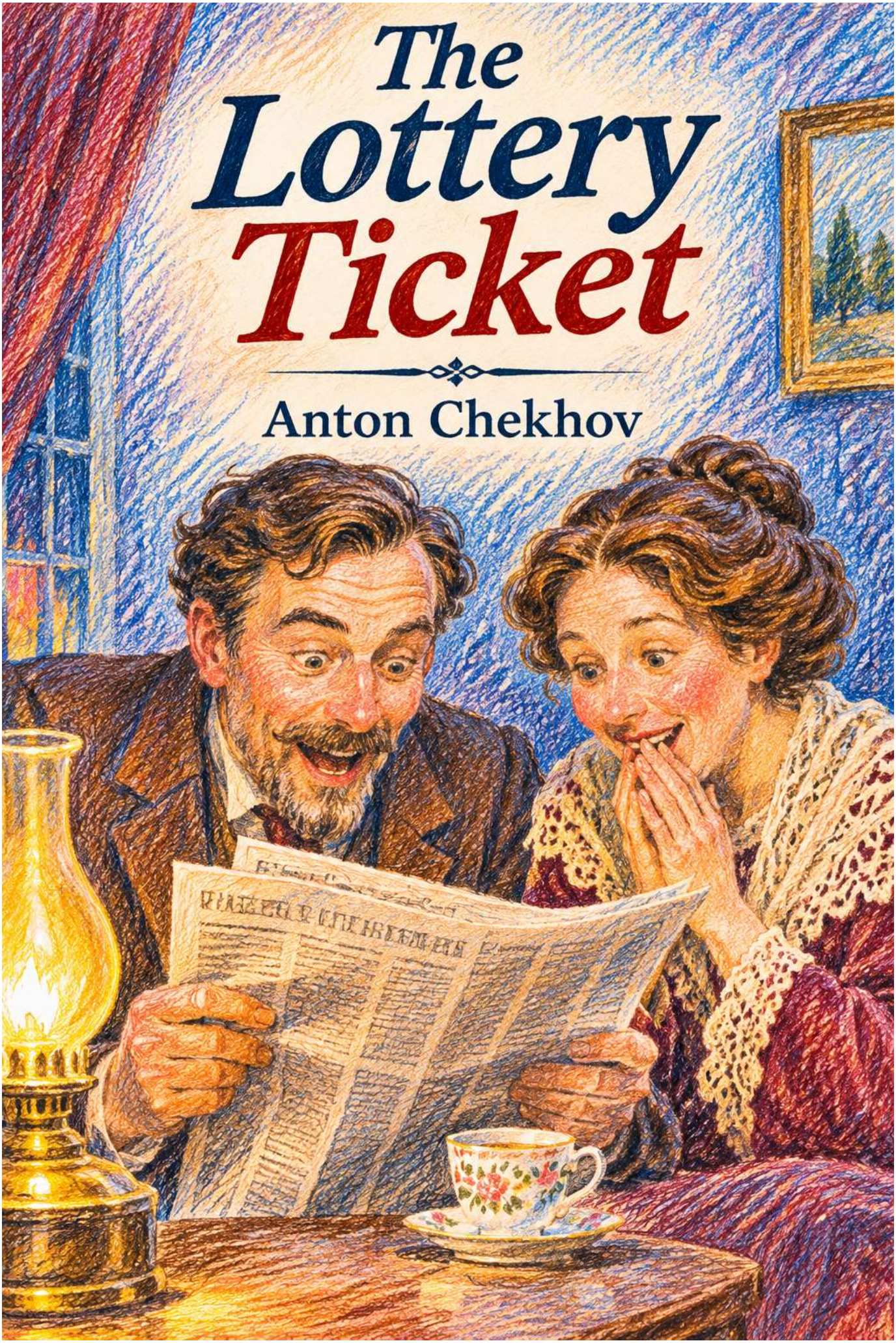

The Lottery Ticket
Anton Chekhov

The Lottery Ticket

By Anton Chekhov

CLASSIC SHORT STORY
ENGLISH READING PRACTICE

ENGLISH SHORT STORIES FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS

LEVEL C1

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CONTENTS

About the Author: Anton Chekhov (1860–1904)

About the Story: "The Lottery Ticket" by Anton Chekhov

The Original Story: "The Lottery Ticket" by Anton Chekhov

Vocabulary List

Reading Comprehension

Grammar Exercises

Answer Key

About the Author

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904)

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) was a celebrated Russian writer, playwright, and physician. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest short-story writers in world literature. His works are admired for their psychological depth, realistic characters, subtle humour, and thoughtful exploration of human nature.

