

THE LAST LEAF BY O HENRY

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INTRODUCTION

The Last Leaf is a short story by O. Henry.

It was published in 1907 in his collection *The Trimmed Lamp and Other Stories*.

“The Last Leaf” is a story of Johnsy, a poor young woman who is critically ill due to pneumonia.

- **She believes that when the ivy vine on the wall outside her window would lose all its leaves, she would die too.**
- **However, her neighbor, Behrman, an artist, tricks her by painting a leaf on the wall.**
- **Johnsy recovers. However, Behrman caught pneumonia while painting the leaf. As a result, he dies.**

SUMMARY

Sue and Johnsy lived together in a small flat. Both were artists. They resided on the third floor of an old house.

Johnsy fell critically ill in November. She suffered from pneumonia and used to lie in her bed without moving. She continuously gazed out of the window.

Sue, her friend, became very worried. She called the doctor. Although he came every day, yet Johnsy's condition showed no improvement.

The doctor confirmed that Johnsy was not willing to live. As a result, the medicines were ineffective to cure her ill-health.

Sue tried her greatest to make Johnsy take an interest in things around her. She talked about clothes and fashion. However, Johnsy was irresponsive. She continued to lie still on her bed. Sue brought her drawing-board into the room and began to paint.

Suddenly Sue heard Johnsy whispering something. She speedily rushed to the bed and heard Johnsy counting backward. She speedily rushed to the bed and heard Johnsy counting backward. Looking out of the window, she was saying, "Twelve!"

However, after some time she whispered “eleven”, then “ten” and so on. She saw an old ivy creeper climbing half-way up the brick wall opposite to the window. Also, the creeper was shedding its leaves in the strong wind.

Johnsy was very depressed. She created a thought that she would die when the last leaf fell. Moreover, she did not accept the soup offered to her.

Later, in the last leaf summary, Sue tried to show affection towards Johnsy. Sue told her that she would not die. She kept the curtain open as she needed the light to complete her painting. She desired to fetch money for them by selling it. Sue pleaded Johnsy not to look out of the window.

Also, she told Johnsy that she would not die. She has to live for her friends. Moreover, Sue would become lonely without Johnsy. But Johnsy was sure that she would die as soon as the last leaf falls.

She added that she would sleep after the last leaf falls and would sleep forever. Sue was very worried about her friend's condition. She was helpless.

Sue rushed to the ground floor to seek help from a 60-year-old painter. His name was Behrman. His lifelong dream was to paint a masterpiece. Unfortunately, it remained a dream only.

Sue told the condition of his friend to Behrman. She refused to eat and continuously looked outside the window. She declares that she would not survive after the falling of the last leaf. He condemned Johnsy for being silly. However, he agrees to paint the last leaf for Johnsy so that she could recover.

Johnsy woke up the next morning. To her surprise, the last leaf survived the storm and it was clinging to the creeper. It survived another storm in the evening too.

This incident opened Johnsy's eyes. She apologized to her friend for being so irresponsible and depressed. She realized that it was a sin to think of death. Then, she combed, had soup, and a desire to live.

The doctor arrived. He told about the improvement in her health. He added that she would recover soon as her desire to live was back.

Sue went to see Behrman. He was only two days ill. However, he dies of pneumonia contracted while being out in the wet and cold. Sue tells this news to Johnsy. She tells her to look at the last leaf clinging to the creeper. She reveals the truth that it was the masterpiece of the old artist, Behrman.

He always wanted to produce a masterpiece painting but had never succeeded in his attempt to produce the same. However, to help her recover from her depression, he spent considerable time painting with great realism a leaf on the wall. Thus, he himself dies of pneumonia contracted while being out in the wet and cold.