

THE MODEL MILLIONAIRE

a comedy in one act

by Burton Bumgarner

*adapted from the tale by
Oscar Wilde*

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Hugh is in love with Laura and she is in love with him. They want to marry but Laura's father, a gruff and greedy man, won't hear of the marriage of his only daughter to a lowly actor. In order to win the girl he loves, Hugh must come up with the astounding sum of \$10,000, or Laura will be forced to marry an attorney, a man her father has selected. Set in New York City during the Great Depression, actors and artists, as well as millionaires and beggars, populate this one-act play. Hugh's best friend, Trevor, is an arrogant but well-intentioned artist who is well paid for his paintings. Trevor's current project is a commissioned painting of a beggar. As Hugh tells Trevor of his plight with Laura, the artist comes up with a solution. An O' Henry-like twist of plot makes for a delightful resolution.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(3 men, 2 women, 4 flexible)

HUGH: A young actor, in love with Laura.

LAURA: A young woman, in love with Hugh.

MR. MCCARTHY (COLONEL): Laura's father, gruff and cruel.

TREVOR: Hugh's friend, a painter.

CELESTE: A model.

4 BEGGARS

The Model Millionaire is set in Greenwich Village, New York, during the 1930s. The play can be performed on a bare stage with a table and chairs downstage left, and a park bench downstage right. Trevor's studio is center.

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(AT RISE: LAURA is seated on the bench, HUGH kneels before her.)

LAURA: I do love you, Hugh. And I really do want to be your wife.

HUGH: Then what's stopping you? Every day for the past two months we've met here in the park, every day we tell each other we're in love, and every day I ask you to marry me.

LAURA: And every day ... *(Pause.)*

HUGH: You end the conversation and go home. *(SHE stands to exit.)*

LAURA: I've got to go home.

HUGH: Wait! *(Stands and takes HER arm.)* Today is going to be different.

LAURA: What do you mean?

HUGH: Today you're going to tell me why you won't talk about marriage even though you love me.

LAURA: I'd rather not.

HUGH: You must.

LAURA: I don't think I can.

HUGH: Is it my looks?

LAURA: No. You're a very handsome man.

HUGH: My clothes?

LAURA: You wear nice clothes. Practical and well-tailored.

HUGH: My education?

LAURA: You're very well educated, as anyone can tell. You can talk about ancient Rome, and the Greek gods, and you know so much about music and art. And the theater! I love to hear you talk about the theater!

HUGH: It's one of my favorite subjects, you know.

LAURA: I know.

HUGH: I'm very popular, too. People really like me.

LAURA: You haven't an enemy in the world.

HUGH: Do you find me boring or snobbish?

LAURA: Certainly not. You're captivating and amusing, and you're very kind. Kindness is a quality I've always admired in people.

HUGH: Could it possibly be my profession?

LAURA: I certainly have nothing against persons in your particular profession, though others may consider it odd.

HUGH: Then I can think of no reason why you won't be my wife.

(MR. MCCARTHY enters and crosses between HUGH and LAURA. He is followed by four BEGGARS.)

MCCARTHY: Laura! What are you doing out here with this ... person? Someone might see you.

LAURA: Father, this is ...

MCCARTHY: *(Interrupting.)* You must come home. The cook is about to serve dinner. *(Batting at the BEGGARS.)* Get away from me!

BEGGAR 1: *(Holding out HIS hand.)* Please, sir. I haven't eaten all day.

MCCARTHY: That's not my problem! Go away!

BEGGAR 2: I've got children, sir. They need food.

MCCARTHY: Then you need to find a job and earn their food!

BEGGAR 3: Please, sir. Just a spare coin. It would mean so much to a poor woman.

MCCARTHY: Go away, all of you, or I shall call for a policeman and you'll spend the rest of the day in jail, where you can enjoy a hot meal at the taxpayers expense!

(ALL but BEGGAR 4 exit. Beggar 4 crosses upstage right and sits. He holds a tin cup in his hand.)

LAURA: Father, you shouldn't be so cruel.

MCCARTHY: My dearest daughter, you shouldn't be so naive. Beggars like being beggars. If the beggars of the world wanted to work, they could find jobs. Instead, they chose to roam the streets wearing rags and harassing honest people.

LAURA: Maybe they can't find jobs.

MCCARTHY: Looking the way they do, I should think not.

LAURA: There is a depression. Many people have been forced out of their homes.

MCCARTHY: Then they need to find new homes instead of cluttering up this lovely park. Now tell me, what are you doing with this ... this person?

LAURA: His name is Hugh.

MCCARTHY: I know what his name is.

HUGH: *(Nervous.)* Sir, I have ... I have asked your daughter to marry me.

MCCARTHY: *(Laughs.)* Are you serious, young man?

HUGH: Quite serious. *(Takes LAURA'S hand.)*

MCCARTHY: That won't be possible. *(Removing HUGH'S hand from LAURA.)*

LAURA: Please, Father. I do love him.

HUGH: I will be a very good husband ... and son-in-law. You'll like me a lot. Honestly. Everyone likes me.

LAURA: And he's handsome and well-educated.

MCCARTHY: I'm sure you have many good qualities. I can't begin to imagine what they are, but I'm sure there are good qualities in there somewhere. But I know about you and I know about your family. *(Snidely, to LAURA.)* They live in Brooklyn, you know. Lower middle class. *(To HUGH.)* The one quality you need most is missing.

HUGH: And that would be ...?

MCCARTHY: That would be the fiscal resources which would allow my daughter to maintain the lifestyle to which she is accustomed without the burdening of my finances.

HUGH: You're saying ...

MCCARTHY: I'm saying you're too poor. Your family barely has enough money to stay afloat. And you have no job to speak of.

HUGH: I certainly do have a job. *(With pride.)* I am an actor!

MCCARTHY: As I said, you have no job. You are a waiter and you are an opportunist.

HUGH: *(With pride.)* I DO have ambition. Someday I'll land a role on Broadway.

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MCCARTHY: I mean a CHEAP opportunist. You are the type of person who courts a young lady of wealth knowing that once you've married her, your days of work are over and you can commence living the life of a parasite!

HUGH: What do you mean by that?

MCCARTHY: I mean you wish to marry my daughter for my money, and I won't have it! I am a self-made man! My father arrived at Ellis Island with barely a cent in his pocket! I am well-off because I worked hard! I didn't hang around with actors and artists! I went to work in a bank and I invested in the stock market, getting out just in time to avoid the big crash. I have a lot of money and I intend to keep it!

HUGH: I don't want your money! *(The COLONEL laughs.)* I'm handsome, and popular, and I do dress and speak well. My family sacrificed so I could have an education.

MCCARTHY: And what is your field of expertise?

HUGH: The theater. I am an actor ... and a waiter.

MCCARTHY: So, you are a pauper with a lot of useless knowledge stored between your ears. *(With scorn.)* The theater! Baah!

HUGH: You should see me on stage! I am an outstanding interpreter of the classics as well as the modern plays. I've worked and studied for years to fine-tune my skills.

MCCARTHY: You've wasted your time and resources. Why didn't you study business or the law or medicine? Then you might be a worthy husband for my daughter. Instead, you frittered away a perfectly good opportunity to better yourself. *(Places HIS arm around HUGH'S shoulder.)* Really, sir. I think you are a fine young man. I have nothing against you personally. But I cannot allow my daughter to marry a man who cannot care for her on his own, no matter how good he is at Shakespeare or ... or whoever else writes those confounded plays you people perform. It's just a little rule I live by. Besides, I already have a husband picked out for my daughter.

HUGH: A husband?

LAURA: No, Father!

End of Freeview

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