Chekhov was born on 29 January 1860 in Taganrog, Russia. He studied medicine at Moscow University and worked as a doctor while developing his literary career. His medical profession gave him valuable insight into people's lives, emotions, suffering, and everyday struggles, which later became important elements of his writing.

During his literary career, Chekhov wrote numerous short stories and plays. Some of his best-known works include *The Lady with the Dog*, *The Bet*, *The Death of a Government Clerk*, *Ward No. 6*, and *The Cherry Orchard*. Rather than relying on dramatic events alone, he often focused on ordinary people and the hidden conflicts behind their everyday experiences.

Chekhov's writing style is particularly notable for its irony, understated humour, and psychological realism. He frequently explored themes such as greed, social inequality, loneliness, disappointment, human weakness, and the gap between people's expectations and reality.

His short story *The Lottery Ticket* demonstrates these qualities through the transformation of an ordinary married couple whose dreams of sudden wealth gradually reveal jealousy, suspicion, and selfishness. With remarkable psychological insight, Chekhov shows how the mere possibility of becoming rich can change people's attitudes towards those closest to them.

Anton Chekhov died on 15 July 1904 in Badenweiler, Germany. His literary legacy continues to influence writers and readers around the world.

About the Story

"The Lottery Ticket" by Anton Chekhov

The Lottery Ticket is a thought-provoking short story by the renowned Russian writer Anton Chekhov. It explores human greed, material desires, marital relationships, and the psychological effects of imagining sudden wealth. Through an ordinary domestic situation, Chekhov reveals how the possibility of becoming rich can expose hidden feelings and weaknesses in human nature.

The story centres on Ivan Dmitritch, a middle-class man who lives comfortably with his wife, Masha, and their family. One evening, while reading the newspaper after supper, Ivan discovers that the series number on his wife's lottery ticket appears among the winning numbers. The prize is seventy-five thousand roubles. Although they have not yet confirmed the complete ticket number, the couple immediately begin imagining how their lives might change if they have won.

At first, their thoughts are filled with excitement and happiness. Ivan dreams of buying an estate, improving his living conditions, travelling abroad, and enjoying a life free from financial responsibilities. Masha also imagines the opportunities that such a fortune could provide. However, as Ivan continues to develop his fantasies, his attitude towards his wife gradually changes. He begins to imagine travelling without her and worries that she might control the money or spend it on her relatives.

His thoughts become increasingly negative, and he starts viewing his wife and other family members with suspicion and resentment. Masha, meanwhile, appears to understand her husband's intentions and becomes equally defensive about the potential winnings. Their shared excitement gradually turns into hostility and mutual distrust.

The story reaches its conclusion when Ivan finally checks the complete lottery number. Although the winning series is 9,499, the winning ticket number is 46, whereas Masha's ticket bears number 26. They have won nothing. Their dreams of wealth disappear instantly, leaving them dissatisfied with their ordinary lives.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Ivan Dmitritch is the central character. Initially satisfied with his modest life, he becomes increasingly greedy and suspicious after imagining himself as a wealthy man. His changing thoughts reveal the influence of money on human behaviour.

Masha is Ivan's wife and the owner of the lottery ticket. She shares her husband's excitement about the possible fortune but gradually becomes suspicious of his intentions. Her reactions reveal that she also has personal expectations and financial interests.

MAJOR THEMES

Greed and Materialism: The story demonstrates how the desire for wealth can transform people's attitudes and relationships, even before they actually possess any money.

The Power of Imagination: Chekhov explores how imagined possibilities can influence emotions and behaviour as strongly as real events.

