

The Lucky Horse



a short story for English reading and speaking

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Introduction

Is there horse gambling in your country?

What kind of people play this?

Do some people lose a lot of money doing this?

What do you think about it?

The Lucky Horse

“Don’t worry,” said Blake. “It’s a dead cert. It’s a winner.”

“They all say that,” said Hedley. “They all say exactly the same words.”

But Hedley still went to the track and laid his money down. He still wanted to believe that this horse would make all his problems go away.

All the other nags before were just also-rans — ***total losers***. But this one, this one horse, this would be different.

Hedley stood by the fence and stared ahead at the gate. The horses all lined up, hot breath panting from their nostrils and mouths in great clouds. Hedley could feel it on his arms and face.

He gripped the ticket between his fingers. He shook the ticket three times at the grass track in front of him and repeated a prayer to himself.

“Come on now, be lucky. Come on, be lucky. Come on, be lucky.”

He chanted out the three lines of his lucky verse.

Beside him stood another punter. He held onto his ticket with a strained look on his face of desperate optimism. Hedley didn't want to be associated with him — didn't want to be seen as any of these other losers and failures. He was not like them.

This was the last time. His last race. He knew that now. He would take the winnings from this last horse — ***his lucky horse*** — and fix everything.

The back payments on the apartment, his daughter's college fund, even new shoes for his wife. He would give them everything. He would repair everything in his life and make amends.

Then he would never come down to this cursed race track again.

He had spent too many hours here, lost so much money. Some wins, sure. But he always lost it again later. It never worked out.

This time was different. This one last race. This one last lucky horse. Then back to a normal life again.

He would move back in with his wife and daughter. They would be a family again.

An announcement burst through the speakers above the rail.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the 3:30 from Happy Valley is due to start in a few moments. Take your places and stand clear of the racetrack.”

People edged forward. Hedley governed his place by the rail. His vantage point.

Then on a huge board on the other side of the track, the list of horses that were running in the race.

They all had typical racing horse names.

Little Thunder.

Dancing Nicely.

Red Top.

Key Point.

Little Lucky.

Little Vantage.

“That’s my boy,” thought Hedley to himself.

Wait, what was that?

Little Lucky? Little Vantage?

Those names were too similar. They had the same ring of fortune — *or lack thereof* — between them.

Hedley checked his racing ticket. It said Little Lucky. Was that

his horse? He was sure it was. But was it?

Panic flew into his veins, and his heart pounded out a message. You have made a big mistake.

What if he had put everything on the wrong horse? Blake had told him it was a dead cert. What did that even mean? Some said these races were fixed. That all the winners were arranged by gangs.

It was Blake's fault!

He had given him the wrong horse. It was all his fault. He had relied on him for information, for inside info, and instead, Blake had given him the wrong horse. It could ruin his life, ruin his chances of fixing everything!

Hedley pulled out his phone and called Blake.

“Hello?”

“What horse was it?”

“Hedley? What do you mean, what horse?”

“The 3:30. Quick, what horse was it?”

The sound of rustling paper on the other end of the line.

“Little Vantage,” said Blake.

“Little Vantage?” Hedley choked on the words. He pulled air

into his lungs. "I thought you said Little Lucky. There are two horses here. Two. Both of them with similar names. I thought you said Little Lucky."

"No, I didn't." Blake's voice was very stern. No friendliness now. "I said Little Vantage. I even wrote it down for you."

"I've put everything on Little Lucky," said Hedley. "You said —"

"Not my problem. Yours." The phone clicked off.

Hedley swore through his clenched teeth. He put his phone back in his pocket and then searched all his other pockets for the piece of paper.

An announcement came out of the speakers. "And they're off."

The horses charged out of the gate and there was a rush of air as the crowd of punters cheered their horses on.

Hedley found the piece of paper all scrunched up. He flattened it out and saw the letters.

Little Vantage. 3:30.

He ripped the paper to shreds and threw it on the grass at his feet.

He was ruined. He was finished. No more moving back in with the wife. She would never talk to him again. No more plans of

making it up to his daughter. And he was behind with the rent.

He could be made homeless. No job, no money. He was done for.

Hedley leaned on the rail and watched as the horses tore into the ground towards him.

The commentator's voice bellowed through the speaker: *"And it's Little Lucky taking the lead. Little Lucky in full forward position. Little Lucky right in the lead."*

Hedley stared at the horse in front. It was Little Lucky. It was the horse on his ticket. Blake was wrong all along. He gave him the wrong horse.

