



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E54

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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1. The Lottery Ticket

Adapted from Anton Chekhov

Ivan Dmitritch was an ordinary man. He lived with his wife, Masha, and their two children in a small house. His salary was 1,200 roubles a year, enough for their simple life. Ivan was happy with what he had. One evening, after dinner, he sat on the sofa and opened the newspaper, ready to take it easy.

"I forgot to check the newspaper today," Masha said, clearing the plates from the table. "Can you see if the lottery results are there?"

"Yes, they are," Ivan replied, flipping the pages. "But hasn't your lottery ticket expired?"

"No, I paid the interest on Tuesday," Masha said.

"What's the number of your ticket?" Ivan asked.

"Series 9,499, number 26," Masha answered.

"Okay, let's check. Series 9,499, number 26," Ivan repeated.

Ivan didn't believe in lottery luck. He thought checking winning numbers was a wild goose chase. But tonight, he had nothing else to do, and the newspaper was right there. He ran his finger down the list of numbers. Suddenly, on the second line, he saw it: 9,499! His heart raced. He couldn't believe his eyes. He dropped the newspaper onto his lap without checking the ticket number. A strange feeling filled him, like cold water running through his body. It was exciting but scary.

"Masha, 9,499 is here!" he said, his voice shaking.

Masha looked at his shocked face. She knew he wasn't joking. Her hands shook, and she dropped the tablecloth she was folding.

"Series 9,499?" she asked, her face pale.

"Yes, yes, it's there!" Ivan said.

"And the ticket number?" Masha asked.

"Oh, yes, the ticket number... Wait a minute!" Ivan said, his voice full of excitement. "The series is there, Masha! That means we might have won!"

Ivan smiled widely, like a child seeing a shiny toy. Masha smiled too. She liked that Ivan hadn't checked the ticket number yet. It was fun to dream about winning without knowing the truth. The idea of a big prize was thrilling.

"It's our series," Ivan said after a pause. "There's a chance we've won. It's just a chance, but it's there!"

"Go on, check the number!" Masha said.

"Wait a little," Ivan replied. "We have time. If it's not our number, we'll be disappointed. The prize for that series is 75,000 roubles. That's not just money—it's power, it's freedom! If I look now and see number 26, we've won. Can you imagine?"

Ivan and Masha laughed and looked at each other. The idea of winning confused them. They couldn't think clearly about what they would do with 75,000 roubles. They only thought about the numbers—9,499 and 75,000. In their minds, they saw piles of money, but they couldn't imagine the happiness it might bring.

Ivan held the newspaper tightly and walked around the room. After a while, he calmed down and started to dream.

"If we've won," he said, "it will change our lives! The ticket is yours, Masha, but if it was mine, I'd spend 25,000 roubles on a house or land. I'd use 10,000 for new furniture, travel, and paying debts. The other 40,000 I'd put in the bank to earn interest."

"Yes, a house would be wonderful," Masha said, sitting down. Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

"We could buy a house in a quiet place, maybe in Tula or Oryol," Ivan said.

"We wouldn't need a summer house, and the land would make money for us."

Ivan's imagination grew bigger. He saw himself healthy and relaxed, lying on warm sand by a river after eating cold soup. His children played nearby, digging in the sand or chasing insects. He felt free, knowing he didn't have to go to work. Sometimes, he imagined walking through fields to pick mushrooms or watching farmers fish with nets. At sunset, he would bathe in the river, then drink tea with cream and eat fresh bread. In the evenings, he'd play cards with neighbours or take a walk.

“A house would be perfect,” Masha said, lost in her own dreams. Her face showed how much she loved the idea.

Ivan thought about autumn, with its cool evenings and golden leaves. He’d walk by the river to feel the fresh air, then drink vodka and eat salty mushrooms or cucumbers. His children would run to him with carrots or radishes from the garden, smelling of earth. He’d lie on the sofa, reading a magazine or napping with his coat unbuttoned.

But then, Ivan imagined winter. The rain would fall day and night. The trees would look sad. The wind would be cold and wet. The dogs, horses, and chickens would be miserable. There would be nowhere to walk, and Ivan would pace inside, staring out the gray window, feeling bored.

Ivan stopped pacing and looked at Masha. “I’d like to travel abroad, Masha,” he said. “Maybe to France, Italy, or even India.”

“I’d go abroad too,” Masha said. “But check the ticket number!”

“Wait, wait,” Ivan said, walking around again.

Then a new thought came to him. What if Masha went abroad? Traveling alone would be fun, maybe with cheerful people who didn’t worry about every little thing. But Masha would bring bags and boxes, complain about the train, and say everything was too expensive. At every station, Ivan would have to buy her tea or bread. She’d skip meals to save money.

“She’d count every rouble,” Ivan thought, looking at Masha. “The ticket is hers, not mine. Why does she need to travel? She’d lock herself in the hotel and watch me all the time.”

For the first time, Ivan noticed that Masha looked old and tired. Her clothes smelled of cooking. But he was still young and strong. He could have married someone else.

“These thoughts are silly,” Ivan told himself. “But why should she go abroad? She wouldn’t enjoy it. She’d go anyway, of course. To her, Italy or our town would be the same. She’d just make my life harder. She’d lock up the money and give me nothing.”

