



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E10

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

<https://learn-by-reading.co.uk>

Contents

1. The Lament

2. Grammar Page – Adjectives

1. The Lament

By Anton Chekhov

It is twilight. A thick, wet snow is slowly twirling around the newly lit street lamps and lying in soft thin layers on roofs, on horses' backs, and on people's shoulders and hats. The cab driver, Iona Potapov, is quite white and looks like a ghost: he is bent double as far as a human body can bend double; he is seated on his box; he never makes a move. If a whole snowdrift fell on him, it seems as if he would not find it necessary to shake it off. His little horse is also quite white, and remains motionless; its immobility, its angularity and its straight wooden-looking legs, even close by, give it the appearance of a gingerbread horse worth a kopek. It is, no doubt, plunged in deep thought. If you were snatched from the plough, from your usual grey surroundings, and were thrown into this slough full of monstrous lights, unceasing noise and hurrying people, you too would find it difficult not to think.

Iona and his little horse have not moved from their place for a long while. They left their yard before dinner and, up to now, not a fare. The evening mist is descending over the town, the white lights of the lamps are replacing brighter rays, and the hubbub of the street is getting louder. "Cabby for Viborg Way!" suddenly hears Iona. "Cabby!"

Iona jumps and, through his snow-covered eyelashes, sees an officer in a greatcoat, with his hood over his head.

"Viborg way!" the officer repeats. "Are you asleep, eh? Viborg way!"

With a nod of assent, Iona picks up the reins, in consequence of which layers of snow slip off the horse's back and neck. The officer seats himself in the sleigh, the cab driver smacks his lips to encourage his horse, stretches out his neck like a swan, sits up and, more from habit than necessity, brandishes his whip. The little horse also stretches its neck, bends its wooden-looking legs, and makes a move undecidedly.

"What are you doing, werewolf!" is the exclamation Iona hears from the dark mass moving to and fro, as soon as they have started.

"Where the devil are you going? To the right!"

"You do not know how to drive. Keep to the right!" calls the officer angrily.

A coachman from a private carriage swears at him; a passer-by, who has run across the road and rubbed his shoulder against the horse's nose, looks at him furiously as he sweeps the snow from his sleeve. Iona shifts about on his seat as if he were on needles, moves his elbows as if he were trying to keep his equilibrium, and gasps about like someone suffocating, who does not understand why and wherefore he is there.

"What scoundrels they all are!" jokes the officer; "one would think they had all entered into an agreement to push you or fall under your horse."

Iona looks around at the officer and moves his lips. He evidently wants to say something but the only sound that issues is a snuffle.

"What?" asks the officer.

Iona twists his mouth into a smile and, with an effort, says hoarsely:

"My son, Barin, died this week."

"Hm! What did he die of?"

Iona turns with his whole body towards his passenger and says: "And who knows! They say high fever. He was three days in the hospital and then died... God's will be done."

"Turn round! The devil!" sounds from the darkness. "Have you popped off, old doggie, eh? Use your eyes!"

"Go on, go on," says the officer, "otherwise we shall not get there by tomorrow. Hurry up a bit!"

The cab driver again stretches his neck, sits up and, with bad grace, brandishes his whip. Several times again he turns to look at his fare, but the latter has closed his eyes and, apparently, is not disposed to listen. Having deposited the officer in the Viborg, he stops by the tavern, doubles himself up on his seat, and again remains motionless, while the snow once more begins to cover him and his horse. An hour, and another... Then, along the footpath, with a squeak of boots, and quarrelling, come three young men, two of them tall and lanky, the third one short and humpbacked.

"Cabby, to the Police Bridge!" a cracked voice calls the humpback. "The three of us for ten kopeks."

Iona picks up his reins and smacks his lips. Ten kopeks is not a fair price, but he does not mind whether it is a rouble or five kopeks—to him it is all the same now, so long as they are fares. The young men, pushing each other and using bad language, approach the sleigh and all three at once try to get onto the seat; then begins a discussion as to which two shall sit and who shall be the one to stand. After arguing, abusing each other and much nonsense, it is, at last, decided that the humpback shall stand as he is the smallest.