Little Lucky was the horse! It was going to win!

Little Lucky galloped ahead of the other horses. It was like it was no effort to him at all. The other nags trailed behind, long forgotten. Hedley could not see which horse was Little Vantage.

Little Lucky raced past Hedley, right in front of him, and Hedley cheered him on.

"Go on, my son! Go on!"

The crowd around him roared as one as Little Lucky stormed ahead towards the finishing line.

Hedley gazed at the back of the jockey's shirt as he tapped Little Lucky's rump with his crop.

The announcer's voice lost in the lion's roar of the crowd, but Hedley could see Little Lucky speed past the finishing line.

The crowd went ballistic.

Hedley jumped up on the spot. He punched the air with victory.

Yes, Little Lucky had won! He had won!

He left the fence and marched back to the ticket cashiers. Time to cash in his ticket. He would call his wife, tell her all his debts were cleared. They could make a new start. No more horses. No more gambling.

But what an absolute freak chance of a win. It came out of nowhere. It was like he had been given a gift.

Maybe that was it? Maybe today was his lucky day after all.

Why ruin a good run? Why not take advantage of his leap of great luck? It would be stupid not to.

After all, he could go back to his wife with ten times the amount he had won now.

Yes, that was the right thing to do.

All he needed to do was pick the right horse...

The lucky horse.

The Lucky Horse – story and reading comprehension questions

This is the story divided into clear sections with reading comprehension questions below each section.

This format might be easier for certain classes.

You can find the model answers for the questions at the end of the lesson plan.

Section 1

“Don’t worry,” said Blake. “It’s a dead cert. It’s a winner.”

“They all say that,” said Hedley. “They all say exactly the same words.”

But Hedley still went to the track and laid his money down. He still wanted to believe that this horse would make all his problems go away.

All the other nags before were just also-rans — total losers. But this one, this one horse, this would be different.

Hedley stood by the fence and stared ahead at the gate. The

horses all lined up, hot breath panting from their nostrils and mouths in great clouds. Hedley could feel it on his arms and face.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Who is the main character in the story?
2. What is he trying to do?
3. Where is he?
4. Who is Blake, and what information does he give to Hedley about the horse race?
5. What does Hedley say at the beginning of the story about the racing tips he gets from horse racing tipsters?
6. Why does Hedley decide to go to the horse track despite his reservations?
7. Where does Hedley go? Why does he want to go there?

Section 2

He gripped the ticket between his fingers. He shook the ticket three times at the grass track in front of him and repeated a prayer to himself.

“Come on now, be lucky. Come on, be lucky. Come on, be lucky.”

He chanted out the three lines of his lucky verse.

Beside him stood another punter. He held onto his ticket with a strained look on his face of desperate optimism. Hedley didn't want to be associated with him — didn't want to be seen as any of these other losers and failures. He was not like them.

Reading Comprehension Questions

8. How does Hedley feel about the other people at the racetrack? Why?
9. What does Hedley do with his ticket before the race?

Section 3

This was the last time. His last race. He knew that now. He would take the winnings from this last horse — his lucky horse — and fix everything.

The back payments on the apartment, his daughter's college fund, even new shoes for his wife. He would give them everything. He would repair everything in his life and make amends.

Then he would never come down to this cursed race track again. He had spent too many hours here, lost so much money. Some wins, sure. But he always lost it again later. It never worked out.

Reading Comprehension Questions

10. If Hedley's horse wins, what will he do with the money?
11. What does he plan to do for his wife and daughter?

Section 4

This time was different. This one last race. This one last lucky horse. Then back to a normal life again.

He would move back in with his wife and daughter. They would be a family again.

An announcement burst through the speakers above the rail.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the 3:30 from Happy Valley is due to start in a few moments. Take your places and stand clear of the racetrack.”

People edged forward. Hedley governed his place by the rail. His vantage point.

Reading Comprehension Questions

12. What information does the announcement give to the crowd?

Section 5

Then on a huge board on the other side of the track, the list of horses that were running in the race.

They all had typical racing horse names.

Little Thunder.

Dancing Nicely.

Red Top.

Key Point.

Little Lucky.

Little Vantage.

“That’s my boy,” thought Hedley to himself.

Reading Comprehension Questions

13. What is written on the board beside the track?

Section 6

Wait, what was that?

Little Lucky? Little Vantage?

Those names were too similar. They had the same ring of fortune — or lack thereof — between them.

Hedley checked his racing ticket. It said Little Lucky. Was that his horse? He was sure it was. But was it?

