

3.3 The Last Leaf

WARMING UP

1. Suppose you suffer from a long - term illness (one or two weeks), what should you do and what should you avoid? Fill up the table of Dos and Don'ts.

Dos	Don'ts
(1) Go to a doctor for diagnosis	(1) Do not
(2)	(2) Do not avoid medication on time.
(3) Take a suitable diet	(3) Avoid
(4)	(4) Avoid physical stress and exertion.
(5) Rest in a properly ventilated room.	(5) Do not
(6) Have cheerful thoughts, courage, positive attitude.	(6) Do not lose and

2. You already know that Homophones are pairs of words that sound the same but differ in spellings and meanings.

For example : sum and some

There are some words that even have the same spelling and pronunciation but have different meanings in different situations or contexts.

For example : bat (a bird) and bat (sports / games equipment)

Such words are called **Homographs**.

- Make pairs of sentences of your own to point out the different meanings of the following Homographs.

- (1) fine :
- (2) wave :
- (3) bear :
- (4) rose :
- (5) lead :
- (6) match :
- (7) second :
- (8) object :

The Last Leaf

In the poorer parts of New York, there was a colony where many struggling artists lived. Among them were Sue and Johnsy. They had come to New York from different parts of the United States. When they met, they found that they shared the same interest, and they became friends. They shared a flat and set up a joint 'studio' trying to earn a living through art.

Johnsy was small, thin and not very strong. After spending a few months in New York, she became ill with pneumonia. In those days, it was not easy to cure pneumonia patients. Though Sue looked after her well, Johnsy showed no signs of improvement.

One day, the doctor told Sue that Johnsy had one chance in ten. "And that chance is for her to want to live," he said. "Your little lady has made up her mind that she's not going to get well." He told Sue that medicines alone did not help if the patient did not wish to live.

That day, Johnsy just lay in bed without making any sound or movement. First, Sue thought that she had fallen asleep but then she noticed that Johnsy was looking out of the window and was counting something again and again in a very low voice – almost a whisper.

Sue, too, looked out of the window, but there was nothing to see – only an old, old **ivy vine**, **gnarled** and decayed at the roots, climbed half way up the brick wall. The cold breath of autumn had taken away most of the leaves. Only the skeleton branches were left, clinging to the bricks.

"What is it, dear?" asked Sue.

"Six," said Johnsy. "They are falling faster now. Three days ago, there were almost a hundred."



◆ *What dreadful illness did Johnsy suffer from?*

◆ *What did the doctor tell Sue about Johnsy?*

● **ivy vine** : a strong creeper with green leaves and yellow berries

● **gnarled** : (here) twisted

◆ *Describe the ivy vine outside the window.*

◆ *What false belief did Johnsy have about the ivy vine?*

● **broth** : a hot soup

◆ *Who was Behrman? Why did Sue call him to their flat?*

● **wielded the brush** : painted with a flourish

● **masterpiece** : a most valuable, outstanding work of art

● **fancy** : imagination

It made my head ache to count them. But now it's easy. There goes another one. There are only five left now."

"Five what, dear?"

"Leaves. On the ivy vine. When the last one falls, I must go, too. I've known that for three days. Didn't the doctor tell you?"

"Oh, I never heard of such nonsense," said Sue. "What have old ivy leaves to do with your getting well? And you used to love that vine so! Don't be silly. The doctor said that you had excellent chances of getting well. Take some **broth** now, and let me get back to my work."

But Johnsy just kept looking out of the window. "There goes another. No, I don't want any broth. That leaves just four. I want to see the last one fall before it gets dark. Then I'll go, too."

"Johnsy," said Sue, "will you promise me to keep your eyes closed and not look out of the window until I am done working? I must hand those drawings in tomorrow. I need the light. Otherwise I would have closed the window. I don't want you to keep looking at those silly ivy leaves."

"Tell me as soon as you have finished," said Johnsy, closing her eyes, "because I want to see the last one fall."

"Try to sleep," said Sue. "I must call Behrman up to be my model for the old man that I'm drawing. I'll not be gone a minute."

Old Behrman was a painter who lived on the ground floor, but he was a failure in art. For forty years he had **wielded the brush** but had not made any money. He had been always about to paint a **masterpiece**, but had never yet begun it. For several years, he had only made a few paintings. He earned a little by serving as a model to the young artists in the colony, who could not afford other models. He always talked of his coming masterpiece.

Sue told Behrman about Johnsy's **fancy**. Old Behrman was shocked that anyone could have such idiotic 'imaginings'. "What!" he cried. "Are there people in the world foolish enough to die because of leaves dropping off

from a vine ? I have not heard of such a thing. Why did you allow this thought to enter her brain?"

"She is very ill and weak," said Sue. "The fever has made her mind full of fancies."

"This place is not good for Miss Johnsy. Some day I'll paint a masterpiece and we shall all go away. Yes !" said Behrman.

Johnsy was sleeping when the two went upstairs. Sue showed Behrman the ivy vine that Johnsy saw through the window. They looked at each other for a moment without speaking, and then began their work. Outside a cold rain was falling continuously, **mingled** with snow. Sue closed the window.