“Now then, hurry up!” says the humpback in a sharp voice, as he takes his place and breathes in Iona’s neck. “Old furry! Here, mate, what a cap you have! There is not a worse one to be found in all of Petersburg! ...”

“He-he—he-he”, giggles Iona. “Such a ...”

“Now you, “such a”, hurry up, are you going the whole way at this pace? Are you...Do you want it in the neck?”

“My head feels like bursting,” says one of the lanky ones. “Last night at the Donkmasoves, Vaska and I drank the whole of four bottles of cognac.”

“I don’t understand what you lie for,” says the other lanky one angrily; “you lie like a brute.”

“God strikes me, it’s the truth!”

“It’s as much the truth as that a louse coughs!”

“He-he,” grins Iona, “how happy young gentlemen!”

“Pshaw, go to the devil!” says the humpback indignantly.

“Are you going to get on or not, you old pest? Is that the way to drive? Use the whip a bit! Go on, devil, go on, and give it to him well!”

Iona feels at his back the little man wriggling, and the tremble in his voice. He listens to the insults hurled at him, sees the people, and little by little the feeling of loneliness leaves him. The humpback goes on swearing until he gets mixed up in some elaborate six-foot oath, or chokes with coughing. The lankies begin to talk about a certain Nadejda Petrovna. Iona looks round at them several times; he waits for a temporary silence, then, turning round again, he murmurs:

“My son... died this week.”

“We must all die,” sighs the humpback, wiping his lips after an attack of coughing. “Now, hurry up, hurry up! Gentlemen, I really cannot go any farther like this! When will he get us there?”

“Well, just you stimulate him a little in the neck!”

“You old pest, do you hear, I’ll bone your neck for you! If one treated the like of you with ceremony, one would have to go on foot! Do you hear, old serpent Gorinytch! Or do you not care a spit!”

Iona hears rather than feels the blow they deal him.

“He-he” he laughs. “They are happy young gentlemen, God Bless them!”

“Cabby, are you married?” asks a lanky one.

“I? He-he, happy young gentlemen! Now I have only a wife and the moist ground...He, ho, ho, ...that is to say, the grave. My son has died, and I am alive...A wonderful thing, death mistook the door...instead of coming to me, it went to my son...”

Iona turns round to tell them how his son died but, at this moment, the humpback, giving a little sigh, announces, “Thank God, we have at last reached our destination,” and Iona watches them disappear through the dark entrance. Once more he is alone, and again surrounded by silence... His grief, which has abated for a short while, returns and rends his heart with greater force. With an anxious and hurried look, he searches among the crowds passing on either side of the street to find whether there may be just one person who will listen to him. But the crowds hurry by without noticing him or his trouble. Yet it is such an immense, without limit, grief. Should his heartbreak and the grief pour out, it would flow over the whole earth, so it seems, and yet no one sees it. It has managed to conceal itself in such an insignificant shell that no one can see it even by day and with light.

Iona sees a hall porter with some sacking and decides to talk to him.

“Friend, what sort of time is it?” he asks.

“Past nine. What are you standing here for? Move on.”

Iona moves on a few steps, doubles himself up, and abandons himself to his grief. He sees it as useless to turn to people for help. In less than five minutes he straightens himself, holds up his head as if he felt some sharp pain, and gives a tug at the reins; he can bear it no longer. “The stables,” he thinks, and the little horse, as if it understood, starts off at a trot.

About an hour and a half later, Iona is seated by a large dirty stove. Around the stove, on the floor, on the benches, people are snoring; the air is thick and suffocatingly hot. Iona looks at the sleepers, scratches himself, and regrets having returned so early.

“I have not even earned my fodder,” he thinks. “That’s what’s my trouble. A man who knows his job, who has had enough to eat and his horse too, can always sleep peacefully.”

A young cab driver, in one of the corners, half gets up, grunts sleepily, and stretches towards a bucket of water.

“Do you want a drink?” Iona asks him.

“Don’t I want a drink!”