Panic flew into his veins, and his heart pounded out a message.

You have made a big mistake.

Reading Comprehension Questions

14. What causes Hedley to panic?
15. How does Hedley react when he realizes that two horses have similar names?

Section 7

What if he had put everything on the wrong horse? Blake had told him it was a dead cert. What did that even mean? Some said

these races were fixed. That all the winners were arranged by gangs.

It was Blake's fault!

He had given him the wrong horse. It was all his fault. He had relied on him for information, for inside info, and instead, Blake had given him the wrong horse. It could ruin his life, ruin his chances of fixing everything!

Reading Comprehension Questions

16. What mistake does he think Blake has made?
17. Why does he feel that way?

Section 8

Hedley pulled out his phone and called Blake.

“Hello?”

“What horse was it?”

“Hedley? What do you mean, what horse?”

“The 3:30. Quick, what horse was it?”

The sound of rustling paper on the other end of the line.

“Little Vantage,” said Blake.

Reading Comprehension Questions

18. Who does Hedley call on the phone?
19. Describe Hedley's emotional state when he calls Blake and learns about the horse's name.

Section 9

"Little Vantage?" Hedley choked on the words. He pulled air into his lungs. "I thought you said Little Lucky. There are two horses here. Two. Both of them with similar names. I thought you said Little Lucky."

“No, I didn’t.” Blake’s voice was very stern. No friendliness now.

“I said Little Vantage. I even wrote it down for you.”

“I’ve put everything on Little Lucky,” said Hedley. “You said —”

“Not my problem. Yours.” The phone clicked off.

Reading Comprehension Questions

20. What does he find out?

Section 10

Hedley swore through his clenched teeth. He put his phone back in his pocket and then searched all his other pockets for the piece of paper.

An announcement came out of the speakers. “And they’re off.”

The horses charged out of the gate and there was a rush of air as the crowd of punters cheered their horses on.

Hedley found the piece of paper all scrunched up. He flattened it out and saw the letters.

Little Vantage. 3:30.

Reading Comprehension Questions

21. What does he do with the piece of paper?

Section 11

He ripped the paper to shreds and threw it on the grass at his feet.

He was ruined. He was finished. No more moving back in with the wife. She would never talk to him again. No more plans of making it up to his daughter. And he was behind with the rent.

He could be made homeless. No job, no money. He was done for.

Reading Comprehension Questions

22. Why does Hedley rip up the piece of paper with the

horse's name on it?

Section 12

Hedley leaned on the rail and watched as the horses tore into the ground towards him.

The commentator's voice bellowed through the speaker: "And it's Little Lucky taking the lead. Little Lucky in full forward position. Little Lucky right in the lead."

Hedley stared at the horse in front. It was Little Lucky. It was the horse on his ticket. Blake was wrong all along. He gave him the wrong horse.

Reading Comprehension Questions

23. How does Hedley's attitude change when he hears the race commentator's announcement?
24. Halfway through the race, which horse is winning?

Section 13

Little Lucky was the horse! It was going to win!

Little Lucky galloped ahead of the other horses. It was like it was no effort to him at all. The other nags trailed behind, long forgotten. Hedley could not see which horse was Little Vantage. Little Lucky raced past Hedley, right in front of him, and Hedley cheered him on.

“Go on, my son! Go on!”

Reading Comprehension Questions

25. What happens during the horse race? How does the crowd react?
26. How does Hedley feel when he sees the horse "Little Lucky" leading the race?

Section 14

The crowd around him roared as one as Little Lucky stormed ahead towards the finishing line.

Hedley gazed at the back of the jockey's shirt as he tapped Little Lucky's rump with his crop.

The announcer's voice lost in the lion's roar of the crowd, but Hedley could see Little Lucky speed past the finishing line.

The crowd went ballistic.

Reading Comprehension Questions

27. Was this the same horse that Blake advised Hedley to bet on?
28. Which horse wins the race?

Section 15

Hedley jumped up on the spot. He punched the air with victory.

Yes, Little Lucky had won! He had won!

He left the fence and marched back to the ticket cashiers. Time to cash in his ticket. He would call his wife, tell her all his debts were cleared. They could make a new start. No more horses. No more gambling.

Reading Comprehension Questions

29. How does Hedley react when "Little Lucky" wins the race?
30. How does Hedley feel when he goes to cash in his ticket?
31. What does Hedley plan to do with his winnings? How does he envision his future?

Section 16

But what an absolute freak chance of a win. It came out of nowhere. It was like he had been given a gift.