Marriage and Human Relationships: The couple's changing attitudes reveal the insecurity, jealousy, and hidden tensions that can exist within a marriage.

Human Nature: Through Ivan and Masha, Chekhov examines selfishness, suspicion, resentment, and the weakness of human character.

Expectation versus Reality: The contrast between the couple's elaborate dreams and the disappointing result highlights the difference between imagined happiness and actual life.

LITERARY TECHNIQUES

Irony: The couple's dreams of enormous wealth create conflict and hostility, yet they ultimately discover that they have won nothing.

Psychological Realism: Chekhov carefully presents Ivan's changing thoughts, showing how excitement gradually develops into jealousy and hatred.

Contrast: The story contrasts the couple's initial satisfaction with their ordinary existence against their dissatisfaction after imagining a wealthier future.

Imagery: Detailed descriptions of estates, summer landscapes, foreign travel, and comfortable living help readers understand the attractive world Ivan creates in his imagination.

Unexpected Ending: The final revelation destroys the couple's expectations and returns them abruptly to their ordinary circumstances.

WHY READ THIS STORY?

The Lottery Ticket is an excellent literary choice for advanced English learners (CEFR C1). Its rich vocabulary, sophisticated descriptions, psychological depth, and subtle irony provide opportunities to develop advanced reading and analytical skills.

By studying this story, learners can expand their vocabulary, examine complex sentence structures, improve their understanding of literary techniques, and explore the relationship between wealth, happiness, and human nature.

Chekhov's central insight remains relevant: sometimes the mere possibility of becoming wealthy can reveal more about a person's character than wealth itself.

The Lottery Ticket

By Anton Chekhov

IVAN DMITRITCH, a middle-class man who lived with his family on an income of twelve hundred a year and was very well satisfied with his lot, sat down on the sofa after supper and began reading the newspaper.

"I forgot to look at the newspaper today," his wife said to him as she cleared the table. "Look and see whether the list of drawings is there."

"Yes, it is," said Ivan Dmitritch; "but hasn't your ticket lapsed?"

"No; I took the interest on Tuesday."

"What is the number?"

"Series 9,499, number 26."

"All right... we will look... 9,499 and 26."

Ivan Dmitritch had no faith in lottery luck, and would not, as a rule, have consented to look at the lists of winning numbers, but now, as he had nothing else to do and as the newspaper was before his eyes, he passed his finger downwards along the column of numbers. And immediately, as though in mockery of his scepticism, no further than the second line from the top, his eye was caught by the figure 9,499! Unable to believe his eyes, he hurriedly dropped the paper on his knees without looking to see the number of the ticket, and, just as though some one had given him a douche of cold water, he felt an agreeable chill in the pit of the stomach; tingling and terrible and sweet!

"Masha, 9,499 is there!" he said in a hollow voice.

His wife looked at his astonished and panic-stricken face, and realized that he was not joking.

"9,499?" she asked, turning pale and dropping the folded tablecloth on the table.

"Yes, yes... it really is there!"

"And the number of the ticket?"

"Oh, yes! There's the number of the ticket too. But stay... wait! No, I say! Anyway, the number of our series is there! Anyway, you understand...."

Looking at his wife, Ivan Dmitritch gave a broad, senseless smile, like a baby when a bright object is shown it. His wife smiled too; it was as pleasant to her as to him that he only mentioned the series, and did not try to find out the number of the winning ticket. To torment and tantalize oneself with hopes of possible fortune is so sweet, so thrilling!

"It is our series," said Ivan Dmitritch, after a long silence. "So there is a probability that we have won. It's only a probability, but there it is!"

"Well, now look!"

“Wait a little. We have plenty of time to be disappointed. It’s on the second line from the top, so the prize is seventy-five thousand. That’s not money, but power, capital! And in a minute I shall look at the list, and there—26! Eh? I say, what if we really have won?”

The husband and wife began laughing and staring at one another in silence. The possibility of winning bewildered them; they could not have said, could not have dreamed, what they both needed that seventy-five thousand for, what they would buy, where they would go. They thought only of the figures 9,499 and 75,000 and pictured them in their imagination, while somehow they could not think of the happiness itself which was so possible.

