

ROBERT J. DIXSON

EASY READING
SELECTIONS IN

ENGLISH

A NEW REVISED EDITION



Regents Publishing Company, Inc.

ROBERT J. DIXSON

EASY READING
SELECTIONS IN

ENGLISH

A NEW REVISED EDITION



Regents Publishing Company, Inc.

Cover design: Paul Gamarello
Text design: Suzanne Bennett & Associates
Illustrations: Connie Maltese

Copyright © 1984 by R. J. Dixon Associates

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN 0-88345-538-2

Published by Regents Publishing Company, Inc.
2 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10016

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Preface

This revised edition of *Easy Reading Selections in English* provides short stories from around the world for high-intermediate to advanced students of English as a second language. In most instances, the stories have been simplified.

Students not sufficiently advanced should prepare by using the following texts: *Beginning Lessons in English* (Parts A and B), *Exercises in English Conversation*, and *Graded Exercises in English* (a general grammar supplement). The selections in this book should not be attempted by beginning students; otherwise, studying the text will become a tedious exercise in translation.

Most of the selections are well-known stories by classic authors. Long-time users of *Easy Reading Selections* will detect a change in format from previous editions. Each unit is roughly the same length (8–12 pages), and each is followed by the same kinds of exercises.

Comprehension questions follow Parts One and Two. These twenty questions, and any others a teacher may supplement them with, immediately test whether the students have a basic understanding of the story. Teachers should pay close attention to vocabulary, since not all students will understand all the terms used in the stories. The exercises should be written and, in general, should be supplemented whenever possible by questions of a similar nature or theme. Generally, the exercises use terms and structures from the story, so teachers have an additional opportunity to check understanding of vocabulary and grammar. Repetition with direct, complete, and automatic answers is important. If answers to a particular exercise are slow or hesitant, teachers should repeat the questions.

The discussion questions are new in this edition. Teachers may use them for written work or for conversational purposes to stimulate the students to use the vocabulary and structures from the stories, as well as to generate new thoughts.

Easy Reading Selections is the second in a series of three readers. The first, *Elementary Reader in English*, is a reader for beginning and low-intermediate students. The third reader, *Modern Short Stories*, is for advanced students. The same plan of presentation is followed in all three books: selected readings, graded as to level of difficulty, with vocabulary, structure, and conversational exercises.

Contents

- 1 The Last Leaf
O. Henry 1
- 2 The Stolen Letter
Edgar Allan Poe 8
- 3 The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County
Mark Twain 15
- 4 The Wreck of the *Commodore*
Florida Times-Union and *The New York Press* 23
- 5 Van Bibber's Burglar
Richard Harding Davis 33
- 6 The Necklace
Guy de Maupassant 42
- 7 David Swan
Nathaniel Hawthorne 53
- 8 Rip Van Winkle
Washington Irving 60
- 9 Two Short Stories by Kate Chopin 70
- 10 The Lady or the Tiger
Frank R. Stockton 80
- 11 Adolescence
Hetty Hemingway 88
- 12 The Gifts of Feodor Himkoff
A. Quiller-Couch 97

Unit 1: The Last Leaf

O. Henry



O. Henry is the pen name for a short story writer named William Sidney Porter (1862–1910). His stories often resemble newspaper articles, and they usually end with an interesting twist.

PART ONE

Many people who are interested in art come to Greenwich Village, which is a section of New York City. They like the Bohemian life of the village, and they enjoy living among so many artists. The buildings and apartments are often very old and dirty, but this only adds to the interest of the place.

At the top of an old, three-story brick house, Sue and Johnsy had their studio. One of them was from the state of Maine, the other from California. They had met in the restaurant of an Eighth Street hotel. Both were artists who had recently come to New York to make their living.

That was in May. In November, a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called pneumonia, visited the city, touching one here and one there with his icy finger.

He touched Johnsy and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bed, looking through the small window at the blank wall of the opposite building.