Maybe that was it? Maybe today was his lucky day after all.

Why ruin a good run? Why not take advantage of his leap of great luck? It would be stupid not to.

After all, he could go back to his wife with ten times the amount he had won now.

Yes, that was the right thing to do.

All he needed to do was pick the right horse...

The lucky horse.

Reading Comprehension Questions

32. Why does Hedley contemplate taking another gamble even after winning?

33. Describe Hedley's thought process as he considers betting again.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Who is the main character in the story?
2. What is he trying to do?
3. Where is he?
4. Who is Blake, and what information does he give to Hedley about the horse race?
5. What does Hedley say at the beginning of the story about the racing tips he gets from horse racing tipsters?
6. Why does Hedley decide to go to the horse track despite his reservations?
7. Where does Hedley go? Why does he want to go there?
8. How does Hedley feel about the other people at the racetrack? Why?
9. What does Hedley do with his ticket before the race?
10. If Hedley's horse wins, what will he do with the money?
11. What does he plan to do for his wife and daughter?

12. What information does the announcement give to the crowd?
13. What is written on the board beside the track?
14. What causes Hedley to panic?
15. How does Hedley react when he realizes that two horses have similar names?
16. What mistake does he think Blake has made?
17. Why does he feel that way?
18. Who does Hedley call on the phone?
19. Describe Hedley's emotional state when he calls Blake and learns about the horse's name.
20. What does he find out?
21. What does he do with the piece of paper?
22. Why does Hedley rip up the piece of paper with the horse's name on it?
23. How does Hedley's attitude change when he hears the race commentator's announcement?
24. Halfway through the race, which horse is winning?

25. What happens during the horse race? How does the crowd react?
26. How does Hedley feel when he sees the horse "Little Lucky" leading the race?
27. Was this the same horse that Blake advised Hedley to bet on?
28. Which horse wins the race?
29. How does Hedley react when "Little Lucky" wins the race?
30. How does Hedley feel when he goes to cash in his ticket?
31. What does Hedley plan to do with his winnings? How does he envision his future?
32. Why does Hedley contemplate taking another gamble even after winning?
33. Describe Hedley's thought process as he considers betting again.

Essential Vocabulary

losers	resembled	stupid
vantage	ruined	advantage
announced	movements	absolute
vantage	advance	freak
galloped	repaired	chance
jockey	losers	desperate
victory	govern	optimism
cleared	announcement	typical
debts	typical	failed
advantage	cleared	strained

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Losers — *a term often used informally to describe individuals*

who have not achieved their desired goals or outcomes.

Resembled — *to exhibit traits, features, or qualities that are similar to those of another person, thing, or entity.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

The team felt disappointed after being labelled as losers in the competition.

The toy car closely resembled a real racing car, complete with intricate details and designs.

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help improve all your English skills — reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Discussion Questions

What is Hedley doing in this story?

What is the main problem Hedley is facing at the beginning of the story?

Do you think he has a problem? What is it?

Why does Hedley trust Blake's advice about the horse race?

Just before the race, Hedley shakes his ticket three times and says a prayer. Why does he do this? Does he believe it can help him? How?

Hedley's life with his wife and daughter is in trouble. What other actions could he take to fix these problems?

How does Hedley react when he realizes there are two horses with similar names? Why does he panic?

What does Hedley blame Blake for, and why does he think it's Blake's fault?

Why do the horses have their special names?

How does Hedley feel when he sees the horse "Little Lucky" leading the race?

Describe Hedley's reaction when he finds out he has bet on the wrong horse.

There is a mix-up between two horses, but in the end, Hedley's horse wins. What do you think he will do next? Why will he do this?

How does the story end, and what does Hedley plan to do next?

Do you think Hedley's decision to gamble was a good idea? Why or why not?

What do you think is the lesson or message of the story?

Can you relate to any of the emotions or experiences that Hedley goes through? Why or why not?

Is gambling a problem in your country? Why/why not?

If a person has a problem with gambling, what can they do? Who can they ask for help?

Have you ever gambled? Did you win? How much did you win or lose?

Have you ever been to a horse race or a gambling event? What was it like?

How did gambling make you feel?

What are some reasons people might enjoy watching horse

racers or betting on them?

Do you think horse racing is a fair sport, or do you think some races might be fixed? Why?

Should gambling be banned? Why/why not?

Is gambling the same as drinking too much alcohol? Why/why not?

What do you think are the risks of gambling? Can you think of any positive aspects?