Ivan Dmitritch, holding the paper in his hand, walked several times from corner to corner, and only when he had recovered from the first impression began dreaming a little.

“And if we have won,” he said—“why, it will be a new life, it will be a transformation! The ticket is yours, but if it were mine I should, first of all, of course, spend twenty-five thousand on real property in the shape of an estate; ten thousand on immediate expenses, new furnishing... travelling... paying debts, and so on.... The other forty thousand I would put in the bank and get interest on it.”

“Yes, an estate, that would be nice,” said his wife, sitting down and dropping her hands in her lap.

“Somewhere in the Tula or Oryol provinces.... In the first place we shouldn’t need a summer villa, and besides, it would always bring in an income.”

And pictures came crowding on his imagination, each more gracious and poetical than the last. And in all these pictures he saw himself well-fed, serene, healthy, felt warm, even hot! Here, after eating a summer soup, cold as ice, he lay on his back on the burning sand close to a stream or in the garden under a lime-tree.... It is hot.... His little boy and girl are crawling about near him, digging in the sand or catching ladybirds in the grass. He dozes sweetly, thinking of nothing, and feeling all over that he need not go to the office today, tomorrow, or the day after. Or, tired of lying still, he goes to the hayfield, or to the forest for mushrooms, or watches the peasants catching fish with a net. When the sun sets he takes a towel and soap and saunters to the bathing-shed, where he undresses at his leisure, slowly rubs his bare chest with his hands, and goes into the water. And in the water, near the opaque soapy circles, little fish flit to and fro and green water-weeds nod their heads. After bathing there is tea with cream and milk rolls.... In the evening a walk or *vint* with the neighbours.

“Yes, it would be nice to buy an estate,” said his wife, also dreaming, and from her face it was evident that she was enchanted by her thoughts.

Ivan Dmitritch pictured to himself autumn with its rains, its cold evenings, and its St. Martin’s summer. At that season he would have to take longer walks about the garden and beside the river, so as to get thoroughly chilled, and then drink a big glass of vodka and eat a salted mushroom or a soused cucumber, and then—drink another.... The children would come running from the kitchen-garden, bringing a carrot and a radish smelling of fresh earth.... And then, he would lie stretched full length on the sofa, and in leisurely fashion turn over the pages of some illustrated magazine, or, covering his face with it and unbuttoning his waistcoat, give himself up to slumber.

The St. Martin's summer is followed by cloudy, gloomy weather. It rains day and night, the bare trees weep, the wind is damp and cold. The dogs, the horses, the fowls—all are wet, depressed, downcast. There is nowhere to walk; one can't go out for days together; one has to pace up and down the room, looking despondently at the grey window. It is dreary!

Ivan Dmitritch stopped and looked at his wife.

"I should go abroad, you know, Masha," he said.

And he began thinking how nice it would be in late autumn to go abroad somewhere to the South of France... to Italy.... to India!

"I should certainly go abroad too," his wife said. "But look at the number of the ticket!"

"Wait, wait!..."

He walked about the room and went on thinking. It occurred to him: what if his wife really did go abroad? It is pleasant to travel alone, or in the society of light, careless women who live in the present, and not such as think and talk all the journey about nothing but their children, sigh, and tremble with dismay over every farthing. Ivan Dmitritch imagined his wife in the train with a multitude of parcels, baskets, and bags; she would be sighing over something, complaining that the train made her head ache, that she had spent so much money.... At the stations he would continually be having to run for boiling water, bread and butter.... She wouldn't have dinner because of its being too dear....

"She would begrudge me every farthing," he thought, with a glance at his wife. "The lottery ticket is hers, not mine! Besides, what is the use of her going abroad? What does she want there? She would shut herself up in the hotel, and not let me out of her sight.... I know!"

And for the first time in his life his mind dwelt on the fact that his wife had grown elderly and plain, and that she was saturated through and through with the smell of cooking, while he was still young, fresh, and healthy, and might well have got married again.

