise the price of stocks and shares
bears	: speculators who try to lower the price of stocks and shares
pekoe and souchong	: different varieties of tea
dry sherry	: a kind of white wine, free from sweetness and fruits and flavours (Note the pun on the word 'dry'. On the second occasion it is used to mean 'unprofitable'.)
freckled	: having small, flat, brown spots
dandies	: men who spend a lot of time and money on clothes and personal appearance
<i>entrée</i>	: permission to enter
wizened	: having lines on the face
<i>A trouvaille, mon cher</i>	: a lucky find, my dear
Velasquez	: Spanish painter who lived from 1599 to 1660. He belonged to the realistic school and painted portraits from peasant life.
Rembrandt	: Dutch painter who lived from 1606 to 1669. He delighted in painting the wrinkled faces of old people.
easel	: wooden frame to hold a picture while it is being painted
hansom	: a two-wheeled horse-drawn carriage
<i>A chacun son métier</i>	: to each one his trade
<i>Que voulez-vous?</i>	: What do you want?
<i>La fantaisie d'un millionnaire</i>	: the whim of a millionaire
<i>Son affaire c'est l'argent des autres</i>	: other people's money is his business
sulkily	: with anger for a slight cause
duffer	: foolish person
in the Row	: in a public place
<i>monsieur</i>	: mister
<i>de la part de</i>	: on behalf of
best man	: the friend and attendant of the man to be married

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. 'Unless one is wealthy there's no point in being a charming fellow.' Is this true of Hughie Erskine? In what way?
2. What was the colonel's condition for the marriage? Do you think he was harsh? Or was he being careful about his daughter's future?
3. '... there are moments when Art almost attains to the dignity of manual labour.' What does Alan Trevor mean by this? Do you agree with him? Why?
4. What was the reaction of the model when Erskine gave him a sovereign? Was he amused or angry? What gives you the answer?
5. What was the extravagance for which Hughie Erskine got a scolding from Laura Merton? Why is the scolding called 'charming'?
6. Describe briefly the feelings of Hughie Erskine when he learnt that the model was actually Baron Hausberg.
7. 'I shall probably find him waiting for me when I go home.' Why did Hughie Erskine expect to see the model again? What actually happened later?
8. Write about the qualities that made Baron Hausberg a millionaire model and a model millionaire.
9. The story has several witty and humorous sentences. Here is one. '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 never found either of them again.'
Pick out more examples of Oscar Wilde's humour from the story.
10. 'An artist's heart is his head.' Explain.

VOCABULARY

1. **Words like 'tea-merchant', 'arm-chair' and 'beggar-man' are formed by combining two words. Find such words to get the following meanings.**

friendly to the user

something that can save a life
burnt by the sun
something that induces sleep
made by man
to think rightly
having a heart like that of a lion
something that helps to raise the curtain
a way for people to escape from fire

- 2. Several items of the British coinage have been mentioned in the story – pound, guinea, sovereign, shilling, penny, copper. Find out the values of each of these.**
- 3. Construct a single sentence using the following words in any order.**

poison die adulterated

Example: test failed job

Though he failed the test, he succeeded in getting the job.

STUDY SKILLS

Using a dictionary, find out at least five meanings of each of the words 'book' and 'press'. Make sentences of your own using these words in their different meanings.

SPEAKING

Read this sentence from the story 'The Model Millionaire'.

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

This is how Hughie Erskine apologized for his act of indiscretion.

Here are some sentences used to make an apology.

I'm sorry, I talked to you offensively.

I'm very sorry, I lost my temper.

I'm really ashamed of myself. I'm extremely sorry.

I feel awfully bad about it. I'm extremely sorry.

Please accept my apologies.

My sincere apologies.

I apologise for the lapse on my part.

Please let me apologise for the behaviour of my son/daughter etc.

We use the following expressions to accept the apology.

It's all right.

Let's forget about it.

There's nothing to feel bad about.

Discuss in groups and prepare short dialogues for the following occasions. Do a role play of the dialogues before the class.

1. You borrowed a pen from a classmate, but forgot to return it. The next day, you return it with an apology.
2. On the playground Anil pushed Suresh who fell down and hurt his knee. Later Anil apologises to Suresh.
3. Seema has an argument with Priya. During the argument, Seema uses abusive language. Later she apologises to Meena.

WRITING

1. In the story 'The Model Millionaire' Baron Hausberg is curious to know more about the kind-hearted young man, Hughie Erskine. He asks Alan Trevor, the artist, for all the information on him – his income, prospects, romantic life etc.

Recount the conversation that must have taken place between them in dialogue form. It could start like this:

Baron Hausberg : Who was that handsome gentleman here? Is he your friend?

Alan : That was Hughie Erskine. A fine lad with a generous heart! If only his prospects were better!

Baron Hausberg : Why

2. **You want to go to the library. Your friend wants to go to a restaurant. Develop a conversation between the two of you.**
3. Laura's father told Hughie that he would think of Hughie's engagement with his daughter only after Hughie had ten thousand pounds of his own. Obviously he wanted to make sure that Hughie could take care of his family after marriage.

In our society, the groom and his parents, in most cases, demand dowry in both cash and kind from the bride's family. Imagine that you are part of either the groom's side or the bride's side trying to negotiate a dowry-less marriage.

Write a short story on this subject covering the following points. Use the dialogue as well as the narrative forms. Also, give a suitable title to the story.

Raja wants to get married – he likes Rani – Raja's parents demand dowry – Rani and her family tell them that they will not give any dowry – Raja is caught between his parents and Rani – he decides to go against his parents

FOCUS ON LANGUAGE

GRAMMAR

Study this sentence.

I had to tell him who you are.

This is a combination of two sentences –

Who are you: I had to tell him that.

Note the change in the position of the subject and the verb when the sentences are combined.

Here is another example.

Why are you afraid of him? I want to know that.

I want to know why you are afraid of him.

Now, combine each of the following pairs of sentences.

1. How did the prisoner escape? The police are trying to find that out.
2. Why didn't she appear for the test? Everybody is asking that.
3. Why was the old man interested in Hughie Erskine? Trevor wanted to know that.
4. Where have you kept the keys? Try to remember that.
5. How was his interview? I asked Hari.
6. How was the night safari in Singapore? I asked my colleagues.

USAGE

Italics is a style of writing or printing where the letters lean to the right. Italics can be used for:

- titles of books, plays, films, paintings and newspapers when you use them in a sentence
The Lord of the Rings is my favourite film.
- foreign words that are not a part of the English language
She loves to eat *gajar ka halwa*.
- emphasis
It was *the butler's* fingerprint.

Underline the words that need to be italicized in the following sentences.

1. Suraj remembers all the dialogues from Sholay.
2. A baaraat is an essential part of the wedding ceremony in many parts of India.
3. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* talks about the silence that pervades the life of Indian women.
4. Jacob quit his job at the Times of India and joined The Hindu.
5. I can't believe that he of all people did it.