Ivan thought about Masha’s family—her brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles. If they heard about the money, they’d come asking for help. They’d beg with fake smiles, and if Ivan said no, they’d curse him and spread lies.

"They're like wolves," Ivan thought.

Then he looked at Masha's face. It seemed ugly to him now. Anger grew inside him. "She doesn't understand money," he thought. "If she won, she'd give me only 100 roubles and hide the rest."

Ivan stared at Masha, not smiling anymore. His eyes were full of hate. Masha looked back, and her eyes showed anger too. She had her own dreams and plans. She knew exactly what Ivan was thinking. She knew he'd try to take her money.

"Dreaming about my money is easy!" her eyes seemed to say. "You're barking up the wrong tree!"

Ivan felt her anger. To annoy her, he quickly looked at the newspaper again. On the fourth page, he found the list and read loudly, "Series 9,499, number 46! Not 26!"

The hope and anger vanished. Suddenly, Ivan and Masha felt their house was dark and small. The dinner they ate felt heavy in their stomachs. The evening seemed long and boring.

"What's wrong with this place?" Ivan said, getting angry. "There's paper and crumbs everywhere. The house is never clean! I can't stay here. I'm going out!"

But before Ivan could grab his coat, Masha stood up. "Wait, Ivan," she said softly, her voice different now. She reached into her pocket and pulled out another ticket. "I forgot to tell you. I bought another ticket last week. It's series 9,499, number 46."

Ivan froze. His mouth opened, but no words came out. He stared at the ticket in Masha's hand. "What?" he whispered.

Masha smiled, her eyes warm again. "I didn't want to say anything until I was sure. I checked earlier today. Series 9,499, number 46 won 75,000 roubles. We won, Ivan. We really won."

Ivan's anger melted away. He laughed, a loud, happy laugh. He grabbed Masha and hugged her tightly. "Masha, you clever woman! Why didn't you tell me?"

"I wanted to surprise you," Masha said, laughing too. "I was waiting for the right moment."

They sat down together, holding the winning ticket. The room didn't feel dark anymore. It felt warm and full of hope. They started talking about their dreams again—a new house, a trip with the children, maybe even a small school for the village. They realized they didn't need to fight over the money. They loved each other and wanted the same things.

"I'm sorry I got angry," Ivan said, looking at Masha. "I was stupid."

"I was angry too," Masha said. "But now we know what's important. This money is for us, for our family."

That night, Ivan and Masha didn't sleep. They talked and planned until the sun came up, happier than ever. They knew they had hit the jackpot, not just with money, but with love and trust.

2. Comprehension Questions and Answers

Question 1: What does Ivan Dmitritch do after dinner that leads to checking the lottery results?

Question 2: Why does Ivan initially think checking the lottery numbers is a waste of time?

Question 3: What is the first number Ivan sees in the newspaper that excites him?

Question 4: How does Masha react when Ivan tells her their series number is in the newspaper?

Answer 5: Ivan dreams about buying a house or land, new furniture, traveling, and paying debts.

Answer 6: Ivan thinks of Masha's family as "like wolves," meaning they are greedy and aggressive.

Question 7: Why does Ivan get angry with Masha while thinking about the lottery money?

Question 8: What does the idiom "barking up the wrong tree" mean in the story when Masha looks at Ivan?

Question 9: What is the surprising twist Masha reveals at the end of the story?

Question 10: How does the story end for Ivan and Masha, and what does the idiom "hit the jackpot" mean here?

Answers

Answer 1: Ivan sits on the sofa to read the newspaper, which prompts him to check the lottery results when Masha asks.

Answer 2: Ivan thinks it's a wild goose chase because he doesn't believe in lottery luck.

Answer 3: Ivan sees the series number 9,499, which matches Masha's ticket.

Answer 4: Masha's face turns pale, and she drops the tablecloth because she is shocked and excited.

Question 5: What does Ivan dream about buying with the lottery money?

Question 6: What idiom does Ivan use in his mind to describe Masha's family when he thinks about them asking for money?

Answer 7: Ivan gets angry because he thinks Masha would lock up the money and only give him 100 roubles.

Answer 8: It means Masha thinks Ivan is wrong to dream about taking her money, as she won't let him control it.

Answer 9: Masha reveals she bought a second ticket with series 9,499, number 46, which is the winning number.

Answer 10: Ivan and Masha plan their future happily with the lottery money, and "hit the jackpot" means they achieved great success with both money and love.

3. Grammar Page

Preposition or Adverb?

Some words can be used either as prepositions or as adverbs. If the word is followed by a noun or a pronoun, it is a preposition.

Look at these pairs of examples. In each of the sentences marked **preposition**, there is a noun or pronoun after the preposition. This noun or pronoun is called the **object of the preposition**. Notice that objects are printed in color.

She put her hand **inside** my **bag**.

preposition noun

It was raining, so they decided to stay **inside**.

adverb

His friends walked **past** **him** without speaking.

preposition noun

A car drove **past** at high speed.

adverb

John's house is **across** the **street**.

preposition noun

They got into the boat and rowed **across**.

adverb

Water was running **down** the **walls**.

preposition noun

He tripped over his shoelaces and fell **down**.

adverb

