



# The Rocking Horse Winner

*D.H. Lawrence*

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## **The Rocking Horse Winner** D.H. Lawrence

The "Rocking-Horse Winner" is a short story by D. H. Lawrence. The story describes a young middle-class Englishwoman who "had no luck." Though outwardly successful, she is haunted by a sense of failure; her husband is a ne'er-do-well and her work as a commercial artist doesn't earn as much as she'd like. The family's lifestyle exceeds its income and unspoken anxiety about money permeates the household. Her children, a son Paul and his two sisters, sense this anxiety; moreover, the kids even claim they can hear the house whispering "There must be more money." Paul tells his Uncle Oscar Cresswell about betting on horse races with Bassett, the gardener. He's been placing bets using his pocket money and has won and saved three hundred twenty pounds. Sometimes he says he is "sure" of a winner for an upcoming race, and the horses he names do in fact win, sometimes at remarkable odds. Uncle Oscar and Bassett both place large bets on the horses Paul names. After further winning, Paul and Oscar arrange to give the mother a gift of five thousand pounds, but the gift only lets her spend more. Disappointed, Paul tries harder than ever to be "lucky." As the Derby approaches, Paul is determined to learn the winner. Concerned about his health, his mother rushes home from a party and discovers his secret. He has been spending hours riding his rocking horse, sometimes all night long, until he "gets there," into a clairvoyant state where he can be sure of the winner's name. Paul remains ill through the day of the Derby. Informed by Cresswell, Bassett has placed Paul's bet on Malabar, at fourteen to one. When he is informed by Bassett that he now has 80,000 pounds, Paul says to his mother: "I never told you, mother, that if I can ride my horse, and get there, then I'm absolutely sure - oh absolutely! Mother, did I ever tell you? I am lucky!" "No, you never did," said his mother. The boy dies in the night and his mother hears her brother say, "My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand to the good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking horse to find a winner.

## **The Rocking Horse Winner Details**

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## From Reader Review The Rocking Horse Winner for online ebook

### Dustin says

D.H. Lawrence's 1926 classic short story, *The Rocking Horse Winner* pulls at your heartstrings from the get-go and refuses to let go until its tragic culmination. As seen below, the opening paragraph does more than make for an emotional first impression, Lawrence's impressive and somehow beautiful prose sucks you in immediately, making it impossible to put down.

"There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love, and the love turned to dust. She had bonny children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them. They looked at her coldly, as if they were finding fault with her. And hurriedly she felt she must cover up some fault in herself. Yet what it was that she must cover up she never knew. Nevertheless, when her children were present, she always felt the centre of her heart go hard. This troubled her, and in her manner she was all the more gentle and anxious for her children, as if she loved them very much. Only she herself knew that at the centre of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody. Everybody else said of her: "She is such a good mother. She adores her children." Only she herself, and her children themselves, knew it was not so. They read it in each other's eyes."

From there, it only gets better. The dialogue is spot-on, relevant, and lifelike. The pictures that Lawrence delivers to the reader is incredibly vivid, increasingly compelling (I couldn't finish it fast enough, really,) and though there are little details like the protagonist's "uncanny blue eyes" that are emphasized for whatever reason, every word serves a purpose. It never felt verbose or unnecessary. On the contrary, literally every word is essential.

I have no more to say, other than read it for yourself if you haven't. Even if you have (this was a re-read for me,) give it another go, it's totally worth it.

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### Cecily says

The opening words sound like a fairy story, "There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck." But it is immediately clear that this is more Grimm than Disney: "She married for love, and the love turned to dust. She had bonny children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them."

It was intended to be a ghost story, but there are no ghosts - just supernatural voices and premonitions, and the metaphorical ghost of an off-stage, useless father: "Though he had good prospects, those prospects never materialised."

It is as haunting as any ghost story because of the combined effects of lack of love and whispering walls on the boy, Paul. "The house became haunted by the unspoken phrase: There must be more money!"

The heart of the story is luck, money, and the absence of both.  
The heart of Paul longs for love from the empty heart of his mother.

### **Luck**

Paul asks why they don't have a car. His mother says it's because they're poor (this is relative - they have a large house and several servants, but live beyond their means).