"Of course, all that is silly nonsense," he thought; "but... why should she go abroad? What would she make of it? And yet she would go, of course.... I can fancy... In reality it is all one to her, whether it is Naples or Klin. She would only be in my way. I should be dependent upon her. I can fancy how, like a regular woman, she will lock the money up as soon as she gets it.... She will hide it from me.... She will look after her relations and grudge me every farthing."

Ivan Dmitritch thought of her relations. All those wretched brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles would come crawling about as soon as they heard of the winning ticket, would begin whining like beggars, and fawning upon them with oily, hypocritical smiles. Wretched, detestable people! If they were given anything, they would ask for more; while if they were refused, they would swear at them, slander them, and wish them every kind of misfortune.

Ivan Dmitritch remembered his own relations, and their faces, at which he had looked impartially in the past, struck him now as repulsive and hateful.

"They are such reptiles!" he thought.

And his wife's face, too, struck him as repulsive and hateful. Anger surged up in his heart against her, and he thought malignantly:

“She knows nothing about money, and so she is stingy. If she won it she would give me a hundred roubles, and put the rest away under lock and key.”

And he looked at his wife, not with a smile now, but with hatred. She glanced at him too, and also with hatred and anger. She had her own daydreams, her own plans, her own reflections; she understood perfectly well what her husband’s dreams were. She knew who would be the first to try and grab her winnings.

“It’s very nice making daydreams at other people’s expense!” is what her eyes expressed. “No, don’t you dare!”

Her husband understood her look; hatred began stirring again in his breast, and in order to annoy his wife he glanced quickly, to spite her at the fourth page on the newspaper and read out triumphantly:

“Series 9,499, number 46! Not 26!”

Hatred and hope both disappeared at once, and it began immediately to seem to Ivan Dmitritch and his wife that their rooms were dark and small and low-pitched, that the supper they had been eating was not doing them good, but lying heavy on their stomachs, that the evenings were long and wearisome....

“What the devil’s the meaning of it?” said Ivan Dmitritch, beginning to be ill-humoured. “Wherever one steps there are bits of paper under one’s feet, crumbs, husks. The rooms are never swept! One is simply forced to go out. Damnation take my soul entirely! I shall go and hang myself on the first aspen-tree!”

THE END

VOCABULARY LIST

1. **Scepticism** /ˈskeptɪsɪzəm/ — An attitude of doubt or disbelief towards something that is presented as true or possible.
   Example: “And immediately, as though in mockery of his scepticism, no further than the second line from the top, his eye was caught by the figure 9,499!”

2. **Lapsed** /læpst/ — Expired or become invalid because a required period of time has passed.
   Example: “but hasn’t your ticket lapsed?”

3. **Consent** /kənˈsent/ — To agree to or give permission for something.
   Example: “Ivan Dmitritch had no faith in lottery luck, and would not, as a rule, have consented to look at the lists of winning numbers, but now, as he had nothing else to do and as the newspaper was before his eyes, he passed his finger downwards along the column of numbers.”

4. **Agreeable** /əˈgriːəbl/ — Pleasant, enjoyable, or giving a feeling of satisfaction.
   Example: “Unable to believe his eyes, he hurriedly dropped the paper on his knees without looking to see the number of the ticket, and, just as though some one had given him a douche of cold water, he felt an agreeable chill in the pit of the stomach; tingling and terrible and sweet!”

5. **Bewildered** /bɪˈwɪldəd/ — Confused and unable to understand what is happening.
   Example: “The possibility of winning bewildered them; they could not have said, could not have dreamed, what they both needed that seventy-five thousand for, what they would buy, where they would go.”

6. **Tantalize** /ˈtæntəlaɪz/ — To excite someone's desire or interest by offering the possibility of something desirable without allowing them to obtain it.
   Example: “To torment and tantalize oneself with hopes of possible fortune is so sweet, so thrilling!”

7. **Transformation** /ˌtrænsfəˈmeɪʃən/ — A complete or significant change in someone's life, appearance, or circumstances.
   Example: “And if we have won,” he said—“why, it will be a new life, it will be a transformation!”

8. **Property** /ˈprɒpəti/ — Land, buildings, or other possessions owned by an individual.
   Example: “The ticket is yours, but if it were mine I should, first of all, of course, spend twenty-five thousand on real property in the shape of an estate; ten thousand on immediate expenses, new furnishing... travelling... paying debts, and so on....”