One morning the busy doctor invited Sue into the hall.

"She has about one chance in ten to live," he said as he shook down the mercury in his clinical thermometer. "And that one chance depends upon her desire to get better. But your little friend has made up her mind that she is going to die. Is she worrying about something?"

"She wanted to paint a picture of the Bay of Naples some day," said Sue.

"No, something more important—a man perhaps?"

"No."

"Well, perhaps it is a result of her fever and her general physical weakness. But when a patient begins to feel sure that she is going to die, then I subtract fifty percent from the power of medicines. If you can succeed in making her interested in something, in asking, for instance, about the latest exhibit at a local gallery or some other art news, then I can promise you a one-in-five chance for her instead of one-in-ten."

After the doctor had gone, Sue went into her own room and cried. Later, trying not to show her sadness, she went into Johnsy's room, whistling.

Johnsy lay under the bedclothes, with her face toward the window. Sue stopped whistling, thinking Johnsy was asleep. But soon Sue heard a low sound, several times repeated. Sue went quickly to the bedside.

Johnsy's eyes were wide open. She was looking out of the window and counting backwards.

"Twelve," she said, and a little later, "eleven," and then "ten" and "nine," and then "eight—seven."

Sue looked out of the window. What was Johnsy counting? There was only a gray backyard and the blank wall of the opposite house. An old, old vine, dead at the roots, climbed halfway up the wall. The cold breath of autumn had blown almost all the leaves from the vine until its branches were almost bare.

"What is it, dear?" asked Sue.

"Six," said Johnsy very quietly. "They are falling faster now. Three days ago there were almost a hundred. It makes my head

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

"Five what, dear? Tell me!" said Sue.

"Leaves. The leaves of that vine. When the last leaf of that vine falls, I must go, too. I've known that for three days. Didn't the doctor tell you?"

"The doctor didn't say any such thing. That is pure foolishness," said Sue. "What connection have those old leaves with your getting well? And you used to love that old vine so much. Please don't be silly. The doctor told me this morning that your chances of getting well soon were excellent. Now try to take some of your soup and let me get back to work so that I can make money to buy you some good port wine."

"There's no use buying any more wine," said Johnsy, keeping her eyes fixed on the blank wall of the house opposite. "There goes another leaf. That leaves just four. I want to see the last one fall before it gets dark. Then I'll go, too."

"Johnsy, dear," said Sue, bending over her, "will you promise me to keep your eyes closed and not look out of the window until I have finished working? I must deliver these drawings tomorrow. I need the light; otherwise I would pull down the curtain."

"Can't you draw in your room?" said Johnsy coldly.

"I'd rather stay here with you," said Sue. "Besides, I don't want you to keep looking at those silly leaves."

"Tell me as soon as you have finished," said Johnsy, closing her eyes and lying white and still. "Because I want to see the last leaf fall. I'm tired of waiting. I'm tired of thinking."

"Try to sleep," said Sue a little later. "I must go downstairs for a minute to get Mr. Behrman, who is going to sit as my model. But I will be right back. And don't move, and also please promise me not to look out of the window."

Comprehension

1. What is a pen name? What was O. Henry's real name?
2. Where does this story take place? Why is it an interesting place?
3. What are the names of the two young women in the story?
4. How do the women make a living?
5. What was Johnsy's illness?
6. Why did the doctor believe that Johnsy's desire to live was important?

7. What did the doctor think Johnsy's chances were?
8. How did he think her chances could be improved?
9. Why was Johnsy counting the falling leaves? What did she think would happen when the last leaf fell?
10. Why did Sue have to leave the room?

PART TWO

Old Mr. Behrman was a painter who lived on the first floor beneath Johnsy and Sue. He was more than sixty years old. Behrman was a failure in art. He had always wanted to paint a masterpiece, but he had never begun to paint it. For many years he had painted nothing, except now and then a piece of commercial or advertising work. He earned a little money by serving as a model for those young artists who could not pay the price for a regular model. He drank a great deal of whiskey and, when he was drunk, always talked about the great masterpiece he was going to paint. He was a fierce, intense little man who considered himself as a watchdog and protector for the two young artists living above him, of whom he was very fond.