When he asks why, she says, "slowly and bitterly, 'it's because your father has no luck.'" She fails to mention her own compulsive spending.

"Is luck money, mother?"

"No, Paul! Not quite. It's what causes you to have money... That's why it's better to be born lucky than rich."

So does dying rich mean dying lucky? Tragedy or triumph?

### **Make Your Own?**

The idea of making your own luck is a cliché. But if you "make" it, surely it's skill, effort, and persistence, rather than luck?

Rationalists like me can't manufacture luck and can't hope for Paul's paranormal solution.

That leaves us with a delicate balancing act: to accept and enjoy what we have right now, even as we reach out and up, striving for more and better lives, more and better selves.

### **Ad Astra**

I named my own rocking horse Pegasus because I knew he had wings. Their invisibility was part - confirmation, even - of their magic. Like Paul, my riding was sometimes frantic, mesmeric, dangerous. Pegasus flew me to many and wondrous places. I won no money, but I lived to tell the tales and to see my own, loved, son ride Pegasus as I had done. I saw my own Winner's Enclosure.

Read as part of Selected Short Stories.

Image source for word "Lucky" with horseshoe U:  
<http://i2.wp.com/www.fynesdesigns.com...>

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### **Perla says**

"A short story about a boy and his quest to be "lucky". The boy knows that his family is struggling with money and he asks his mother how other people have more than they do. She says that some people are simply more "lucky" than others, and that their father was in fact, very unlucky. The boy begins searching for luck, and finds it while he's riding his rocking horse. Through some unknown force, the boy is able to predict the winner of the next horse race, after riding his rocking horse. The story ends with the boy

struggling to keep up with the amount of money that he thinks his mother wants, because she continually desires more and more money. The boy dies one night after riding the rocking horse for a very long time.

I suppose that the moral of the story is about the mother's greed. While the boy continually wins races, it isn't enough for his parents, who want more and more expensive items. The boy dies before ever getting what he wanted, which was to be loved by his mother, while she was caught up in a world where she could never have enough.

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### **Laura says**

You may read online here.

#### **Opening lines:**

**There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love, and the love turned to dust. She had bonny children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them.**

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### **Kayla says**

I studied D.H. Lawrence's *The Rocking Horse Winner* in my creative writing class some time ago and it has always been a piece of his work that I greatly admire. The story appears to be very average on a surface level, but upon analyzing the many different possible interpretations that can be drawn from it, one begins to respect the amount of thought that was put into its conception. Needless to say to those who have read *The Rocking Horse Winner*, Freud would have a field day with this. Symbolism is so prominent here, and it is when you slowly begin to decipher the true meanings behind the commonplace objects that Lawrence mentions that you will fully understand the story. I would wager that it was since reading this story that I have been so suspicious of that which I read, always searching for hidden connotations and expecting the unexpected at each turn. I no longer read a story and accept all of the details for face value. What a marvelous thing Lawrence has instilled in me.

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### **Kels says**

Let me just start off by saying that I'm fiercely unafraid of criticizing and rejecting a classic. I'm not all that impressed by antiquity, nor do I feel the need to rate something highly just because it is a lauded piece of literature. So now that we have gotten that out the way, I must say that *The Rocking Horse Winner* is a lackluster tale, more akin to a fable, that blatantly and obtrusively tries to weave in morality within its plot with all the elegance of a T-Rex trying to make up a bed. (just picture it!)

The narrative suffers greatly from being depthless and of course, I do realize that this is a short story. Yet even shorts can do a good job of adding layers and profundity to a story, but this short decidedly doesn't put the slightest effort into accomplishing that feat. The writing was colorless, the characters went unexplained, and the plot and moral of the story was so obvious, really, it need not be written.



I 'read' this on audio. I'm getting used to the medium and can see that the acting ability of the narrator is what makes all the difference. More difference than the actual text written by the author. This narrator, a woman, chose to give the little boy a thin, reedy voice, almost laughable, but written, I could see that this had considerably greater depth.

No matter what I read and hear, I have to say that still to me listening to an audio book is entirely synonymous to listening to a radio play and in no way has the depth of a written book - after all the characterisation and emphasis have all been taken out of my hands and, like with a film, it's someone else's interpretation that is feeding my brain.