Next morning, when Sue woke up, she found that Johnsy was staring at the closed window again with dull, wide-open eyes.

"Open the window ; I want to see," she ordered. Sue obeyed.

But, lo ! even after the rain and the fierce wind that blew throughout the night, there yet stood against the brick wall one ivy leaf. It was the last on the vine. Still dark green near its stem, but with its edges **tinted** with yellow, it hung bravely from a branch some twenty feet above the ground.

"It is the last one", said Johnsy. "I thought it would surely fall during the night. I heard the wind. It will fall today and I shall die at the same time."

Johnsy was preparing herself for the last journey that one makes alone. The feeling was very strong within her.

The ties of Sue's friendship and other things on earth became loose one by one.

The day wore away but even through the **twilight**, they could see the lone ivy leaf clinging to its stem against the wall. At night, again the wind raged and the rain poured.

Next day, when it was light enough, Johnsy asked Sue to open the window.

The ivy leaf was still there.

◆ *What did Behrman promise to do some day?*

● **mingled** : mixed

◆ *What happened that night and what did the two friends see when the window was open?*

● **tinted** : slightly coloured

◆ *What did Johnsy declare when she saw the last ivy leaf?*

● **twilight** : soon after sunset but before it is dark

Johnsy lay for a long time looking at it. Then she called Sue. “Sue dear,” she said, “I’ve been a bad girl. Something has made a last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die.”



After that she was ready to take the broth and milk that Sue brought her. She wanted to sit up in bed. “Someday I hope to paint the Bay of Naples.”

Mr Behrman downstairs was now ill with pneumonia. The sweeper had found him lying helpless in his room in very wet clothes and shoes. He also found some scattered brushes and a palette with green and yellow colours mixed on it. Two days later, Mr. Behrman died in a hospital.

The last ivy leaf was still there on the wall. It never **fluttered** or moved when the wind blew. It was Behrman’s masterpiece. He had painted it there that night when the last leaf had fallen.

– Adapted from ‘The Last Leaf’ by O. Henry

◆ What change came over Johnsy the next day? Why?

◆ What happened to Mr. Behrman?

● **fluttered** : irregular shaking movement

◆ Who had saved Johnsy’s life and how?

ENGLISH WORKSHOP

1. Read the story and choose the appropriate meanings.

(a) Struggling artists

- (i) artists fighting with one another
- (ii) artists trying hard to earn a living
- (iii) artists painting war scenes

(b) Skeleton branches

- (i) bones branching out from joints

- (ii) leafy branches
- (iii) bare branches
- (c) Wielded the brush
 - (i) painted skillfully
 - (ii) broke the brush
 - (iii) joined the broken brush
- (d) Palette
 - (i) the tip of the brush
 - (ii) a board used by artists to mix colours
 - (iii) a fancy dinner plate
- (e) Masterpiece
 - (i) a master who promotes peace
 - (ii) the very first creation of an artist
 - (iii) an exceptionally beautiful work of art

2. Make pairs of sentences to show the difference between the meanings of the following Homographs from the story.

- (a) interest 
- (b) well 
- (c) left 
- (d) just 
- (e) mind 

3. State the facts about the story.

- Main characters :
- Problem :
- Attempts made to solve it :
- Climax / Turning point :
- Problem solved :
- End :

4. Say whether the following statements are right or wrong.

- (a) Sue and Johnsy were very close friends.
- (b) Sue was a rich girl.
- (c) Johnsy was hopeful that she will live.
- (d) Behrman was a hard - hearted person.
- (e) The last leaf fell off during the rain.
- (f) Johnsy realised that her thinking was wrong.
- (g) Behrman did not know anything about the last leaf on the ivy.

5. Correct the following statements.

- (a) Sue and Johnsy were good neighbours.
- (b) Johnsy was eager to recover from her illness.
- (c) Sue ignored Johnsy completely.
- (d) Behrman was a very heartless person.
- (e) The real ivy leaf did not fall off at all.
- (f) The last leaf was a real leaf that survived.

6. Read the descriptions of the following from the story and describe any one of them using your own words.

- The ivy vine • Behrman • The last leaf that Johnsy saw

7. You have learnt that a Clause is a group of words that has a Subject and a Verb, and is a part of a larger sentence.

In the sentence, 'We returned home, when school was over' there are two clauses.

- (i) 'We returned home and (ii) 'When school was over'.

The first one makes complete sense, so it is called **Main / Principal Clause**. The second one is not complete by itself. It depends on the **Main Clause** to convey proper sense. So it is called **Dependant** or **Subordinate Clause**. 'When' is the joining word, and it is called a **Subordinator**.

- In the following sentences, point out the Main Clause and Subordinate Clause. Encircle the Subordinator.
- (a) There was a colony, where many struggling artists lived.
- (b) Though Sue looked after her well, Johnsy showed no signs of improvement.
- (c) Sue thought that she had fallen asleep.
- (d) Old Behrman was a painter, who lived on the ground floor.
- (e) Johnsy was sleeping, when the two went upstairs.
- (f) I want to see the last one before it falls.

8. Compose an imaginary dialogue between Sue and Johnsy, when they realise about what Behrman had done for Johnsy.