What is a gambler? What is gambling?

Do you know anyone who likes to gamble?

Why do people gamble? What is the attraction?

In your culture, are there any traditional forms of gambling or games of chance?

Do you think gambling can be addictive? Why or why not?

What advice would you give to someone who is thinking about trying gambling for the first time?

How do you think gambling can affect families and relationships?

Are there any other forms of entertainment that involve chance, luck, or predictions?

Do you think winning a large sum of money would solve all of a person's problems? Why or why not?

Role Play

This is a role play activity.

There are two characters in the role play.

1. Hedley

2. Hedley's wife

The Situation

Hedley has come back from the racetrack. He has won a lot of money. Enough to pay off all the family debts and to buy some new clothes and go out for a really nice meal in a good restaurant.

Hedley wants to make amends with his wife. He says he will never gamble again. They have no debts, so they can start their lives again.

But his wife doesn't believe him. She thinks he will always be a gambler and always make trouble.

In pairs, create a story that you can present to the class in a role play.

Take some time to prepare your role play.

When you are ready, show the class.

Debate: Gambling Should Be Banned!

This is a debate exercise.

Divide the class into two teams. Choose one person to act as chairperson for the debate.

The Situation

There is a gambling problem in your town.

People are gathering in private rooms to play card games, backgammon, mah-jong and other games with the purpose of gambling.

They are not doing this in public places, and they are very discreet.

But some people believe this could create a social problem in the town.

Team A

You think that these private gambling rooms have become a serious problem.

It is causing people to become addicted to gambling and destroying people's lives and families.

Some people have complained of family members spending all their time and money in the gambling rooms and avoiding work and family responsibilities.

It is time for this to stop. So you want the gambling rooms to be closed down.

Team B

You do not think the gambling rooms are a problem.

They are private and not in the public eye. No children can enter the rooms, only adults.

If people want to gamble, then let them. It is their choice and their right. No one is forcing them to gamble.

You believe that if the gambling rooms are banned, then people will go to other places to gamble. The problem will not go away — it will just become more hidden from view.

Each team should prepare their lines of argument.

When you are ready, begin the debate.

Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

You are Hedley in the story.

You have lost a lot of money, and your life is in serious trouble.

You want to make amends to all the people you have hurt with your gambling addiction. So you want to write a letter to each person and ask them for their forgiveness.

The first person you will write to is your wife.

Write to her and explain what has happened. Then express your apologies in a sincere and heartfelt manner.

When you have finished writing your letter, read it out loud in front of the class.

Or hand it to your teacher for review.

Reading Comprehension Questions – Model Answers

- 1.The main character in the story is Hedley.
- 2.He is trying to win money by betting on a horse.
- 3.He is at the racetrack.
- 4.Blake is someone who gives Hedley a tip about which horse will win, telling him it is a “dead cert.”
- 5.He says that they all say the same thing, suggesting he does not fully trust them.
- 6.He goes because he still hopes this horse will solve all his problems.
- 7.He goes to the racetrack because he wants to place a bet and win money.
- 8.He feels superior to them because he does not want to be seen as a loser like them.
- 9.He shakes it three times and repeats a lucky prayer.
10. He will use the money to fix his financial problems and improve his life.
11. He plans to support them financially and make amends for his past mistakes.

12. The announcement tells the crowd that the 3:30 race from Happy Valley is about to begin.
13. The board shows the names of the horses running in the race.
14. He panics because there are two horses with very similar names.
15. He becomes confused and anxious, and checks his ticket.
16. He thinks Blake gave him the wrong horse name.
17. He feels that way because he is afraid he has bet on the wrong horse.
18. He calls Blake.
19. He is anxious and desperate to confirm the correct horse.
20. He finds out that Blake told him to bet on Little Vantage, not Little Lucky.
21. He finds it and reads the horse's name written on it.
22. He rips it up because he believes he has made a terrible mistake and lost everything.
23. His attitude changes from despair to hope when he realises his horse is winning.
24. Little Lucky is winning.
25. Little Lucky takes the lead and the crowd cheers loudly with excitement.

26. He feels excited and hopeful as he believes he will win.
27. No, Blake advised him to bet on Little Vantage.
28. Little Lucky wins the race.
29. He reacts with excitement and celebrates his victory.
30. He feels happy and relieved.
31. He plans to pay off his debts and rebuild his life with his family.
32. He believes his luck will continue and wants to win even more money.
33. He convinces himself that continuing to gamble is sensible because he feels lucky and wants greater rewards.

Credits

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