Sue found Behrman in his poorly lighted studio. In one corner of the room stood a blank canvas which had been waiting for twenty-five years to receive the first line of the promised masterpiece. Sue told him of the strange idea which Johnsy had concerning the last leaf, and said that she feared that Johnsy would really die when the last leaf fell.

Old Behrman shouted, "Are there people in the world who are foolish enough to die simply because leaves fall from an old vine? I have never heard of such a thing. Why do you permit such silly ideas to come into her mind? Oh, that poor little Miss Johnsy."

"She is very ill and very weak," explained Sue, "and the fever has left her mind full of strange ideas."

Johnsy was sleeping when they both went upstairs. Sue pulled down the curtain and motioned to Behrman to go into the other room. There they looked out of the window fearfully at the vine. Then they looked at each other for a moment without speaking. A cold rain was falling, mixed with snow. Behrman took a seat and prepared himself to pose for Sue as a model.

When Sue woke up the next morning, she found Johnsy with dull, wide open eyes, looking at the window.

"Put up the curtain. I want to see," Johnsy said quietly.

Sue obeyed.

But, oh, after the heavy rain and the strong wind, one leaf was still hanging on the vine. The last leaf. Still dark green, it hung 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 and the rain. It will fall today and I shall die at the same time."

"Dear Johnsy," said Sue, placing her face close to Johnsy's on the pillow, "think of me if you won't think of yourself. What shall I do?"

The day passed slowly, and even through the growing darkness of the evening they could see the lone leaf still hanging from the branch against the wall. And then, with the coming of the night, the wind began to blow again, and the rain began to fall heavily.

But the next morning, when Johnsy commanded that the curtain be raised again, the leaf was still there.

Johnsy lay for a long time looking at it. And then she called to Sue.

"I've been a bad girl, Sue," said Johnsy. "Something has made that last leaf stay there just to show me how bad I was. It was a sin to want to die. You may bring me a little soup now—and then put some pillows behind me and I will sit up and watch you cook."

An hour later Johnsy said, "Sue, some day I want to paint a picture of the Bay of Naples."

The doctor came in the afternoon. "You are doing fine," he said, taking Johnsy's thin hand in his. "In another week or so you will be perfectly well. And now I must go to see another patient downstairs. His name is Behrman. He is some kind of artist, I believe. Pneumonia, too. He is an old, weak man, and the attack is very severe. There is no hope for him, but I am sending him to the hospital in order to make him more comfortable."

The next day, Sue came to the bed where Johnsy lay. "The doctor tells me that soon you will be perfectly well again," Sue said, putting her arm around Johnsy. Johnsy smiled at her happily.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Sue continued. "But now I have something sad to tell you. Old Mr. Behrman died this morning of pneumonia. They found him two days ago in his room. He was helpless with pain and fever. His shoes and clothing were wet and icy. No one could understand where he had gone on such a

terrible night. Then they found a ladder and a lantern which was still lighted. They also found some paint and a brush which was still wet with green paint."

"Do you understand what happened?" Sue asked with tears in her eyes. "During the night—in all that wind and rain—Mr. Behrman climbed up and painted a green leaf on the wall of the house across from us. Didn't you think it was strange that the leaf never moved when the wind blew? Ah, darling, it was Behrman's true masterpiece—he painted it there the night that the last leaf fell."

Comprehension and Discussion

1. Who was Mr. Behrman? How did he make a living?
2. What did he think of Sue and Johnsy?
3. What did Behrman say when Sue told him of Johnsy's idea?
4. What was the weather like during Johnsy's illness?
5. What gave Johnsy the hope to get better?
6. How did Behrman catch pneumonia?
7. What do you think of Behrman's last act (and first painting)?
8. What is pneumonia? How do doctors treat this illness today?
9. Do you know any artists? What kind of art do you enjoy?
10. Are most people as generous as Mr. Behrman? Give some examples.