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### **Ken Moten says**

You know I don't regularly recommend music with my book reviews but Led Zeppelin's Stairway To Heaven seems almost scarily appropriate here and I will offer it in place of my usual opening quote.

This story highlights the sometimes sad circumstance that can happen when a child feels (or is forced to feel/be) obligated for the well-being of his/her family. In this case the child without the knowledge of his mom feels called to this to relieve the hard circumstance of his family and it ends in the way that you think a young child taking financial matters in his own hand behind his parent's back would but the plot...is not what you thought it was going to be.

This book has a lot of interpretations from economic to social to feminist. It makes you really have to think who or what is bad here, there is an antagonist but where do I look for the antagonist at? I for one would think a combination of greed, bad communication, and indifference combine to be the real antagonist in this story, but I will let you read and tell me if I'm right.

HEY! I THOUGHT OF ANOTHER SONG! XD Very dark humor.

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### **CapsGuy says**

Prime example of how a short story can be done to perfection. Not a single word wasted.

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### **Rhonda says**

This remains my favorite short story of all time. In that I will follow my dictum of when I was 15 and suggest that writing about it would damage the beauty of it. My English teachers were not impressed by my appeal to aesthetics.

This story is about how greed overwhelms and isolates and alienates us from what is truly valuable in life, a constant theme within Lawrence. The topic is treated masterfully and the end is tragic. To me this wonderful story will always be hauntingly beautiful with a moral to which the modern world has not paid sufficient attention.

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### **Duane says**

A haunting story that sent a shudder through me at the end. This would have made a perfect episode of the old TV series "The Twilight Zone". Nevertheless, it was a first class fun read.

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### **Shayantani Das says**

A short story rendered to perfection. It's about how a parent's greed and dissatisfaction can affect their children and rob them of their innocence. Lots of symbolism in the story and I really liked it.

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### **Helga says**

This is a tragic story about how humans are never satisfied with what they have and enough is never enough for them.

The story is so strong and real, it makes you take a good look at the things you value in your life and ask yourself are they worth the sacrifices you make to gain them.

You can read the short story here: <http://www.classicshorts.com/stories/...>

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### **Laurajean says**

This story continues to haunt me. Sometimes when I'm paying bills, I can hear myself chanting "There must be more money. There must be more money."

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### **BELIEVESINMIRACLES says**

I must have been around 12 when I read this story and I remember it blowing my mind. I have not read it since, and while knowing practically nothing about psychology then, even though as an adult I went into social work, it is a great story with some psy elements and a certain 'creepiness' about it. Time to re-discover it after over 40 years.

A+++++++

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### **Bruce says**

Paul, the son of a loveless mother who is never satisfied with her lot, who considers herself unlucky because she hasn't more money, obsesses about how he might help her be lucky, happy, and the home serene. At first he tries to ask her what being lucky means, and the only answer he receives is that people who are lucky have money. But no amount of money would ever be enough for her, that seems certain.

Nonetheless, Paul, by riding his rocking horse to the point of frenzy, seems to have developed the uncanny ability to predict what horse will win each race at the local track. Of course, he cannot always be sure, and when he is not he often loses. But when he is sure, his intuition is infallible. He makes more and more money, thousands of pounds. When he surreptitiously manages to have his mother receive some of it, she is still not satisfied.

Finally, in an orgy of rocking, he is able to predict a winner that earns him 80,000 pounds, but the ride pushes him over the edge into brain fever and death. His mother has won a huge amount of money at the price of her son.

This story has more than a small amount of the aura of the fantastic, if not technically magical realism at least its verisimilitude. There is almost a fairy tale quality to it. Throughout there is a crabbed sense of greed and meanness, of unhappiness that seeks relief in riches, unhappiness that can never be satisfied. A small child takes upon himself the impossible task of making a loveless and eternally unsatisfied adult be happy, a futile aspiration guaranteed to rob him of his childhood, in a real sense of his life. What burdens we often place upon our children, burdens that are impossible to carry, burdens that are really our own. The worst of these may be our requiring them to meet our own emotional needs, to fill the emptiness that resides in our own heart. And in so doing we can kill the innocence and spontaneity, the freedom and happiness that are the joy of childhood. Whatever is gained cannot compensate for what is lost.

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