9. **Gracious** /ˈgreɪʃəs/ — Pleasant, attractive, and showing elegance or refinement.
   Example: “And pictures came crowding on his imagination, each more gracious and poetical than the last.”

10. **Poetical** /pəʊˈetɪkəl/ — Having the imaginative beauty, emotional quality, or expressive character associated with poetry.
    Example: “And pictures came crowding on his imagination, each more gracious and poetical than the last.”

11. **Saunter** /ˈsɔːntə/ — To walk in a slow, relaxed, and unhurried manner.
    Example: “When the sun sets he takes a towel and soap and saunters to the bathing-shed, where he undresses at his leisure, slowly rubs his bare chest with his hands, and goes into the water.”

12. **Opaque** /əʊˈpeɪk/ — Not transparent or allowing light to pass through; difficult to see through.
    Example: “And in the water, near the opaque soapy circles, little fish flit to and fro and green water-weeds nod their heads.”

13. **Despondently** /dɪˈspɒndəntli/ — In a hopeless, discouraged, or deeply unhappy manner.
    Example: “There is nowhere to walk; one can’t go out for days together; one has to pace up and down the room, looking despondently at the grey window.”

14. **Begrudge** /bɪˈgrʌdʒ/ — To feel unwilling or resentful about giving someone something or allowing them to have it.
    Example: “She would begrudge me every farthing,” he thought, with a glance at his wife.

15. **Hypocritical** /ˌhɪpəˈkrɪtɪkəl/ — Behaving in a way that contradicts one's stated beliefs or feelings, especially by pretending to be virtuous.
    Example: “All those wretched brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles would come crawling about as soon as they heard of the winning ticket, would begin whining like beggars, and fawning upon them with oily, hypocritical smiles.”

16. **Repulsive** /rɪˈpʌlsɪv/ — Extremely unpleasant or disgusting, causing strong dislike or aversion.
    Example: “Ivan Dmitritch remembered his own relations, and their faces, at which he had looked impartially in the past, struck him now as repulsive and hateful.”

17. **Malignantly** /məˈlɪgnəntli/ — In a hostile, spiteful, or deliberately harmful manner.
    Example: “And he looked at his wife, not with a smile now, but with hatred. She glanced at him too, and also with hatred and anger.”

18. **Triumphantly** /traɪˈʌmfəntli/ — In a manner expressing great satisfaction or pleasure at having achieved victory or proved something.
    Example: “Her husband understood her look; hatred began stirring again in his breast, and in order to annoy his wife he glanced quickly, to spite her at the fourth page on the newspaper and read out triumphantly:”

19. **Wearisome** /ˈwɪərɪsəm/ — Extremely tiring, tedious, or boring, especially because something continues for too long.
    Example: “Hatred and hope both disappeared at once, and it began immediately to seem to Ivan Dmitritch and his wife that their rooms were dark and small and low-pitched, that the supper they had been eating was not doing them good, but lying heavy on their stomachs, that the evenings were long and wearisome....”

20. **Ill-humoured** /ˌɪlˈhjuːməd/ — Irritable, bad-tempered, or easily annoyed.
    Example: “What the devil’s the meaning of it?” said Ivan Dmitritch, beginning to be ill-humoured.

READING COMPREHENSION

Instructions: Answer the following questions based on the story.

1. How does Ivan Dmitritch initially feel about his ordinary life, and what does this reveal about his character?

2. Why does the discovery of the winning lottery series immediately change Ivan's mood?

3. Why do Ivan and his wife become excited before confirming the complete lottery number?

4. What does Ivan's imagined purchase of an estate reveal about his personal ambitions and desires?

5. How does Ivan imagine spending his new wealth, and what does this suggest about his priorities?

6. Why does Ivan's attitude towards his wife begin to change while he is imagining their future?

7. How does Ivan's fantasy about travelling with his wife reveal tensions in their marriage?

8. Why does Ivan imagine that his wife might become financially controlling if they won the lottery?

9. What does Ivan's reaction to the possibility of supporting his wife's relatives reveal about his attitude towards family relationships?