“That’s so? Your good health. But, listen mate, you know, my son is dead...Did you hear? This week, in the hospital...It’s a long story.” Iona looks to see what effect his words have, but sees none—the young man has hidden his face and is fast asleep again. The old man sighs and scratches his head. Just as much as the young one wants to drink, the old man wants to talk. It will soon be a week since his son died, and he has not been able to speak about it properly to anyone. One must tell it slowly and carefully; how his son felt when he suffered, what he said before he died, how he died. One must describe every detail of the funeral, and the journey to the hospital to fetch the dead son’s clothes. His daughter, Anissia, has remained in the village—one must talk about her too. It is nothing he has to tell? Surely the listener would gasp and sigh, and sympathise with him? It is better, too, to talk to women; two words are enough to make them sob.

“I’ll go and look after my horse,” thinks Iona; “there’s always time to sleep. No fear of that!”

He puts on his coat and goes to the stable to his horse; he thinks of the corn, the hay, and the weather. When he is alone, he dares not think of his son; he can speak about him to anyone, but to think of him, and picture him to himself, is unbearably painful.

“Are you tucking in?” Iona asks his horse, looking at its bright eyes, “Go on, tuck in, though we’ve not earned our corn, we can eat hay. Yes, I am too old to drive—my son could have, not I. He was a first-rate cab driver. If only he had lived!”

Iona is silent for a moment, then continues: “That’s how it is, my old horse. There’s no more Kuzma Ionitch. He has left us to live, and he went off pop. Now let’s say you had a foal, you were the foal’s mother and, suddenly, let’s say, that foal went and left you to live after him. It would be sad, wouldn’t it?”

The little horse munches, listens, and breathes over its master’s hand...

Iona’s feelings are too much for him and he tells the little horse the whole story.

2. Grammar Page

3 Adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns and pronouns. They give you more information about people, places, and things.

Kinds of Adjectives

Some adjectives tell about the **size of people or things**.

a big house	a long bridge	tiny feet
a large army	a high mountain	big hands
a huge ship	a short man	a short skirt
a tall building	a thin boy	long trousers

Some adjectives tell about the **color of things**.

a red carpet	a gray suit	a brown bear
a white swan	an orange balloon	green peppers
a blue uniform	a yellow ribbon	black shoes

Some adjectives tell what people or things are like by describing their **quality**.

a beautiful woman	a young soldier	a flat surface
a handsome boy	an old uncle	a hot drink
a poor family	a kind lady	a cold winter
a rich couple	a familiar voice	a sunny day
a strange place	a deep pool	cool weather

Some adjectives tell **what things are made of**. They refer to substances.

a plastic folder	a stone wall	a clay pot
a paper bag	a metal box	a glass door
a cotton shirt	a silk dress	a concrete road
a jade ring	a wooden spoon	a porcelain vase

Some adjectives are made from proper nouns of **place**. These adjectives are called **adjectives of origin**.

a Mexican hat	a British police officer
the French flag	a Filipino dress
an American custom	Washington apples
a Japanese lady	a Spanish dance
an Indian temple	an Italian car

The Order of Adjectives

Sometimes several adjectives are used to describe a single noun or pronoun. When you use two or more adjectives, the usual order is: **size, quality, color, origin, substance**. For example:

a	small	green	plastic	box
	<i>size</i>	<i>color</i>	<i>substance</i>	
a	stylish	red	Italian	car
	<i>quality</i>	<i>color</i>	<i>origin</i>	

Here are more examples.

a large Indian temple	a tall white stone building
a colorful cotton shirt	a long Chinese silk robe
delicious Spanish food	an old graceful Japanese lady
crunchy Australian apples	a short handsome English man

Adjectives of quality sometimes **come before** adjectives of size. For example:

beautiful long hair	elegant short hair
----------------------------	---------------------------

But adjectives of size **always come before** adjectives of color. For example:

beautiful long black hair	elegant short red hair
----------------------------------	-------------------------------

If you use any adjective of substance, it **comes after** the color adjective. For example:

a **beautiful long black silk** dress