

# Life Lines

A Shared Reading activity pack  
to read wherever you are

Issue 45

"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."

*The Lottery Ticket, Anton Chekhov*

The Reader is a charity which usually brings people together to listen to stories, extracts and poems in free, weekly Shared Reading groups. In these Life Lines activity packs we hope to offer everyone the same comfort, meaning and connection through great literature that our reading groups provide – wherever it finds you.

Each Life Lines pack will bring you some of a story and a poem, which you can read in your own time. Along with the reading, you'll find a selection of thoughts and feelings shared by other fellow readers about the chosen pieces. We suggest that reading the poem or the story out loud is a great way to fully immerse yourself in the reading experience and discover your own personal connections with the material. It may feel strange but it does make a difference, so do please give it a try!

*This week's story is The Lottery Ticket by Anton Chekhov. Have you ever dreamt of what it might feel like to see your numbers appear, that dawning realization that you have won the lottery? I wonder where your dreams might take you, what adventures you might have, the places you might go and things you would do? In our story today we are going to meet Ivan Dmitritch and his wife who are faced with this very situation. Let's have a read and see what we make of their experience. Feel free to make notes on your own thoughts and feelings as you go, perhaps marking words or sentences that particularly stand out to you...*

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.

***A Pause for Thought...***Let's take a moment to pause here at this dramatic moment and gather our thoughts. It feels as if a lot has happened already. I wonder what kind of impression we have of Ivan Dmitritch at this point? He is introduced to us as a man who 'was very well satisfied with his lot' and who 'had no faith in lottery luck' What did you make of the moment where he sees the number in the paper? I'm wondering what is going on inside him here as we are told 'he felt an agreeable chill in the pit of his stomach; **tingling** and **terrible** and **sweet**?' Those three words are interesting aren't they. What kind of feeling do they leave you with? I was intrigued by their decision not to look at the second number and instead to 'torment and tantalize oneself with hopes of possible fortune' Do you agree that this is 'sweet' and 'thrilling'? What do you think you might do in this situation? Let's read on and see where this 'possible future' takes them...

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! . . ."

***Another Pause for Thought...*** Well, it certainly feels as if we have been on a 'journey' with our imaginary lottery winnings here. What do you make of these pictures that 'came crowding on Ivan's imagination, each more gracious and poetical than the last'? What might be going on inside him here as he walks through the seasons in his mind?

*Have you ever let yourself dream about what you might do if you won the lottery? Where do your imaginings take you? It feels like there has been a bit of a shift in Ivan here. Remember at the start of the story we were told he was 'very well satisfied with his lot'? And yet now he is dreaming of 'a new life...a transformation'. I wonder what might have made that change happen, and what it is about his 'lot' that he is dreaming of changing. I'm trying to work out whether it is possible to be 'satisfied' and also dream of or long for a different life at the same time? Or does one thing replace the other...? Is this dreaming as innocent and 'sweet' as Ivan feels it to be, do you think? Let's pick our story up and see what happens next...*

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!"



fancy . . . In reality it is all one to her, whether it 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 go to Naples or Klein. 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!"

***A Final Pause for Thought***...Again it feels like there is another huge shift in this final piece of the story. What did you make of it? Were you surprised by the ending? All of this is happening in a matter of moments as these thoughts rush through Ivan's mind. And it seems a similar process is going on in his wife's mind too. Have you ever had an experience where you've had a huge shift in your thinking in a short space of time? I'm wondering what that might feel like, and whether Ivan and his wife are even aware of what is taking place..

*After all the dreaming and imagining of a different life, when Ivan finally looks at the second number in the paper we are told 'Hatred and hope both disappeared at once'. What do you make of that line? Is it a good thing, or bad? When the dreams fade and reality comes back into focus, that reality seems to take on a different form from the beginning of the story. Why might that be, when nothing about the room around them has changed? I wonder in what ways our inward life impacts on our outward surroundings or how we view the world around us. Do you think Ivan and his wife will be able to get back, or has this journey taken them too far away? I hope you enjoyed reading it.*

### **Time for a Poem...**

We'll pick up with another story again in our next issue, but now a pause for some poetry. Poetry isn't always easy for everyone to get going with. In our Shared Reading groups we read a poem out loud a few times, to give ourselves a bit of time to hear it aloud. Give this a go yourself and see if it helps you to feel comfortable with the words, even if you're still not sure what it's all about!

We aren't looking to find an answer here, or what the person writing it might have meant when they wrote it. We're just looking to see if any feelings or ideas come up when we read it – and often we find that the more time you allow yourself to simply be with the poem, the more thoughts and feelings will come through.

One of the keys is to enjoy yourself: take your time, read it out loud, have a think about any bits you like, or that puzzle you, then... have another read!

*This week's Featured Poem is The Best Thing In The World by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Let's take a read through and think about the question, 'What's the best thing in the world?'*

## **The Best Thing in the World**

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

What's the best thing in the world?  
June-rose, by May-dew impearled;  
Sweet south-wind, that means no rain,  
Truth, not cruel to a friend;  
Pleasure, not in haste to end;  
Beauty, not self-decked and curled  
Till its pride is over-plain;  
Light, that never makes you wink;  
Memory, that gives no pain;  
Love, when, so, you're loved again.  
What's the best thing in the world?  
Something out of it, I think.

*There are lots of different images and thoughts in here aren't there. I wonder if any stood out for you? The description of the rose at the beginning makes me think of changing seasons and look forward to the spring. What pictures do these descriptions bring to mind for us? Have you ever asked yourself this question? Maybe you have your own ideas about 'the best thing in the world', a favourite place, or season, a memory or a feeling? Its interesting isn't it, that the poem quickly moves on from nature and the outside world, to focus instead on 'truth...pleasure...beauty...memory...love.' It's making me think a bit about our story, and how quickly Ivan moves on from dreaming of an idyllic life in the country to imagining the inner struggle and unhappiness which might exist, even in such a place. I was struck by the line 'Truth, not cruel to a friend' Its making me wonder how truth might be cruel, or used in a cruel way. And what about truth can also make it something you might think of when you think of 'the best thing in the world'? What did you make of the description of beauty here, 'not self-decked and curled/Till its pride is over-plain'? What do you make of the last couple of lines? Do you feel like the poem answers the question? I'm left wondering what might have prompted this question to begin with...perhaps a child, asking the question and an adult trying to think of an answer, maybe a solitary moment of quiet and contemplation?*

*We've left this page blank for you to make notes,  
draw a picture, have a go at writing yourself or jot  
down something you'd like to tell us...*



*As well as reading materials, we've also included a puzzle for you to have a go at while you're having a cuppa.*

As we have been reading about Lottery Tickets, I thought we could have a go at a number sequence puzzle today. Below are a set of different number sequences. Can you work out the rule and find out what number comes next? I have included a box with the rules for each sequence at the bottom of the page in case you want to check!

<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>100</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>1,250</b>	<b>6,250</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>16</b>

**Answers:**

Rule 1: (+2, +3, +2, +3 etc)

Rule 2: (-1, -10, -1, -10 etc)

Rule 3: (x5)

Rule 4: (+6)

Rule 5: (+1, +2, +3, +4, +5 etc)