

6. The Last Leaf

ASSIGNMENTS

- I.** (i) The first speaker in the extract is the doctor, who has come to examine Johnsy. He is an optimistic person, who strongly believes in the power of positive thinking.
- (ii) The 'little lady' is a reference for Johnsy. She is suffering from pneumonia.
- (iii) The 'little lady' has only one in ten chances of recovery. This is because she has lost her will to live and therefore, even the medicines fail to have any positive effect on her.
- (iv) To the first speaker's last question in the extract, Sue replied that a man is not worth thinking and Johnsy does not have a man on her mind. Johnsy does not consider men worth giving attention. This shows that she does not have a positive attitude towards men.
- (v) The 'little lady' actually has all the negative thoughts regarding her death on her mind. She believes that when the last ivy leaf falls from the vine, her life too will come to an end.
- (vi) The first speaker, i.e., the doctor assured Sue that if she would be able to make Johnsy ask one question about the latest winter styles in cloak sleeves, he would promise one-in-five chances for Johnsy's survival, instead of one in ten.
- II.** (i) Johnsy and Sue are two young artists, who share an apartment. They first met six months ago at a group table in Delmonico's, a restaurant in New York City.
- (ii) The two girls' common tastes and interests in art, chicory salad and bishop sleeves made them start a joint studio.

- (iii) Johnsy was looking outside the window to watch the leaves falling from an ivy vine on the wall of the opposite brick house. She was counting the number of the leaves falling from the ivy vine.
- (iv) She was sketching a pair of elegant horseshow riding trousers and a monocle of the figure of the hero, an Idaho cowboy.
- (v) Johnsy had taken strange fancy to the falling ivy leaves from the vine. She believed that with the fall of the last ivy leaf from the vine, her life too would come to an end.
- (vi) She told Johnsy that her chances of recovery were ten to one. She told a lie to Johnsy to keep up her sagging spirits and revive a hope of survival in Johnsy.

- III.**
- (i) The first speaker here is 'Johnsy'. She is waiting for the last leaf to fall from the vine and also her impending death.
 - (ii) Johnsy told Sue to tell her when the last leaf from ivy vine would fall because she wanted to see the last leaf fall.
 - (iii) Behrman is a painter by profession, who lives in the apartment beneath Sue and Johnsy.

Behrman is an old man past sixty. He has a beard that looks like the beard of Moses, a sculpture by Michael Angelo. His beard curls down from his head and makes him look like a mythological creature having a man's face and body of a little man that has magic powers but behaves badly.

- (iv) No, Behrman was not considered a professional success because in the last forty years of his career, he has not painted anything extraordinary.
- (v) Behrman used to earn his living by serving as a model to those young artists, who could not afford a professional for the purpose.
- (vi) Behrman's attitude towards Sue and Johnsy was fraternal affection, for he was a striving artist like the two girls. Further, he had a fatherly affection for them for he considered himself as 'especial mastiff-in-waiting' to protect the two girls.

- IV.**
- (i) When Behrman came to know about Johnsy's strange fancy concerning the last leaf, he became quite angry and expressed his contempt and derision for such an idiotic imagination.
 - (ii) Behrman refused to pose as a model for Sue in the beginning because he was angry with Sue for allowing Johnsy to harbour such a strange fancy concerning the last leaf and her own death.

- (iii) The strange fancy which has filled Johnsy's mind was that she would die the very moment the last ivy leaf on the vine would fall.
 - (iv) Yes, Behrman after refusing initially, finally agreed to pose as a model for Sue. He did so because he had a fatherly affection for Sue and Johnsy and was concerned for their well-being. This shows that Behrman was a noble soul, whose heart was full of gentle feelings.
- V.**
- (i) 'It' refers to the last leaf on the ivy vine. It plays an important role in the story with regard to Johny's strange fancy that with the falling of the last leaf from the vine, she would die.
 - (ii) Johnsy was sure that 'it', i.e., the last leaf would fall during the night because she had been continuously sitting near her window and watching the leaves fall from the vine. Hearing the wind, she was sure that even the last leaf would fall at night.
 - (iii) Johnsy's strange thinking regarding the falling of the leaves of the ivy vine and her own life suggests that Johnsy had a pessimistic view of life and harboured negative thoughts.
 - (iv) Sue's dialogue in the extract tells us that she has developed a strong bond of friendship with Johnsy and is much concerned about Johnsy's welfare. She is hinting that she may not be able to bear the loss of losing Johnsy.
 - (v) Johnsy did not answer Sue's last question in the extract.
 - (vi) Sue tried to change Johnsy's pessimistic attitude towards life by diverting Johnsy's mind from the last leaf and sickness by making her take interest in things around her. She talked to her about clothes and fashion. She tried to keep up Johnsy's sagging spirits by bringing her drawing board in Johnsy's room and whistling while painting.
- VI.**
- (i) Sue is the speaker here. She is speaking to Johnsy.
 - (ii) The speaker, i.e., Sue addressed the listener, i.e., Johnsy as 'white mouse' because Johnsy had recovered from her illness and regained her health.
 - (iii) Mr. Behrman was an old artist, who used to live in the apartment beneath Sue and Johnsy. The speaker got the news of Behrman's death from the doctor, who had come to examine Johnsy.
 - (iv) Mr. Behrman was out in the heavy rain at night, with a ladder, across the brick wall where the ivy vine went in order to paint an ivy leaf on the wall.

- (v) The things found on the morning of the first day of Mr. Behrman's illness included a lighted lantern, a ladder, some scattered brushes and a palette with green and yellow colours mixed on it.
- (vi) Mr. Behrman risked his life by going out in the pouring rain and painting the last ivy leaf on the wall, after the original leaf has fallen. On seeing that the last leaf, with the falling of which she had associated her death, Johnsy got the hope and the will to live and was finally cured of her illness. But in the process of saving Johnsy's life, old Behrman got drenched in the rain, caught pneumonia and died. Thus, Behrman sacrificed his own life to save Johnsy's life.