Exercises

- A. Use each of the following terms in a sentence:
pen name, an interesting twist, Bohemian, story (of a building), to make a living, to feel sure, patient, to succeed in making someone feel something, vine, root, port wine, otherwise, fierce, canvas, to pose, model, pillow, branch, to command, sin, severe, icy, ladder, lantern, paint, brush, to climb up, masterpiece.
- B. Circle the term on the right that has a SIMILAR meaning to the term on the left.

Example: silly seldom/sad/weak/foolish

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. scarcely | frequently/rapidly/rarely/usually |
| 2. make up one's mind | hesitate/prefer/decide/refuse |
| 3. permit | refuse/allow/dare/enjoy |

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 4. perhaps | maybe/always/allow/anyway |
| 5. for instance | often/for example/fortunately/forever |
| 6. watchdog | madman/clock/guardian/animal |
| 7. there is no hope | we're hopeful/hope is everywhere/it is always possible/it's useless |
| 8. above | beneath/over/beside/under |
| 9. would rather | must/ought to/insist on/prefer |
| 10. resemble | look like/occupy/paint/try |

C. Circle the word on the right that RHYMES with the word on the left.

Example: would gold/good/shoulder/loud

- | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| 1. sign | lion/line/seen/been |
| 2. knees | niece/peace/sneeze/face |
| 3. comb | come/tomb/thumb/home |
| 4. could | cold/pulled/good/soiled |
| 5. drawer | far/store/near/under |
| 6. climb | limb/dumb/clam/time |
| 7. ache | catch/touch/take/like |
| 8. passed | least/fast/lasted/hissed |
| 9. was | cause/has/does/is |
| 10. mind | kind/send/hand/pinned |

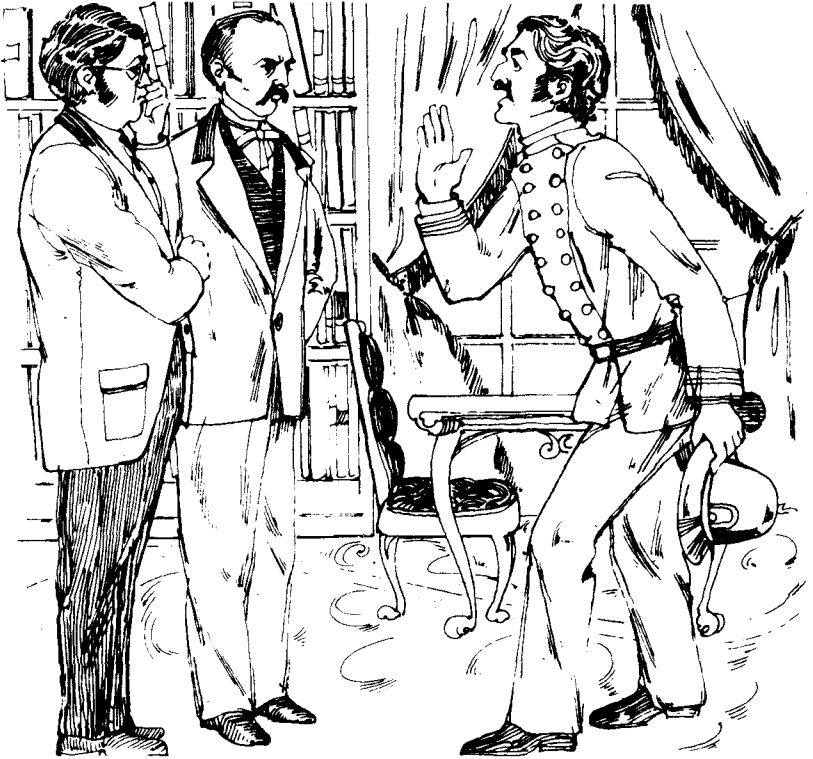
D. Change the following sentences first to the past tense and then to the present perfect tense.

