

Short Stories with Peter: The Model Millionaire by Oscar Wilde (Abridged B1–B2)

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

65 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Welcome to Short Stories with Peter.

Today, The Model Millionaire, by Oscar Wilde, first published in eighteen eighty-seven.

This is an abridged adaptation for English learners.

Listen for the difference between appearances and reality.

Hughie Erskine was a kind young man with very little money.

He loved Laura Merton, and Laura loved him.

But her father would not agree to their marriage until Hughie had ten thousand pounds.

To Hughie, that seemed impossible.

One morning, Hughie dropped in to see his friend Alan, a painter.

Inside the studio, an old man stood in worn clothes, holding a stick and a battered hat.

Alan was painting him as a beggar.

Poor man.

How much do you pay him for standing there?

A shilling an hour.

Now keep still.

I am nearly finished.

Alan left the room for a moment.

The old man sat down, looking tired.

Hughie felt sorry for him.

He searched his pockets and found a gold coin.

It was more than he could comfortably afford to give away.

He needs it more than I do.



Hughie quietly put the coin into the man's hand.

The man smiled.

When Alan returned, Hughie left without mentioning his gift.

He would have to walk instead of paying for transport, but he did not regret helping.

That evening, Alan had surprising news.

The old model had asked all about Hughie, including his wish to marry Laura.

You told him about Laura and the money?

Alan, those are my private affairs.

That man is Baron Hausberg, one of the richest men in Europe.

He asked me to paint him as a beggar.

A millionaire?

And I gave him my gold coin.

He must think I am a fool.

Alan laughed, but Hughie went home embarrassed.

The next morning, a visitor arrived with a letter from the Baron.

Hughie expected a complaint.

Instead, the envelope contained a cheque for ten thousand pounds.

The message called it a wedding present from an old beggar.

Hughie and Laura could marry at last.

Alan was the best man, and the Baron attended the wedding.

Hughie had mistaken an appearance, but his kindness had been real.

The wealthy model had also shown himself to be a model of generosity.

End of the story.

Now, let's dive into the language and break down some of the key vocabulary from the story.

First, drop in.

Hughie dropped in to see Alan.

To drop in means to visit briefly, often without arranging it in advance.

You could say: I will drop in after work.

Second, feel sorry for someone.



Hughie felt sorry for the old man.

He felt sympathy because the man seemed to be suffering.

Feeling sorry for someone does not mean apologising to them.

Third, give away.

Hughie gave away a valuable coin.

He gave it to someone without expecting payment.

You can give away clothes you no longer need.

Giving away money is different from lending it.

Now think: did Hughie give the coin because he expected a reward?

No.

He believed he was helping someone poorer than himself.

Find the transcript and vocabulary on our episode page at yourenglishtoolbox.com.

I am Peter.

Thank you for listening.

