

Lottery ticket essay



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This essay analysis of “ The Lottery Ticket” by Anton Chekhov will mainly review the changing attitudes of Ivan towards his wife and family as the short story develops, and the techniques that the author uses in order to build tension and interest in the story and in the fate of the couple. Anton Chekhov gets to the action of the short story very quickly. A brief but information packed first paragraph tells us without embroidery, what we need to know as readers. The author tells us that Ivan is middle-class and manages to keep his family on twelve hundred a year. He seems content at first that they have just enough to live on.

After dinner, he relaxes with the newspaper and his wife asks him to check the Lottery Numbers. He obliges, Chekhov tells us, because he has nothing else pressing to do. This tells us something about his character already – he seems rather cold and sceptical too, as he seems to have little faith in his wife or in her chances of winning. The author describes Ivan’s shock well, as he realises the ticket is on the list of potential winners. At this point in the short story, the tone changes from the relaxed contentment of the first paragraphs.

Chekhov adds pace and interest by quickening the dialog, as Ivan tells his wife in short sharp syllables that their ticket is on the list. He starts to think out loud about the possibilities, but his train of thought seems to be a one-way conversation – he does not share his joy and excitement with his wife but goes off at a tangent imagining what he will do with the money. It is very important to take note of the first few lines of the short story here – and to remember it is actually his wife’s ticket. Ivan’s wife does add to his reverie, but merely to endorse his spending choices at first. Then she realises what is

going on in Ivan's head. The contentment they had in other's company is turning to frustration and anger as they realise their very different attitudes.

Ivan's thoughts dwell on the ways in which the people who are supposed to matter to him might now be obstacles in his way, preventing him from getting what he wants. He imagines his wife's relatives as oily hypocrites who will come crawling out of the woodwork to beg or threaten for money. His wife can see where this is all going and becomes angry too, as she watches the look on her husband's face. He is seeing her with new eyes, as an obstacle who will stop him from taking an exotic holiday by doling out the money to him in dribs and drabs. His anger makes him see her as aging and plain.

The denouement of the story shows how Ivan tries to get his own back. Petty, bitter and cynical, Ivan goes to the page with the final lottery number selections. He whips the page open and triumphantly tells his wife that they are one number out. Financially, they are no worse than they were before, but in relationship terms they have lost a lot. Or perhaps it is just as well that they found out their true feelings and motives.