

"The Model Millionaire" is a [short story](#) by the Irish author [Oscar Wilde](#). It first appeared in print in the newspaper *The World* in June 1887. It was published again in 1891 as part of the anthology *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*.

The story concerns a young man who, although he does not have much money himself, is moved to pity by the sight of an elderly beggar who is posing as a model for his artist friend. Although he can barely afford to do so, the young man gives the beggar the largest denomination coin that he has in his pocket. The young man's act of kindness has unexpected positive consequences for him.

Plot

The [protagonist](#) of the story is a young man called Hughie Erskine. Hughie is handsome, charming and popular but he has been very unlucky as far as financial matters are concerned. He was left nothing of any great value in his father's will. He has tried his hand at several different businesses, all of which have failed. Having no job, Hughie's only source of income is two hundred pounds a year which is given to him by an elderly aunt. Hughie has fallen in love with a young woman named Laura Merton and she loves him in return. Laura's father, Colonel Merton, is fond of Hughie but, due to his poor financial prospects, he does not want the young man to marry his daughter. He has often told Hughie that he will only allow him to get engaged to Laura after he has earned ten thousand pounds.

Hughie goes to see his artist friend Alan Trevor. He finds that Alan is painting a portrait of an old man who appears to be a beggar. The old man is wearing a tattered brown cloak and boots which have been mended many times. He has a rough walking stick in one hand. In the other hand, he is holding out an old hat as if to ask for money. His face is heavily wrinkled and he looks extremely sad. Both Alan and Hughie agree that the old man is an excellent subject for a painting. Hughie, however, cannot help feeling sorry for the man. He thinks it is unfair that, although Alan's paintings regularly sell for two thousand [guineas](#), he only pays his models one [shilling](#) an hour to pose for him and does not give them a percentage of the money which he makes from sales of their portraits.

When Alan leaves the room, Hughie looks in his pockets. He finds that the highest denomination coin which he has is a [sovereign](#). Although it means that he will have to economize more than usual for the rest of the month, Hughie gives the coin to the old man, who appears very happy to receive it. Hughie leaves soon afterwards.

Alan and Hughie meet up again later. The artist tells his friend that, after he left, the old man asked several questions about him. Alan goes on to say that he told the old man all about Hughie, Laura Merton and the condition which Colonel Merton set that prevents their marriage. Hughie is unhappy that his friend told "that old beggar" all about his private life. The amused Alan tells Hughie that the old man he was painting was Baron Hausberg, one of the wealthiest men in Europe and someone who often buys Alan's paintings. For reasons which Alan does not really understand, the millionaire baron had asked to be painted as a beggar. The tattered clothes he was wearing were supplied by Alan. Hughie feels ashamed about having given a coin to a millionaire, although Alan tells him not to worry.

The following day, a representative of Baron Hausberg comes to Hughie's house with an envelope. The writing on the envelope says that it contains a wedding present "from an old beggar". Inside the envelope, Hughie finds a check for ten thousand pounds. Hughie and Laura get married. Baron Hausberg attends their wedding.