Example: They enjoy living among so many artists.
 (They enjoyed living among so many artists.)
 (They have enjoyed living among so many artists.)

1. This adds to the interest of the place.
2. They are living in a three-story building.
3. The artist is visiting the city.
4. She lies on her bed all day.
5. Is she worrying about it?
6. She doesn't want to die.
7. She is feeling very ill.
8. The doctor is leaving.
9. The leaves will fall slowly.
10. He works in his studio all afternoon.

Unit 2: The Stolen Letter

Edgar Allan Poe



During his lifetime, Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) was more popular in France than in his native United States. Poe's stories always have an air of psychological mystery or horror.

PART ONE

In Paris, just after dark one evening in the autumn of 18--, I was enjoying the company of an old friend, C. Auguste Dupin, in his small library. The door of the room was opened suddenly and another old friend, Monsieur G., head of the Paris police, entered.

We were glad to see Monsieur G., for we had not seen him for several years. He said that he had come to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend Dupin, about some official business which was causing him a great deal of trouble.

"I will tell you in a few words what it is," he said, "but before I begin, let me tell you that this is a matter of great secrecy, and I might lose my job if people knew that I had told someone about it."

"Proceed," said I.

"Well, I have received confidential information that a document of great importance has been stolen from the royal apartments. The thief is Minister D. The person from whom the letter was stolen needs it badly. But, of course, he cannot proceed openly. And he has asked me to take care of the problem."

"My first act," he went on, "was to make a careful inspection of the minister's apartment. Of course, I had to do this secretly and without his knowledge because we do not want the minister to know that we suspect him. Fortunately, the daily habits of the minister helped me greatly. He is frequently absent from home at night. He has only a few servants and they do not sleep in his apartment. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any door in Paris. For three months, I was busy personally searching his apartment. It is now a question of my honor and my reputation. In addition, the reward is enormous. Therefore, I continued to search for a long time. This thief is a very clever man. I searched every corner of his apartment, but I still couldn't find the paper."

"It is possible," I suggested, "that the minister had the letter but has hidden it somewhere outside the apartment."

"Oh, no!" said Monsieur G. "Twice he has been stopped on the street by my own men, pretending to be thieves, and they have searched him carefully."

"Tell us," said I, "exactly what you did in your search of the apartment."

"I have had experience in these matters," answered Monsieur G. "Thus, I examined the apartment room by room, spending an entire week in each room. We examined the furniture. We opened every drawer, and I also looked for secret drawers. Next, we examined the chairs. We removed the tops from all the tables."

"But," I said, "you were not able to take apart all the pieces of furniture. That would be impossible."

"Of course," he answered, "but we did better. We examined every section of each piece of furniture under a very powerful microscope, and we found no indications or marks that the furniture had been touched or disturbed in any way to create a

hiding place for the letter. After we had examined the furniture, we examined the apartment itself. We divided the entire surface into sections and gave a number to each section so that we could not possibly miss any. Then we inspected each square inch of the apartment."

"You examined the grounds around the house?"

"Yes, but that was no trouble. The grounds are paved with bricks. We examined each brick, and also the grass between the bricks, and found no indication that anything had been touched or moved."

"You looked among the minister's papers, of course, and into the books of his library?"

"Certainly, we opened every package. We not only opened every book but turned every page. We also inspected the cover of each book with our microscope."

"You examined the floors beneath the carpets?"

"Certainly! We removed every carpet and examined every board beneath the carpets."

"And the paper on the walls?"

"Yes."

"You looked in the cellar?"

"We did."

"Then," I said, "you have been making a mistake, and the letter is not in the apartment."

"I am afraid you are right," said Monsieur G. "And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?"

"I would advise you to make a second careful search of the apartment," said Dupin.

"But I am sure the letter is not in the apartment," said Monsieur G.