10. How does the possibility of sudden wealth expose feelings that Ivan may have previously concealed?

11. Why does Ivan begin to view his wife's appearance and behaviour differently during his daydream?

12. In what ways does Masha's reaction mirror Ivan's changing attitude towards her?

13. How does Chekhov use the couple's private thoughts to create psychological tension?

14. Why do Ivan and Masha become suspicious and hostile towards each other despite having no confirmed winnings?

15. What is the significance of the contrast between Ivan's idealised vision of country life and his increasingly negative thoughts about his wife?

16. How does the lottery ticket become a symbol of greed, desire, and dissatisfaction in the story?

17. Why is the revelation that the winning number is 46 rather than 26 particularly effective as an ending?

18. How does the final disappointment affect the couple's relationship and their perception of ordinary life?

19. What role does irony play in the story, especially in the contrast between the couple's imagined happiness and their actual circumstances?

20. What does the story suggest about human nature, material wealth, and the ability of imagined possibilities to damage real relationships?

GRAMMAR EXERCISES

Instructions: Choose the one correct answer (A, B, C, or D)

1. Ivan would never have imagined such a luxurious future if he _____ the winning lottery series.

A) had not seen
B) did not see
C) would not see
D) has not seen

2. Had Ivan checked the complete number immediately, he _____ so many unrealistic dreams.

A) would not develop
B) would not have developed
C) will not develop
D) had not developed

3. No sooner _____ the winning series than Ivan began imagining a different life.

A) he had read
B) had he read
C) he read
D) did he had read

4. Ivan looked at his wife as though he _____ her for the first time.

A) sees
B) has seen
C) were seeing
D) is seen

5. It was the possibility of winning the lottery _____ awakened Ivan's hidden desires.

A) who
B) whose
C) that
D) where

6. Ivan imagined _____ a large estate and living comfortably in the countryside.

A) to purchase
B) purchasing
C) purchase
D) purchased

7. If Ivan and Masha _____ the money, their relationship might have changed permanently.

A) received
B) would receive
C) had received
D) have received

8. The more Ivan thought about the money, _____ suspicious he became of his wife.

A) the most
B) more
C) the more
D) most

9. Ivan resented the idea of his wife _____ money on her relatives.

A) spend
B) to spend
C) spending
D) spent

10. Little _____ that their hopes would soon be destroyed by one incorrect number.

A) they knew
B) did they know
C) they had known
D) had they knew

11. The lottery ticket, _____ seemed to promise happiness, eventually caused disappointment.

A) which
B) who
C) whose
D) where

12. Ivan spoke as if he _____ the owner of the estate.

A) had been
B) were
C) will be
D) has been

13. By the time Ivan checked the final number, he _____ an entire imaginary future.

A) had constructed
B) has constructed
C) constructs
D) would construct

14. Neither Ivan nor Masha _____ able to hide their growing suspicion.

A) were
B) have been
C) was
D) are

15. The couple's dreams collapsed, _____ them with their ordinary and unsatisfying lives.

A) leave
B) leaving
C) left
D) to leaving

16. _____ the winning number carefully, Ivan would have avoided the disappointment.

A) If he checked
B) Had he checked
C) Should he checked
D) Were he check

17. Ivan’s imagined happiness was far _____ satisfying than his actual life.

A) less
B) least
C) little
D) fewer

18. What Ivan failed _____ was that the ticket number did not match the winning number.

A) noticing
B) noticed
C) to notice
D) notice

19. Not until he read the final number _____ that they had won nothing.

A) Ivan realised
B) did Ivan realise
C) Ivan had realised
D) had Ivan realised

20. The story illustrates how easily people can become dissatisfied with what they have, _____ the possibility of something better.

A) imagine
B) imagined
C) imagining
D) to imagining

ANSWER KEY

1-A, 2-B, 3-B, 4-C, 5-C, 6-B, 7-C, 8-C, 9-C, 10-B, 11-A, 12-B, 13-A, 14-C, 15-B, 16-B, 17-A, 18-C, 19-B, 20-C