"I have no better advice to give you," said Dupin. "Of course, you have an accurate description of the letter."

"Oh, yes," said the officer. Then, producing a notebook, he began to read a description of the missing letter. Soon afterward he left, a very unhappy man.

Comprehension

1. What was unusual about Edgar Allan Poe's popularity?
2. Why did Monsieur G. go to visit Dupin?
3. What was stolen? By whom?
4. How did Monsieur G. search the apartment of the man he suspected?

5. Why did he discontinue the search? After how long?
6. Why did the police search the apartment secretly?
7. Why did they stop the minister on the street?
8. What did they do in his library?
9. Why did the search around the grounds give the police little trouble?
10. What was Dupin's advice?

PART TWO

About a month later, Monsieur G. visited us again. We were seated in the library as before.

"Well, what about the missing letter?" I asked him after he sat down. "I suppose you have decided at last that the minister is too clever to be caught."

"Damn it, yes," he said. "I examined the apartment again, as Dupin suggested, but without success."

"How much money has been offered as the reward?" asked Dupin.

"A great deal," he said. "In fact, the amount has been doubled recently. But if it were three times as much, I still couldn't find it. But I will give my personal check for fifty thousand francs to anyone who gets that letter for me."

"In that case," said Dupin, "you can write me a check for that amount. When you have signed the check, I will give you the letter."

Both Monsieur G. and I were greatly surprised. For a moment the officer remained speechless, but then, recovering himself, he picked up a pen and wrote a check for fifty thousand francs and handed it to Dupin. Dupin examined the check carefully and then put it into his pocket. Then he unlocked a drawer and took out a letter and gave it to Monsieur G. It was the stolen letter. The officer accepted it with a trembling hand. He read its contents and then rushed from the room and from the house. When he had gone, Dupin began to explain to me how he had gotten the letter.

"I knew the minister in question very well," he said. "He is a mathematician and a poet—and also a very clever and daring man. I knew that such a man would be familiar with all the usual actions of the police and that he would prepare himself against them. His frequent absences from home at night were only a

trick. He knew that the police would search every corner of his apartment, and so he permitted them to do it freely. I saw that he would do something very simple.

"The police, however, never suspected that the minister had placed the letter clearly under the nose of everybody in order to prevent anyone from seeing it.

"With this in mind, I put on a pair of dark glasses and went to visit the minister one fine morning in his apartment. I told him that my eyes were very weak and that, therefore, I had to wear dark glasses. But with my dark glasses I was able to inspect the whole apartment without his noticing the movement of my eyes. Finally, I noticed a small box in full view on the mantelpiece. In this box were five or six visiting cards and a letter. The letter was very dirty and was torn across the middle. It had been put carelessly into one of the sections of the box. As soon as I saw the letter, I was sure it was the one I was looking for. Certainly it was different in appearance from the original letter. The address on the envelope was different; the handwriting on the envelope had also been changed. It looked as if the letter had been written by a woman. But the size was the same. All these things, in the view of every visitor to the apartment, made me suspicious. I examined the letter as carefully as I could without the minister's noticing me, and it was clear to me that the letter had been turned inside out, like a glove, and readdressed and changed slightly. I later said good-bye to the minister but left my cigarette case on the table intentionally.

"The next morning I called upon him again to get my cigarette case. We began to converse again, but suddenly there was a pistol shot in the street. Minister D. rushed to the window and remained there several minutes looking into the street. Actually, it was all part of my plan. One of my own men had fired the shot in order to attract attention. Anyway, while Minister D. was busy at the window, I stepped to the mantelpiece, took the letter, and replaced it with an exact copy which I had prepared at home and brought with me."

"But why did you replace the letter with a copy? Why didn't you take the letter openly on your first visit and leave?"

"Minister D. is a clever and dangerous man," Dupin replied. "There are many men in the house whom he employs. If I had done the foolish thing which you suggest, it is possible I would never have left the place alive and the good people of Paris would never have heard of me again."